

Toward an understanding of the meaning of the night

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Abstract

Although the night has always been accompanied by the moon and darkness brought by the setting sun, each generation experiences its adventures differently. The night, a source of inspiration for many, is for others the best time to find sleep. It is therein that many things become possible, as it liberates men from the game of appearances played during daylight hours.

This is an essay about the night and literature, especially that alluded to in books, regarding both the pleasure and terror that accompany nightfall.

Key words: Night; Darkness; History; Sociology of the night; Greek antiquity.

When night beckons and the birds traverse the sky in search of their refuge and song, when the brightest stars may be seen, longing for the moon, when it is time to head home and be reunited with loved ones, to light the fire and let the chords and voices be heard, when darkness looms, in the Greece that still pulsates in epics, the host pauses, weapons are stockpiled, and men rejoice in the silence once again. The blood that stains the floor has faded, and in the swords and bows, one senses that men may continue to fall. For now, only the night remains, that which, between smiles and songs, causes us forget the daily routines in which the wounded and dead are counted at the feet of the heroes. All is attributed to the valor and grace of the gods. At night, arms open to the sky, and give thanks for the lives of those who still draw breath and continue to fight. At night, the blind speak. They as hosts of the world of darkness and true witnesses of the world of the gods, bring

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news of the magical land in which all things live, and in which nothing exists without the consent of the deities. Without sight, the blind see that they earn the favor or displeasure of the gods for that which occurs among men, and it is impossible to deny their contentions. At night, where people gather, there is only space to enjoy, eat a sumptuous meal, and to take heed of the elders.

One cannot portend a different night from Homeric writings. Perhaps the marvel is that Homer (1991) does not pause sufficient time to describe it, because it would seem that it is all a fantasy. Night is simply the common place in which the Greeks sat close, invited to live and explore that which, by day, was merely a battle. In that case, Homer had nothing to add: he simply let darkness fall on the light of his work. Greek nights have their own air, simple and delicate. If the traditional hypothesis that guides the origin of epics in the continuous transmission from which diverse rhapsodies were composed proves true, it must be recognized, then, that the only possible space for such an experiential presentation to occur was at night. By day, whether owing to occupations or battles, rarely were gatherings permitted between storytellers and their audiences. The Greek night considers the day's fallen, so that, before slumber descends, the mind may be filled with illusions of other voices and stories of other dead.

It could well be said that, during the day, notable scenes also transpired, in which Plato placed Socrates, with an unknown and prudish voice, as a type of ventriloquist's doll through which the author speaks. In Plato, the dialogue and gathering among men are qualified by voices that see all clearly, discern and touch all, but which, it is warned, deceive each other in that clarity. In view of a path upon which only different shades of green are distinguished, on a marvelous day by plane trees, Socrates speaks to Phaedrus in one of the most beautiful dialogues in Plato's work: *Phaedrus*. Some men speak of love, of madness, of the essence of the soul, in light of myths and narratives, but in the light of day. Plato could well have discussed such delicate topics in a more familiar space, far from the path, much more simply. In other words, he could have gathered his characters into a more Homeric, and perhaps more mundane space, a place of wine, fire, and retreat: the night. During the day, in the place in which Plato gathers his guests, few times is there a good time to discuss such interlaced topics. As such, the day is insufficient. To reach a conclusion, more free time is necessary, as Aristotle asserts, and night must be allowed to fall. In this case, life itself is insufficient.

