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MELANCHOLY IN EUROPE AND IN CHINA: SOME OBSERVATIONS OF A STUDENT OF INTERCULTURAL PROCESS*

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The aim of this paper is to characterize the different modes of melancholy in the West and in China during the ages beginning with the 8th cent. B.C. in Greece and 3rd cent. B.C. in China up to the beginning of the 20th cent. within the framework of intercultural process.

> There are the men who are wanting in the comparative,
> they are as a rule the most interesting.
> (Søren Kierkegaard: *The Journals*)

The subject I am just beginning to talk about, is probably the most difficult and debatable topic during more than 35 years of my scholarly career. To solve adequately or at least approximately the question of "melancholy" in two parts of the world, that is Europe and China, is certainly not possible in the contemporary state of research, and even to try it, could be characterized as an adventure. One should have the "measures" of the bird Peng [1] from the book *Zhuangzi* [2], which "with a back like Mount Tai and wings like clouds filling the sky"[1] would roam through the space under the blue and grey skies of the Eurasian continent to study variegated processes within the broad frameworks encompassing that which our Western world labelled as *melancholia, mélancolia, Melancholie, melenconie, malinconia, acedia, tristitia, tristesse,* etc., just to name a few terms, concerned with this concept, and be good in or to understand enough from the ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, medicine, psychology,

* This paper was delivered at the international conference: Melancholy and Society in China, organized by Professor Wolfgang Kubin, Bonn, July 3–6, 1995.

1 *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Transl. by Burton Watson. New York and London, Columbia University Press 1968, p. 31. Original text see in *Zhuangzi yinde* [3] *A Concordance to Chuang Tzu*. Peking, Yenching University 1947, p. 1.

Medieval Arabic and European astrology, literature and art, and modern development practically in all realms of social, political and cultural life.

My abilities are more comparable to that little quail or dove, although I do not laugh at the bird Peng, since I think that in the world of ours, in our *chronotopos*, we need to transcend the time and space we just live in, or to which we devote our mental capacities, and to study the problems within the widest possible framework of reference. I agree with the book *Zhuangzi* and specifically with the chapter *Qiu shui* [4] *Autumn Floods*, and with musings of one of its protagonists: "Calculate what man knows and it cannot compare to what he does not know. Calculate the time he is alive and it cannot compare to the time before he was born. Yet man takes something so small and tries to exhaust the dimensions of something so large!"[2] Or: "You can't discuss the ocean with a well frog – he's limited by the space he lives in. You can't discuss ice with a summer insect – he's bound to a single season. You can't discuss the Way with a cramped scholar (*qu shi*) [5] – he is shackled by his doctrines."[3] One has to transgress his bank and borders, similarly to the god of the Yellow River, who during the autumn time, also a season of Melancholy, as we shall see presently, reached the Ocean in order to understand his own pettiness but also the greatness of the world beyond his narrow space and time. The image of a "cramped scholar" is a *caveat* for all of us.

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I did dare to choose this topic after three years of deliberations, when I observed that up to the beginning of March 1995, four months before the conference, no one of the invited scholars, proposed a similar issue. I suppose that without doing that or attempting to accomplish it, we would fish in the muddy waters and search for something that can be named melancholy but not easy to define in relation to that rich and variegated canvas of meanings subsumed under this extremely important concept of European (and Arabic) intellectual history and its different realms. The Chinese intellectual history what is the topic of our conference concerned, is different from that of ours.

Wolfgang Kubin, organizer of this conference, named it at last as *Melancholy and Society in China* after the well-known book by Wolf Lepenies entitled: *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*,[4] which presents the history of melancholy in the modern West. The history of melancholy does not begin with Robert Burton's (1577–1640) *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), probably the most important and in the last years most studied *opus magnum* of "Dame Mérencolye", but about two thousand years before, at the time of the compilation for the future times of the extremely important *Corpus Hippocraticum*, attributed to

[2] Ibid., pp. 177–178 and p. 42.

[3] Ibid., pp. 175–176 and p. 42.

[4] Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag 1969.

