

## The Hothouse Project

Charles Shaar Murray's Journalism as Craft and Art writing course

[www.charlesshaarmurray.com/hothouse/hothouse-course](http://www.charlesshaarmurray.com/hothouse/hothouse-course)

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### LUCY HALL: A Note About Coffee

The first sip of coffee prompts a vivid daydream to tumble sweetly into the morning. The beat of the sun, strong enough to be felt and gentle enough to be welcomed; the humdrum of continental conversation that weaves through the colourful umbrellas and crowded roadside tables; the intermittent surge of seaside smells softening the urban atmosphere. The Day: Pregnant with expectation.

The reality of location is, unsurprisingly, *not* the European-city-on-the-seafront scene. It is most likely an office or a library; only the coffee remains the constant. Our western lifestyle is fast-paced and rapidly becoming more and more dependent on caffeine: for many people the daily cappuccino is now a functional necessity. Interestingly, though, it feels as though the novelty of coffee still hasn't worn off. What is it about the taste and aroma of that bean? So familiar, so available — yet somehow still special, still mysterious, emitting a delicious scent of romance.

There's the longstanding point about the association of coffee with all things cultured and highbrow. Exaggerated though one might feel this might be, coffee has such a strong cultural history that this remains a fact of eternal importance. Indeed, the seventeenth-century coffee houses that sprang up in Oxford and London were home to the birth of the intellectual revolution: frequented by some of the most prominent minds of the time, and housing the formation of the likes of the Royal Society. Prior to the arrival of coffee on English shores, with only ale to drink, the country had resided in a state of permanent lethargy.

It is in the history of coffee that the notion of its power to create ideas and transform conventions can be traced. And though this is quite literally history, the sentiment still resonates. Every now and again, that defiant and bittersweet taste unlocks some kind of mental door that leaves other fluids trailing in its wake (I'm thinking

particularly about tea). Ideas flow, thoughts race. Doubtful it is a fruitless exercise to wonder how many of the best creative minds are still whirred into action by a cup of coffee.

And even in its calmer moments, coffee still harbours the potential for wander and idealism. Whatever you're doing, wherever you are, the process and the occasion allow you to gather your thoughts and your momentum for the day ahead. As you sip slowly, from a styrofoam cup or a mug, you are given crucial thinking time, crucial daydreaming time. Scrap that. It's not even time. You could be in a rush or at work. It's *permission*. Somehow, for the duration of the coffee, you can mull a little.

Of course, there's always the possibility that the optimism coffee inspires is simply the optimism that accompanies the dawn of a new day. Because — let's face it — the second cup is never quite as good.