Plato, in any case, has seen deeply into the conscience of an entire civilization. We still might claim to be inhabitants of that world in which, later, Christianity took its first steps. Plato characterized the meaning of the day as that of the sun in the world and the light on conscience. There is no place for the night, especially when poets disrobe therein. A reading of *The Republic* would clarify many of these reflections. From the open critiques of poets, that, as Homer and Hesiod say (1990) "should never be heard in our state", "do not represent the gods as they are", to the sun allegory, light for which the eyes open, to the myth of the cavern, a new order for things and subjects is established on each page of the book. Of course, the night achieves diffuse contemplation in the presence of the clarity lent by day. We do not consider the effective qualities of a beautiful morning, as that which pulsates, for example, on the pages of the *Phaedrus*, but the gloomy category that it lends to the night, to the detriment

of the possible gathering place. For Plato, the night is no longer the forum in which to hear the blind and aged. The night is darkness. As such, therein knowledge is impossible. It should simultaneously be considered that the color black, which characterizes moonless nights, is, for Plato, the color of the horse that drags the soul to perdition. Of course, this is in contrast to the white horse, whose significance is quickly intuited. The now usual difference between black and white, however, should not be an exclusively platonic legacy. Plato, in many of his insights about life and death, reclaims that which, with pleasing surprise, he learned on his travels and gatherings with Pythagoreans and the oriental religions. Not everything is originally his work. There are also many voices, not all of which are Greek, known by the talent of their pens. We observe that, if conceptions, beyond changing, had merely been different, night could have been light and day could have been dark, as with the blind in Homeric songs. In our song, the Chalchaleros have said that treacherous eyes are black: there must be a reason they want to sell them. We could also note, as in the classical salsa opinion of Roberto Anglero, that things would be different “if God were black, my man, everything would change; it would be our race, my man, that would rule”.

Christianity, as previously noted, gives Plato’s legacy and the bridge he constructed between East and West a much more complex and yielding meaning. It should also be remembered that, among the most impressive evangelist scenes is that which precedes and initiates the Passion. Among torches and weapons, Judas accompanies those who apprehend Jesus, not without first cutting off one of their ears. Everything happens in accordance with the betrayal. The night is much darker and pain more lasting. Although these are sad scenes for believers, the similarity, even in the acceptance and dedication, between Jesus of Nazareth and Socrates, is striking. Socrates lives, speaks, is judged, and is obligated to consume hemlock in the pages of Plato’s *Dialogues*. Much of what we are, the environment in which we move, whether material or immaterial, maintains the legacy of those two historic human tragedies. They are similar even in the roosters that crow at the end of their lives, as underscored by George Steiner (1997). In his last words, Socrates requests that his rooster be to Asclepius. The rooster crows as Peter denies knowing he who walks to the cross. Both are familiar animals. It is well known that the rooster announces the day, as it crows in the morning at first light. With greater terror, with a commitment that already has flavor and a dark meaning, other animals witness the arrival of the night. Different voices sing. There is no crow. Owls, barn owls, bats, and wolves are animals that, like many others, are saddled with unique metaphors and meanings.

We warn that, as occurs with the day, so too does it with the night. Many of the connotations that we take for granted about our spaces, times, and territories are tinged by historical observations that have attached themselves to our ways of thought and which confront both the expectations and fears which may awaken. On many occasions, for example, journalists or commentators begin with the surprised lines of a news reference with words like: “In the light of day...”. With surprise, they speak of murders “in the light of day”, attempts “in the light of day”, as if they would also like to insinuate that the more opportune space for such activities is the night. Of course, the tonality of the night sky and the disposition of the shadows cause many to capitalize on the interstices to better commit their misdeeds. But these are the same individuals who would do so in the light of day.

We have safeguarded the affirmation of Hippolyte Taine , in which we live in and are “prolongations of Hellenic culture’. However, being thus, we could also ask ourselves on which side of the night we live. The Greek night is heavily influenced by Homer, but it was also Plato who imbued it with songs and hopes, as well as with gloom and betrayal. Plato did not critique Homer or Hesiod, apart from decrying the lack of truth in their poems, the lack of truth for the state. But the Homeric night should not be so easily marginalized. The night in which the Greeks transmit their wisdom to those who end the battle of their day cannot be erased from our memories. If day is necessary for work , as Hesiod suggests, the night should be tasked with the pleasure of gathering, resting among those who share stories and legends, songs, and embraces. There is no night that does not deserve its anecdote, the retreat of those who love each other, the meal, the conversation, and the reading before slumber calls. Each night, as in Homer, becomes an unforgettable gathering. Before becoming thus, however, each night must also be unobjectionable.