Hippocrates (ca. 460–ca. 370 B.C.), Greek physician, who lived approximately in the time of Chinese philosopher Modi (ca. 479–381 B.C.), or even more probably to his pupil and son-in-law, Polybus. The nuclei of this history are even older, reaching back to Pythagorean philosophy and numerology (Pythagoras was the contemporary of Confucius and lived ca. 580–500 B.C.) and Empedocles (ca. 495–435 B.C.), combining then, about 400 B.C., the "four roots" (Empedocles), or "four elements" (Democritus) of macrocosm: fire, water, air and earth with "quattuor humores" in microcosm (human body): blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegma. Of these, black bile (*melaina chole*) became linked with autumn among the four seasons of the year and with the adult age of men between 40 and 60. Hippocratean physiological psychology developed a theory according to which melancholy is a kind of illness with the symptoms including fear, depression and even different forms of madness. Melancholy as a sickness will be a part and parcel of a great part of Medieval and also of modern medicine up to the 18th century.

What we said in the last sentences is nothing else than the first part of the explanation of three different meanings of the concept of "melancholy" preceding the outstanding work by three eminent German emigrant authors Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl entitled *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies on the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*: "In modern speech the word 'melancholy" is used to denote any of several somewhat different things. It can mean a mental illness characterised mainly by attacks of anxiety, deep depression and fatigue – though it is true that recently the medical concept has largely become desintegrated."[5]

This is the first and probably most common meaning of the word *melancholia* in the course of its long history in the Western world.

The second meaning is defined by the authors' trio as follows: "It may mean a type of character – generally associated with a certain type of physique – which together with the sanguine, the choleric and the phlegmatic, constituted the system of the 'four humours', or the 'four complexions' as the old expression was."[6] This kind of melancholy began to be scholarly treated in the 4th cent. B.C. and was concerned with deeper study of Greek tragedy by Aristotle (384–322) and with the "mania" concept of Plato (427–347), e.g., in his *Phaidros* or *Timaeos*. Its best treatment is the text called *Problemata Physica XXX, I*, attributed to Aristotle but probably finished in the 1st cent. B.C. Here *melancholia* is understood as one of the "four temperaments", as psychic hypostasis of some qualities (cold and dried) of the "four elements" together with taking into account the earlier medical knowledge and with observations from literature and society. According to this text: "This union found expression in what for the Greeks was the paradoxical thesis that not only the tragic heroes, like Ajax, Heracles and Bellerophon, but all really outstanding men, whether in the

[5] London, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1964, p. 1.

[6] Loc. cit.

realm of the arts or those of poetry, philosophy or statemanship – even Socrates and Plato – were melancholics." We may find this statement in the first passages of the *Problemata Physica XXX, I*, together with a well-known quotation from *The Iliad*:

> ...the day soon came
> when even Bellerophon was hated by all the gods.
> Across the Alean plain he wandered, all alone,
> eating his heart out, a fugitive on the run
> from the beaten tracks of men.[7]

I used this quotation at the beginning of the paper entitled *Über die Melancholie im* Traum der Roten Kammer *(and in einem anderen "Traum")*, delivered in this hall at the symposium *200 Jahre Traum der Roten Kammer* on April 22, 1992,[8] although at that time I did not have an idea, that it was used in the document of such great value for the history of the concept of melancholy. I neither analysed Homer's lines, nor my assertion that we may find the pendants to this aspect of melancholy in the works of Qu Yuan [6] (ca. 340–278 B.C.) and his followers. It is interesting that typologically very similar stories were either remembered or written nearly at the same time in southern Greece and in southern China.

Bellerophon's story is narrated in the Book 6 entitled Hector Returns to Troy. Glaucus, grandson of Bellerophon, delineates the story of his ancestor back to the famous Sisyphus, Aeolus' son and grandfather of Bellerophon. We all know Sisyphus' myth: in the Underworld he must in vain push a stone eternally up a hill. He was allegedly the most cunning man in the Greek world, the founder and the first King of Corinth. Bellerophon's case was similar to that of Sisyphus, although it remained less known, but not less tragic. Bellerophon was born as a man without fault, with gallant traits and because he was richly endowed by beauty, he became the target of seduction by Antea, wife of the King Proetus at Tiryns. Bellerophon, just as the chaste Joseph of Egypt, fled forth not only once from the Greek "Potiphar's wife", but at the end he was accused by her of temptation to commit adultery. He was not killed by Proetus, since they were good friends, but sent to Iobates, Antea's father, king of Lycia, with a letter that its bearer should be put to death. As many great heroes of Greek myths, he was ordered to accomplish superhuman deeds, such as to kill Chimaera, to fight the Amazons, to slaughter all the best soldiers of Lycia, who set an ambush for him. At the end Iobates did not follow the instruction of Proetus and vile wish of Antea. He offered to Bellerophon another daughter as the wife. Bellerophon became the King but for some unknown reason he was left by

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[7] Cf. ibid., p. 17 and HOMER: *The Iliad*. Transl. by Robert Fagles. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd. 1991, p. 202.

