

Melancholia

Contributed by Andrei Codrescu

the maybes and the almos
for lena pasternak

love your melancholia, dictionaries lie.

Melancholia is a secret we must be careful not to make into a school. But we can talk and feel it when we talk and know precisely its philosophical location but know that if we love it enough to feel it we can never locate, express, or make it subject to theory. There are too many words in too many languages that try to capture it, nostalgia, dor, longing, ansia, sensucht, verlangen, dolu, bramare, languir, verlangend, heimleit (add your own), but they are all masks of nostalgia approved by common agreement to hide melancholia. And to suppress it. Melancholia may be deeply asocial, a threat to the state and to science. Just like the soul in the body melancholia cannot be found by dissecting the brain. It might show up in imaging but its presence is so inexplicable it is folded into a spectrum like a planet far at the edge of the Milky Way, and handed to psychologists, a gift they do not deserve and can't afford. Here is a pill that pulls it by the roots. But some doctors are also poets who revel in second-hand melancholia they do not deserve but shamelessly steal to store in their wank-tank. These guys are perverts.

To surrender to melancholia is to reside in a state between childhood and adolescence: it is both within you and outside of you. It is a state without alarm clocks a timeless somewhere where things are permeable and shadows more consistent than the things projecting them.

When it is in you you are happy to suffer it and wish to stay as long as its presence permits but it can leave you suddenly and enter someone else it can leave you to its neighboring states: depression, nostalgia, wrecklessness, gibberish and envy for one who now possesses it and does not see you seeing it: the person who has taken your melancholia is walking slowly the other way: you want to follow him and take it back even if you must fall in love to reposses it. It creates an appetite that it will never satisfy because it fills you when you need it and flees when you consciously crave it. And if you do recover it through symbiosis, it's been wrecked, no longer yours. Melancholia is possessive but it has a nomad imperative: it belongs to you only but moves on as soon as being-alone with it is not enough. Then you must steal it back and hide it. Melancholia is mostly a noun that can turn into a verb unexpectedly, but is never an adjective. To say "I feel melancholic" is a sure way to chase it away like a bird who senses a cat. Yet it is as palpable as an organ and owns a space that is like Visby or Sibiu, medieval cities that display their latest layer of beauty superimposed on slaughter. History is one of the many streams that it gathers along the watersheds of a long and unknown history because its food is time. To poets it is as familiar as it is to that immensity of time between adolescent longing for another and adolescence itself that populates its sweet torment with ready-made bodies and scenarios that spring in sweat

and pimples to snake around the guardians of order.
 Melancholia is not rebellion, it is the province of every age
 but it will not touch a hardened heart. Yet everyone knows it.
 Some greet it happily, others fear it.
 Yet nobody questions its beauty or fails to enjoy its pain.
 You should never hand it voluntarily to psychologists
 or to emotional extortionists like sentimental novelists and wedding
 photographers. Do not bother to define it with words unless
 you speak around it to soften an undercooked duck.
 It is unique and personal but universal. It detests jealousy.
 Its purpose in your body is unclear unless it is the knowledge
 of the certainty of death seen neither as fear or illness.
 Melancholia may be death itself in its guise of beauty without pain.
 It is yours alone when you are in its grip,
 the only thing that is yours. Being born was not your choice.
 Living among people is not your choice either,
 the placement of others around you is as precise as a military drill.
 Melancholia cares nothing about that, it floods you with power.
 It is a gentle variety of an ongoing orgasm that fills your body
 with eternity, apart from your other bodies at work in the socius.
 If you'd always possess its current your wishes would never come true
 and your work would make everyone cry. There is a dosage.
 Melancholia has seasons: its border between self and world
 migrates to another body as easily as wind. Melancholia is its own
 border as well as what is on either side of it, including you.
 It is timeless but it feeds on your time: you are the source
 of its time-food. It is feeding on the milk of your time
 and is that emptying of the breast that feels you with
 the sweet pain and surrender. Your melancholia is everyone
 else's too, it is a generous vampyr. Open to everyone
 it is accessible only through its joy in eating time
 inside your body. Its mouth is a feeling that draws its keys
 from all the senses: a little from the smell of autumn,
 a bit of flesh from the first bite of the ripe peach with a drop
 of mother's milk in your infant cup. It cares nothing
 about language but it gives itself generously to poets.
 It doesn't mind being undefinable and elusive, it is always itself.
 Melancholia: sweet terror of being alone in a dark alley
 in a foreign city at twilight when ghosts wake up.
 Within the great ineffable surrounding the island
 of each one of us death's most beautiful face kisses your self
 in the mirror of its longing for the thing you are
 supposed to fear. When you are in melancholia
 or melancholia is in you, death is consoling, life passes like a film.

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The Baltic Center

NOTES: The four temperaments, as per Hippocrates, are: Choleric, Melancholic, Sanguine, and Phlegmatic. Each one is "an excess of humors," as per Galen. Earth is the ruler of Melancholic temperament.

In the modern sense, the secondary definition of Melancholy in Thesaurus.com is close: "sober thoughtfulness, pensiveness." (The first is, of course, "depression," and the archaic third is worse, "too much black bile.")

We had a radical revisionist discussion last night. My poem gets only fragments.