However, no matter how much we underscore this, few find favor with the Homeric night, the night that resounds in the poet’s epics. This is firstly because the story in which all things are put in their place, making day into night, in radical spaces for light and darkness, respectively, weighs heavily on our shoulders. Secondly, in the Homeric night in which everything may be enjoyment, meals, conversation, reading, or song, there remains an underlying pulse of an evening that is only possible for few: an aristocratic evening. If we ask ourselves who makes their evening reunions unforgettable, the response of the past, as today, is: those who can--never all those who might wish to. It would be one thing to say that some experience or enjoy the night, and another very different thing to say that they live in it. Lastly, we have all been their inhabitants, but the special tone of those, such as the miserable and oppressed, highlight the mood of the night to hide them, those who trust their slumber only to the shelter of the night sky. In Colombia, if it were the case, the passerby would rarely stop to observe which bridges and sidewalks would also serve as makeshift shelters. Of course, said phenomenon is not exclusive to a single country, and has been reported for years, even in the most enlightened and luminous of European cities. On the other hand, many other men, almost like our Don Quixote, must awake to conceal their weapons, when not engaged in singular battle with the ghosts of wine barrels.

The contrast remains notable. One sees that the meaning of the night varies from person to person, such that when on awakening, the healthy ask the sick: “How was your night?”. For this, it would have been preferable that the moon not appear, that bedtime not be precise for all, because at that time, the sick do not sleep. Their night is long and stretches from one side of the bed to the other. Others, meanwhile, and during the same night, simply dance. We imagine the mythical Greek heroes all the same: Aquilles, Ulysses enjoying the night because life is short, enjoying life because death doesn’t want to. This is the territory of the gods and heroes, for all their faults, members of the same family. In any case, as the legacy of the Greek poet, this night is craved by the artist. In their nights, the time of slumber will always be an opportunity, a meeting point with all that, whether good –or bad– can be called art. Night continues to be the possibility such that, at the end of the day, and after work, men, the heroes of art, can face the community, consult it, ask questions, tell and hear stories. There

are no other spaces. During the day, those that appear are poorly-planned, traversed, or, in the case of school and academic spaces, undesired by those who share them. During the day, artists, if they can, work in their studios, tour the labyrinths of their minds, they try, err, and attempt to correct that which they dislike. At night, they share with those who wish to listen, observe, and critique them. Artists are just that in their private lives, but even more so when, abreast of the signs that they could transmit through their work, to those who wish to know about their strokes, they are able to participate in that which only in origin has been theirs, that which only at the time of creation is their property. Artwork, notably, only has an owner in its first phase. In the long-term, artwork, with or without purpose, falls into the hands of other beings, and smells of the time during which it originated, playing a singular role for its audience, auditorium, and reader.