[8] The proceedings of this symposium, edited by Wolfgang Kubin, will be published later.

gods, whose favourite he had previously been: now they sent Pandora to his cost, and he went mad.

Qu Yuan's story in *Lisao* [7] *Encountering Sorrow*[9] is delineated by the poet himself. His lineage, just like that of Bellerophon, reaches up to Gao Yang [10], divine ancestor (in Chinese meaning of the word) of the Chu [11] and Qin [12] reigning houses. His father Bo Yong [13] is mentioned in the elegy, just like the name of Belerophon's father – another Glaucus – was in Homer's epic. Like Bellerophon, Qu Yuan was proud of his "inward beauty" (*nei mei*) [14] and "outward adornment" (*xiu neng*) [15].[10] Qu Yuan's great deeds did not consist of adventures on the battle fields. He followed, as a good Confucian, the instructions and examples of the "Three Kings" of ancient times: Yu [16], Tang [17] and Wu [18], founders of the three first Chinese dynasties, and two legendary Sage-kings: Yao [19] and Shun [20]. He was never tempted by a woman comparable to Antea, or Meixi [21], the beautiful and deprived consort of King Jie [22], the last "bad" ruler of the Xia [23] dynasty, or Taji [24], the infamous concubine of Zhou Xin [25], another last "bad" ruler of the Shang [26] dynasty, but he was betrayed by the Fragrant One (*quan*) [27], very probably King Huai of Chu [28], who tried to establish a political alliance with King Hui of Qin [29], in spite of Qu Yuan's advices not to do so, since "Qin was a country of wolves and tigers, and not to be trusted."[11] King Huai of Chu and other powerful men in his native country, did not hear to his admonitions, and this was the most weighty reason of his sorrow, despair and melancholy. The very complicated character *yu* [34], which probably more than any other in Chinese script implies the depressed anxiety of human beings harassed by melancholy, is used only once in the poem with 376 lines, one of the longest in Chinese poetry:

> Tun *yu* yi yu tuoji xi,
> wu du qiong kun yu ci shi ye.
> Ning ke si yi liu wang xi,
> yu bu ren wei ci tai ye. [35]

In translation of these verses, I follow D. Hawkes', otherwise excellent rendition, only partly:

> I am depressed by heavy melancholy and lost my self-reliance,
> I am alone and at loss in this age.

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[9] The best translation by David Hawkes may be found in *Ch'u Tz'u. The Songs of the South*, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press 1959, pp. 22–34. Original see in Ma Maoyuan [8] (ed. and comment.): *Chuci xuan* [9] A Selection From the Songs of the South, Peking, People's Publishing House 1958, pp. 1–59.

[10] Hawkes, D.: op. cit., p. 22 and Ma Maoyuan: op. cit., p. 4.

[11] Hawkes, D.: op. cit., p. 14. Originally in *Qu Yuan Jia Sheng liezhuan* [30] Biographies of Qu Yuan and Jia Yi. In: Sima Qian [31] (145–ca. 86 B.C.): *Shiji* [32] *Historical Records*, *juan* [32] 84. SPPY ed. Taipei 1966, p. 2B.

I would rather quickly die and become extinct,
before I ever would to consent to ape its behaviour.[12]

In the first line of above Qu Yuan's text, the first three characters, i.e., the half of the full verse (with the exception of the meaningless "carrier-sound" *xi* [36], are different expressions for sadness in the form of poetic pyramid, where the second component, i.e., *yu* [34], presents the climax of the melancholic moods.

There are similar and different features in both stories. Their background is mythological and literary processing mythopoeic. Bellerophon is more a prey in the hands of gods and their descendants, he is completely within the reach of the nearly almighty Fate. His madness is a lot bestowed upon him by the immortal inhabitants of Olympus. We should have in mind that it was written in a fully mythical milieu between about 725 and 675 B.C. Qu Yuan, as the author and protagonist of the story, lived in different setting. There were no gods of Olympian kind in Chu and religion there "was a mixture of ancestor-worship and animism".[13] He did not need to be afraid of the gods of his country, but he did not put much hope in them either. His "far-away journey", leading him going up and down in the heaven and earth of his universe, was different from that over Greek Alean plain. Qu Yuan was a "poeta doctus", not a lonely madman, maybe with the exception of the moments preceding his death. The Chinese never believed in the concept of Fate similar to that of Greeks and Lao Zi's [37] (4th cent. B.C.) persuasion that "Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs",[14] never found the adequate echo in the *Weltanschauung* of Qu Yuan's countrymen, at least not in traditional China.