From the artist's intimacy, their melancholy, passions, euphorias, and times of madness, there will always be tacit references. Whether from day or night, something haunts or pleases their minds, and so something very much theirs occurs in the senses of those who, as guests, only wish to enjoy the art, that which, at night, as a sample, is a fragment of the artists' life. It is understood that the night, as an emotional reference for asylums, brings with it the most restless souls hours of upheaval and melancholy. Not without their reasons, various authors point to the strange conditions in which artists reveal themselves to be emotionally available to create. Neither will we fall into the trap of considering them constantly mad, nor much less constantly inspired. In the worst of cases, we will not call them sick, but we do know that something inexplicable sifts through artists when approaching their plans and taking up pens and brushes when it is time to create. In the case of the novel, Maurois (1962) called attention, not to the fact that all authors are neurotic, but that they all would be, were they not novelists. Let us recall his classical quote: "Neurosis makes the artist, and the art cures the neurosis". Like Maurois, writers and scholars have reflected upon similar questions. Seen from different references, some will be able to see illness, others health, some will meet the devil, and others the spirit. Thus, in circumstances similar to those of the French writer and biographer André Maurois, let us remember the now classic study, almost entirely clinical, by Spaniard Antonio Vallejo-Nágera (2000), who, with his *Egregious Madmen* was able to achieve –according to Felipe Sassone's prologue– "...the most interesting, varied, and illustrious asylum in the world". It would be sufficient to read several of its pages to be surprised at the madness of those whom we have profoundly admired. Although, the diagnosis, at the end, that everyone did not require art, but rather psychiatric treatment, may now be mistrusted. In the case of Goethe (1943), counted in the chapter of *Egregious Madmen*, just listening to the voices of the alienists gathered in the notes of Vallejo-Nágera makes one think that the brilliant, intellectual German could not have done anything well, that he should have been more worried about his health than art. Goethe, does not reveal much on the topic in his artwork. Despite everything, in said supposed conditions –which are not noted here, so as to avoid making Goethe's admirers blush – the author of *Faust* lived eighty-three years, and was among the most long-lived authors, as a man who experienced the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. In said case, it is better to leave sickness to the cures. As Goethe himself understood, artists

are capable of freeing themselves from their ills, from those who condemn it and seek to drive one to suicide, as he wished. Let us remember that, had it not been for that rare murder that “commits itself”, in the personality of the young Werther, Goethe would not be among the greats. The writer fights against himself and defeats the adversary that seeks to condemn him, a kind of dark force that, despite everything, continues to torment him and appears from time to time in the window of his tower. Everything is so clear when Carl Gustav Jung explains: The universal Mexican, Alfonso Reyes, is correct when he says that Goethe deteriorates and recovers, goes mad and is saved. He sells his soul to the devil, but does not surrender it [...]. He somehow mixes the will of the West and the resignation of the East [...]. It is incomprehensible, and sometimes, also invisible” (1975).

With the sale of his soul to the devil, the good business that Goethe seems to have made attracts our attention, once again, to the dark side of this story. Who better than Goethe to show us pacts with the devil! According to *Faust*, there is no creation without darkness, without a rupture that arrives in the soul’s night. However, life is unable to breach that which has been signed. Behind the genius, the demonic laugh is patient, and awaits that which has been promised. Goethe, then, anticipated his death in the passing of his undesired characters and in the farewell to friends that, like Schiller, did not deserve to live so little! The demonic laugh forms part of the mourning that encircles life. That which matters here, despite everything, is that the man triumphs in his negotiation with the fallen angel. Behind the genius achieved by the sublimity of his work is the presence of something inhuman, and that, seen from the viewpoint of many, should not be holy, is threatened. The glory and the distinguishing touch that could be boasted are instead conditioned by infernal pride. And truly, there is no recognition unless, at the least, one is also their own slave. So easily our attention is drawn by fame, which simultaneously condemns obscurity, one must be so careful with the image that scandalizes, and realize that there are traps and vulnerabilities everywhere. However, everything unites in a constant struggle between recognition and indifference: that of the beloved, the desired location, the desired place and time. Faust undulates there, and recognizes Mephistopheles, in his mixture of distinction and solitude. In *Faust*, everything is wisdom. For the character’s pain, the weight of ignorance is too great. Things are not even the same color of the glass through which he sees them, as Chilean Nicanor Parra renders poetic. They are confused in a luck free of context, light, and fog that cloud the view of the most sagacious observers. Thus, it is Doctor Faust, who, as Platonic Socrates, passes wise hours in painful recognition of the fact that he knew nothing, that that which is loved cannot be possessed, and that which is desired is elusive. The tempter tends their traps, as they do, paradoxically, in the service of art. Goethe and Mephistopheles know that only God knows all. That which Faust ignores is that which weighs most heavily in his life. That naive ambition of wanting to trap everything in a glance, of a murmur that, ultimately, is life.

As such, in more accentuated, but equally problematic considerations, Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* (1982) concedes only the virtues of effort and talent to the artist, despite the fact that, similarly, life passes therein. Of all the science and all love craved by Faust and Goethe, we now move to the only desire that really blends with Mephistopheles’ tempting breath: to achieve the science of art in musical composition. Let us remember that, to this end,

Frenchman Charles Gounod composed a piece of music that repurposed Faust's inheritance from Goethe, and as if it had had the patronage of the tempter, it was with that piece that he achieved glory before passing on. It is far from being titled a musical composition, although with its high-pitched pages, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* breathes the demonic air that supports and condemns the artist's life. Long live artwork and artists' death by art. Thomas Mann has said that his character, German composer Adrian Leverkühn, emerges allegorically to refer to Nietzsche. Adrian takes the philosopher's place, and truthfully, while they are newly warned in the pages of this marvelous *Doctor Faustus*, Adrian is conceded much from Nietzsche, and much from the devil to *Ecce homo*. However, there is more behind the work: an entire culture, a tradition, a number of creators admired by Mann: musicians such as Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Schönberg, writers like Shakespeare and Goethe, and philosophers like Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin. Although there is a great deal more, additional time and space would be required to better, and less casually, assess Mann's complex work. We wished only to caution of the powerful metaphor in which genius auscultates in demonic pacts that, ultimately, are sacrifices. *Doctor Faustus'* beautiful chapter XXV is a wealth and brilliance unique in twentieth-century literature, and even more so when the entire work is submerged in the gloom of a terrible time when evil took power. Mann contemplates, suffers, and narrates, in the character of Serenus Zeitblom, a personal friend of the musician, Leverkühn. Everything redounds in one question about the roles of art and artists in a repressive, violent time of hunger, orphanage, and discrimination. Adrian makes a sacrifice, fearing for his life. He also inhabits the Germany that suffers in its own Hell. "Not few times –says the devil– life has recurred to sickness and death with true enjoyment".

The devil is presented as ominously learned. God is better envisaged in and for humble, simple beings, while the antagonist forms part of a world that is overly-learned in science, art, and tradition. "Do you believe in the existence of a genius who has nothing to do with Hell? Non datur! –says Adrian's provocative demon–. The artist is the brother of the criminal and the mad [...] Health or sickness? Without the sick, life would be incomplete". Such is our condition, our paradoxical condition, like day and night: the day, in which everything is divine, and the night, in which the devil appears and charms. I cannot cease to feel a certain upheaval with these singular paradoxes of our existence, which are singular and also supremely cruel. Mann himself causes us to fall for one of the stories. Its words subjugate us with prophetic breath: "What I have learned –he said in Princeton– is that to achieve superior health, one must firstly pass through the profound experience of sickness and death, just as the experience of sin is the first condition of redemption".

At great length, Stefan Zweig (1999) has circled such peculiar studies on genius and demonic influence –the way in which Socrates sensed a genius within, whom he called *daimon*–. It could be said that Mann's Adrian Leverkühn has the way of the beings that the Austrian writer knows and portrays so well. Everything is support: the demonic ground upon which artists suffer and are prolific is infused into their art, into that which madness and delirium awaken creation. There is no physical disadvantage that is a sign of intellectual disability for the chosen artists. Blindness seems to have crossed through Homer's life, just as in Englishman John Milton's and Argentine Borges' lives. And in their lack of light, these beings were shown

to be irremediably lucid. All of this sickness has a hidden, intricate side, a metaphor, as Susan Sontage has masterfully stated.

We continue to attract attention to the same paradox of the night: as it is demonic, it has, in itself, the possibility of human gathering, because this is with art. This is so, despite the fact that we are still tremendously Greek. On the other hand, we are marked by the dark legacy of night in that which things wear the face of middle age. At that time in history, universities were institutionally organized, and their legacy remains in the light of day and the fervor with which children and youths must wake to attend their classes. Everything has its story. Night, in its bleak tone, remains, then, an opportunity for the savage. Difficult are the accents acquired with study in popular night schools, which are nothing more than the extension of service of those that lend their classrooms to elegant day students.