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Similarly to Greeks, the Chinese had their five (not four) elements *wu xing* [39] including: water, fire, wood, metal and earth. If we compare them with those of old Greece, i.e., fire, water, air and earth, we see that three of them were the same: water, fire and earth. In China they were probably applied to even more numerous branches of study than in Greece: we find them in astronomy and astrology, in the calendar and its calculations, philosophy, prophecy, divination, numerology, proto-scientific thinking, law, medicine and even in the art of rule under different dynasties.[15] However China has never developed a theory of "four humours", although its medicine knew about five fluids in the

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[12] Hawkes, D.: op. cit., p. 25 and Ma Maoyuan: op. cit., p. 13.

[13] Hawkes, D.: op. cit., p. 9.

[14] *Tao Te Ching*. Transl. by D.C. Lau. Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press 1982, pp. 8–9, together with original Wang Bi's [38] (226–249) text.

[15] *The Shorter Science and Civilisation in China: 1. An Abridgement by Colin A. Ronan of Joseph Needham's Original Text*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1978, pp. 142–159, esp. 147.

body: tears, the thin watery saliva, the dense saliva, the lung-fluid and sweat. "Black gall" in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* in Greek and later in European tradition, was a purely speculative invention and it did not correspond to the fluids in the human body. The Chinese notions had much more in common with natural sciences. In China, and certainly in its medicine, gall (*dan)* [40] was connected with the liver (*gan*) [41] and its element was wood, and not earth as in Greece. In contrast to Greek medicine and psychology, gall as a part of the liver, was responsible for audacity (*dan*) [40], and only due to the insufficiency of its "air of life" (*qi*) [42], the fear, the opposite of the audacity, or sleep disorders may appear.[16] The last may have, but need not, be connected with melancholy. In spite of its speculative character and its virtual non-existence, the "black bile" had an enormous impact in the Western world in literature, art, psychology and ethical teachings for about two millennia.

The Chinese never had a god comparable either to Greek Cronus or to Roman Saturn. Cronus, youngest son of Uranus and Gaia, castrated his father, cut off his testicles and threw them into the sea. But Cronus was not very different from his parent. He devoured the children he had with his wife Rhea immediately after their birth. The youngest of them Zeus, was saved and later when he reached his adulthood, he forced Cronus vomit up his older brothers and sisters, fought against him, won the battle, and became the ruler over the universe including heaven, earth and the underworld.

The god swallowing his children and fearing his own progeny, in order not to lose his rule over the universe, was according to Greco-Roman and later medical and psychologic notions, the paradigm of melancholy and possibly also paranoia. Melancholy became one of the divine properties, although the heathen gods lost their attraction in the whole of Europe during the first millennium A.D. or later.

The divine sanction, whether coming from the God of Jews, Christians, Moslims, or Greco-Roman gods, had quite strong impact on the psychological and ethical habitus of the believers or the inhabitants of the Near East and Europe. The application of the natural and medical knowledge (or at least speculation) on psychological processes left a deep imprint in the literary and artistic realms, especially in Greek tragedy and partly also in sculpture. Later the Christian epoch took over the legacy of the "four humours" and applied it in a broad manner wherever possible, even in education and the ethical sphere.

In Christian Europe and in basically Confucian (but also Taoist and Buddhist) China, the deepest and most sthenic (sturdy and strong) feelings, desires or passions had to be suppressed or at least held under control. Christian Europe, especially for some time after Martin Luther's (1483–1526) Protestantism, looked at melancholy as the weapon of Satan, although among the Christians it

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[16] Liu, Frank and Liu Jan Mau: *Chinese Medical Terminology*. Hong Kong, The Commercial Press, Ltd 1980, pp. 45–47 and Ando, V.: *Klasická čínská medicina, I* (Classical Chinese Medicine, I), Prague, Svítání 1995, pp. 258–261.

was usually called *acedia*, sloth, or better to say, one of the seven of deadly sins, i.e. laziness or indifference in religious matters. They followed, among others, the Pauline instruction which was Janus-like: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."[17] The first kind of melancholy (or sorrow) – *tristitia salutaris* – was followed by Luther and later creators of the *Theatrum diabolorum* of Baroque epoch, or by the authors of the first editions of *Dr. Faustus*, the second kind – *tristitia mortifera* – was typical for some of the greatest men of letters, art and philosophy or psychology of modern times: Byron and Baudelaire, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Schnitzler and Hoffmannsthal, Rilke and D'Annunzio, van Gogh and Artaud, Sartre and Benjamin, and many others. In the works of the just mentioned, of course, the Pauline meaning of the term was highly surpassed, although more or less always present.