May night, at this time, have such suggestive meanings that it seems to indicate that additional reflections on the role and place of education and gathering are lacking, as our schools have now progressed from being nurseries in which parents simply occupied their children, and night the space for them to do homework. The more time children spend in school—many parents believe—, the better. There are, of course many more institutions that have seen this exigency as the way to equip themselves economically. Educational quality, in said case, exists in the way in which the young are occupied, still and silent, but there is no vocation to gather, for readings, for communication with history and the night that we have wished to suggest here. The truth is that if, in the family itself, at home, at night, fails to gather, little or nothing is accomplished by the children's' waking at dawn to study. These deficiencies which may easily pass unnoticed, but when accounts are rendered, they are just as pressing for families as educational institutions. It is quite clear that we form part of a tradition in which everything has its meaning, and that these inhibit the attribution of additional meaning. There seems to be no greyscale: everything is black and white. The worst part is that some only see white, and others only see black. There is a lack of willingness to see one in the other, and to reflect and understand these contours. This lesson from Chesterton invites us to explore the paradoxical sweets and cheer that inhabit our world!

We assume a night with a tragic connotation, in which any presence may easily be condemned. Little is done to overcome the cruel notions with which the night is abandoned to disagreement. Still, we educate ourselves to have a profound fear thereof, and do not permit ourselves to be its inhabitants, to recuperate the pleasing indication that the night fosters gatherings, laughter, dinner, wine, and slumber. In these lands, even preventive instructions are followed, so that all may retire early, abandoning the night. It is true that night brings its dangers, but our fears and lack of public policies to make night an opportunity for all are always greater. In our familiar, well-known tradition, we recall the first Christians' fearsome nights. Therein, the darkness was a refuge not exempt to anxiety. We thus remember that even Jesus warned of the fear to which his disciples were prey.

A lack of trust in the night, the world's night, and which for some represented a time without slumber, in which, as tongues of fire descended from the Spirit. In order to finish, they affirmed the words of Matthew 10: 26-33, which demand stating, in broad daylight, that which Jesus

told them in the darkness. But for the first Christians, those nights always presaged the end, threatening and catastrophic. Those secret meetings were anything but calm. The seal of the betrayal that preceded the Passion weighed upon them. Vigils not only contained prayers, but also apprehensions and flight from one town to another. The Middle Ages was not removed from this legacy. However, therein, Christians were no longer hunted.

In such a truly dark historical time, night confronts the abject uses of those who thought that, during the passage of the moon, God also closed his eyes. With time and a solid dose of power, essences become entities, and beliefs achieve both a defined character and their own space. There are animals which embody them. He who believes that, by day, they can call himself Christian, believes that the night must house a demon or incubus. From the known transition from Pagans, Greeks, and Latins to Christians of fine aspect, it stands out that in dark times, that they were later considered superstitious. The medieval night converts miracles into spells, hexes, and heresies. Saint Augustin is known to have conducted entire studies of superstitions and the superstitious, pacts, and demons, and that he truly wished to impede men's' invoking the help of the devil. However, nobody escapes temptation, and less so when night descends. For this reason, for the most illustrious institutions of the Middle Ages, the church and university, there was no transit by night. Therein, the only light was daylight, and they presented themselves as lights. In some way, night divides, into both a place of vigil and waiting, waiting for day to break.

However, that toward which night really strives is to become another space for all, a place for gathering, as well as rest. In our case, which we wish to recognize, night feeds on art in the same way that art feeds on the night. One is meeting, and the other is intimacy. Each author discusses their nights, although they also have their days. Thus, it may be thought that the artist is an exclusive inhabitant of the night, and thus, similarly, one might invoke the normal preconceptions about artists' lives. But if we have wished to propose something here, it is that exclusive spaces or times do not exist, and much less so for artists. In some of these, the morning fervor is notable. Goethe is known for his devotion to the morning, or even better: to wake at dawn to "take the cream from the day", as he himself said. Once, Carlos Fuentes commented that Goethe wrote from five to eight in the morning, and thereafter entertained himself with the intrigues of the Weimar court, or flirtily pursued the servants. Alfonso Reyes shared this dawn-waking spirit, but without the court or persuasions, simply in devotion to his books. Carlos Fuentes was also a morning-time writer. But we have been able to warn that for them, as for so many others with the same preferences, night also holds special meaning. It is one thing to enjoy writing in the early morning, and another to stop being full-time lovers of art and culture. In these cases, they must be men who have slept few hours because the best always comes late: a good book, a good friend, good company, a pleasant conversation, the best liquor, beautiful music, love. The extreme case of Nietzsche could also be considered: by day a disciplined maestro and steadfast writer, and by night a brothel flagellant.

In some way, Plato should be vindicated, because in *The Symposium*, he showed us that the night can be beautiful. Although the Greek philosopher did not seek to honor the night as a stage, perhaps unintentionally, he left an excellent document to represent his preference for the night in a tradition that seems to relate more to that of Homer. However, Plato leaves

no loose ends, and in our reading, it would be much more precise to understand the night in terms of the behavior of Alcibiades than in that of Socrates. The maestro remains the same. The night does not obscure its essence. We can feature his image as fresh and simple as when it is portrayed in the dialogues acted out in the light of day. But Alcibiades immediately stands out as very different, in every way, from Socrates. Both his excesses and darkness are notable. Alcibiades experiences Plato's night, in the image held by the Greek philosopher. The character is imprisoned by his inebriation, and demonstrates the way in which Plato had insinuated that he did not want to see citizens of the polis, or men of the state. Everything about Alcibiades borders on the scandalous. Additionally, he is attractive, while Socrates is eerily unsightly. What can be said about that? They are the same sun and moon. One star, while not entirely ugly, does not permit direct observation.

Prone to the shadows, night continues with drunks among its inhabitants. This proclivity, in itself, has been one of its characteristics. However, the political, and of course, pedagogical character of the night escapes many gazes. Not even Plato could deny that he was raised immerse in hermetic, orphic-Pythagoric traditions. Wine is, of course, a habitual element in the chiaroscuro of human relationships. While its company is inestimable in history, the drunk do not make history. Plato finely weaves a critique of Athenian traditions, drinking to excess in its festivals and to honor Dionysus. We, however, will not exchange this for nocturnal space and its possibilities. Plato himself falls into the trap: in *The Symposium*, Socrates imparts one of his most beautiful lessons, with everything so that his search may "give light" as indicated in his maieutics.

One question then remains: to what point can the Dionisiac night, or more precisely, the excesses which many believe the night sanctions, be judged? The answer to this question is in the moral judgements that one permits in one's life and actions. They will be deemed either good or bad behaviors, not because they are so, per se, but because those who judge consider it thus. For some, its absence is virtue, and for others is so for excess. The night dedicated to wine and Dionysus passed after becoming known as a bacchanal. This term, its pagan origin, reeks of transgression. From Dionysus to Bacchus, a single god for both Greeks and Romans, respectively, measured the progress of those who did not know that they sinned to those who committed the seven deadly sins in a single night. We feel the praise of the Romans as we accompany Virgil on his last night. Behind the window of the imperial room where the poet lies agonizing, the boisterousness of others are heard, others who are indifferent to the writer's pain. They drink, imitate him, and fail to find even themselves. The night of *The Death of Virgil*, Hermann Broch's marvelous novel (1980), is among the most beautiful pieces of literature written in the past century. However, in the novel, it is insufficient that, in the contours of Augustus' palace, we enter the poet's soul. On that night, the night of his death, we are honored to witness his novelized agony.