Due to the Chinese concept and demand of *zhi* [43] restraint, or better to say, self-restraint, the Chinese philosopher, writer and artist, should behave just like a player of chess. Neither reason nor feelings were allowed to go in for combinations that would go counter to the rule of the game. Everything positive and creative had been codified by ancient Sages and the sthenic or depressive feelings might be dangerous for the social and ethical order. *Acedia* or *tristitia* as a form of melancholy was forbidden in Christian Utopias. Only asthenic feelings were allowed to participate at the construction of Chinese literature, art and philosophy.[18] According to the greatest among Chinese literary theoreticians Liu Xie [44] (ca. 465–522), the old poems (he thereby meant those from *Shijing* [45] *The Book of Poetry*) "were created on the basis of feelings" (*wei qing er zao wen*) [46],[19] but at the same time he insisted that the word *shi* [49] poetry is the same as *chi* [50] to hold. Poetry, and not only poetry, but also literature as a whole, art, philosophy, etc. "hold the human feelings (*qing*) [51] and nature (*xing*) [52] (within proper boundaries)".[20]

In the traditional Chinese literature and art there was no place for Oedipus or Iphigenia, for Hamlet or young Werther, for *Melencolia I* by Albrecht Dürer (1514), *Melancolia* by Mathias Gerung (1558) or another *Melancholy* by Edward Munch (1891). In China the feelings, desires or passions had to be held in check or toned down or blunted, in accordance with the needs and requirements of various teachings (not only orthodox Confucianism) or their representatives.

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[17] *II. Corinthians, 7,* 10.

[18] GÁLIK, M.: *The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism*. Oriens Extremus, 22, 1980, 2, pp. 183–202, esp. 194 ff.

[19] Cf. ibid., p. 196 and *Wenxin diaolong zhu* [47] *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons.* Commentaries by FAN WENLAN [48]. Vol. 2. Peking 1958, p. 538.

[20] Cf. vol. 2, commentaries by FAN WENLAN, loc. cit. and vol. 1, p. 65, and CHOW TSE-TSUNG: *The Early History of the Chinese Word Shi (Poetry)*. In: CHOW TSE-TSUNG (ed.):*Wen-lin. Studies in Chinese Humanities*. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press 1968, p. 193.

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There are two places in *St. Matthew's Gospel*, where melancholic thoughts of Jesus Christ are manifested shortly before his death: in the garden called Gethsemane where he said to his three disciples: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death...",[21] or: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...",[22] and on the Golgotha, when dying on the cross, he "cried with a loud voice: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"[23]

A similar kind of venting of the inner melancholy or sorrow, is typical for Chinese literature of its traditional period. In the sentences just quoted, probably with the exception of the "loud voice", all is expressed in a way that could be characterized as *wen rou dun hou* [53], i.e. as "moderate, gentle, sincere and deep",[24] just like in old Chinese poetry and in the whole of Chinese literature acknowledged by the orthodox literary criticism.

In *Lunyu* [54] *The Analects of Confucius*, we read in the translation by Arthur Waley: "... the Songs (i.e., *Shijing*, M.G.) will help you to express your grievances (i.e., *Shi...ke yi yuan)* [55]."[25] In 1980 Qian Zhongshu [57] (1910–), the famous Chinese literary scholar, read at the Waseda University, Tokyo, a paper of the same title as Confucius words which later appeared in English in two versions, one of them being *Poetry as a Vehicle of Grief*.[26] This is probably the deepest study of melancholy in Chinese literature. I would like to point out here one idea not mentioned in Qian Zhongshu's great piece of criticism. It is from the same chapter as Confucius' above premise and it reads as follows: "The Master said, By nature, near together; by practice far apart."[27] This was probably understandable for the Master Waley, but not for everybody. The translation by Wing-tsit Chan is more up to the point: "Confucius said, By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart."[28]

As to their physiological, biological and psychological dispositions, all human beings, notwithstanding their place and time, are really very much alike. Melancholy, whether understood as *"type of character"* or even as *"mental illness"*, is a common feature for all members of *humani generis*. Only the forms

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[21] *St. Matthew, 26,* 38.