The problem is not so much in warning that many nights can lead to irremediable excesses –damage that individuals cause themselves–, but rather that some do not consider that night an opportunity. The night is a gathering with the diversity of culture, which requires space. Let us reclaim the political, pedagogical, and artistic character of the night, and remember those literary gatherings that, in 19th century France, had their first advocacy. As French novels

became more widely known, so too did the way in which their authors nourished themselves with knowledge and striking trinkets. Everyone converses and argues, comments on books, and gossips about writers from other lands, as well as the neighbors' wives. Balzac, Saint-Beuve, Flaubert, Gautier, and the Goncourts –who even have time to write about their nights– are, among others, authors who enjoyed the night and its literary opportunity. The time is short for them to distract themselves in conversation. The topics of said conversations, I would imagine, range from classical books to news, from an author to a recent concert, all without the pressure of a point-by-point schedule. In this way, one may intuit that we are before not only a literary, but also a pedagogical and political opportunity. Those bohemian nights make Paris brighter and feed the fervor for culture. It's not all about classrooms. The education that occurs in the passion of fluid, fervent conversations laden with wisdom is worth more than any master's program in which, as in specializations in the humanities, things tend not toward gatherings, but dispersion, to the reading of photocopies and pedantic, when not worrisome, presentations. Unfortunately, we have fallen into the trap of specializations –although not so much in sciences, tired necessities–, a trap in which, in accordance with the degree conferred, society lends importance to individuals.

Leaving these small considerations to the side, note that something of that night, of passionate readers and friends of art gathered in some Parisian cafe, was also observed in these lands. The “intellectual crowd” forms part of our cultural origins. From Pedro Henríquez Ureña, to Lezama Lima, Estanislao Zuleta, and Borges, we must say that literary life appears in cafe nights, bohemia, in the sea breeze and tone, and in tangos. We look not at the quoted Colombian's excesses, his “complete benders”, let us simply be, to a certain point, in his company. From the banquet at the home of Agathon, of whom Plato spoke, we could have paraphrased the conversations of our writers and musicians. The night is also to be spent reading Plato with friends. This all alleviates the weights of the day in the gathering that is night. Let us consider the classic role of soccer players at night –and now, in this abundance of championships, of every night–, to imagine the cultural exercise of those who found their own way to understand that which is truly human, in art. Similarly, one may consider the telenovelas that sweeten homespun intrigues and adolescent dreams: night is a curtain for what is now called “prime time”. Now, the media have taken the bull by the horns, making the best of the night.

Let us insinuate that excess is not the only option. Media nights are not the best. Rather night spaces should be reclaimed for music, and more than for music, for musicians, for literature and literati, for art and artists: inestimable gathering places in which our souls finally cease to seduce, for which reason we can be true to ourselves and world culture. A concert can only be such if the night adorns itself to be heard. Even the dark sky –and connoisseurs will refute this– makes itself more acoustically available, such that the music may reach our ears. During the day, surely, guitars do not sound as they do at night. As humans, we have notions of the most appropriate spaces, and the lovesick take greater advantage of these serenades.

Nights, many nights, good nights, bad nights: each day brings its night. Even in the tragedy that overshadowed India in 1984, everything began at night. Dominique Lapierre (2001) and

Javier Moro (2001) indicated this in the magnificent book, *Five Past Midnight in Bhopal*. The Armero catastrophe also had its roots on a November night. So many things breathe the night air. Each one of them has experienced their best and cruelest moments, which is normal in this ebb and flow of adversities and happinesses. In our lines, as a simple sentence, the solemn invocation of night remains from poet Amado Nervo (1977):

Mysterious mother

*of all beginnings, mother
wondrous, silent
and faithful, of exalted souls;
unfathomable refuge
of all the suns and worlds;
open sea in which decrees
for all causes tremble!
Oh, formidable path
that leads straight to the enigma;
kingdom of the sad,
lap of our hope;
taciturn protector
from the ills of hopeless love;
mourning godmother
of beautiful divinations;
where the azure wings
of your dreams fly:
be my pupils
mirror that reflects your orbs;
whether your silence be the
subtle communion of my life;
whether your deepest secrets be the
divine sting of my mind;
whether your remote
truth, beyond the grave, be my bequest!*

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