[22] Ibid., *26*, 39.

[23] Ibid., *27*, 46.

[24] Liu, James, J.Y.: *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1962, p. 67.

[25] Cf. Waley, A. (transl.): *The Analects of Confucius*. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1964, p. 212 and *Lunyu*. In: *Sishu jizhu* [56], juan 9. SPPY ed. Taipei 1966, p. 3B.

[26] Cf. Renditions, 21 & 22, Spring and Autumn 1984, pp. 21–40 and Cowrie, 3, 1986, pp. 1–15.

[27] Cf. Waley, A. (transl.): op. cit., p. 209 and *Sishu jizhu*, juan 9, p. 1B.

[28] Wing-tsit Chan (transl.): *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1963, p. 45.

of its expression are different. The enormous knowledge of Qian Zhongshu, both in the Chinese and Euro-American worlds of literature, art, philosophy, religion, etc., helped him to elucidate especially the connecting links between grief or sorrow (he rarely uses the term melancholy or melancholic) in these two great cultural areas. I am trying to show something else: the difference in emphasis in the literary or artistic manifestation of melancholy. In reality, I follow him to some extent but not fully. What I treat in another way, our German friends usually call: *der kleine Unterschied.* This "small difference" has its *raison d'être*. Its analysis will help us better to understand *artes poeticae* of two great literatures at both ends of the Euroasian continent.

At first, let me give you two examples, one from ancient Greek and one from Chinese literature. The first was presented to the audience of Athens in 431 B.C. and entitled as *Medea* by Euripides (480–406). The second was written during the reign of the Emperor Chengdi [58] (32–8 B.C.) in Chang'an, probably around the year 20 B.C. Her authoress was Ban Jieyu [59], Lady Ban, a favourite concubine of the one of the "last" Emperors of the Earlier Han Dynasty.

Medea is a great tragedy about a barbarian woman of melancholic character, a daughter of Aetes, King of Colchis, who helped Jason, the famous hero of Greek myths, to win the Golden Fleece. He promised to marry her after the success of the enterprise. After taking her to Greece, he had two children with her, but then he decided to marry a daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. Medea with her strong passions, who knew how to love and hate, after terrible inner struggle, dipped a beautiful dress in poison and together with jewels, delivered it to the bride of her treacherous husband, and killed both the royal girl and her father with her presents. After that she contrived to murder her two sons with a sword and left their father and herself to mourn over the death of his two boys and their unreasonable deeds. Probably the most tragic moment of the whole work and the most deep expression of her melancholy, are the verses delineating her *etat d'âme* just before stabbing her innocent children:

> Why wait, then? My accursed hand, come, take the sword;
> Take it, and forward to your frontier of despair.
> No cowardice, no tender memories; forget
> That you once loved them, that of your body they were born.
> For one short day forget your children; afterwards
> Weep; though you kill them, they were your beloved sons.
> Life has been cruel to me.[29]

Lady Ban, whose personal name we do not know, was regarded as one of the two Ban *nusheng* [60] Women Sages of the Ban Family, together with Ban Zhao [61], China's first and up to now most famous woman scholar, who helped her

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[29] Euripides: *Medea and Other Plays.* Translated with an Introduction by Philip Vellacott. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books 1963, p. 55.

brother Ban Gu [62] (died 92 A.D.) to finish his monumental *Hanshu* [63] History of the (Earlier) Han. Lady Ban should be an extraordinary woman, excelling both in beauty and talent. She succeeded in defending herself against the vile accusations of the newcomers into imperial seraglio Zhao Feiyan [64] and her younger sister Hede [65] before and after dethroning the Empress Xu huanghou [66]. She had to leave imperial harem but she was allowed to serve as a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Dowager in another palace. There existed in ancient times a volume of her poems, now lost. Only three of her works are preserved to our days: two *fu* [67] rhymeproses and one *shi* [49] lyric poem.

The last one has different names in various editions. Here *Yuan shi* [68] *Melancholic Poem*, according to Tan Zhengbi [69], is quoted:

> Xin lie qi wan su, jiao jie ru shuang xue,
> cai cheng he huan shan, tuan tuan si ming yue,
> chu ru jun huai xiu, dong yao wei feng fa.
> Chang kong qiu jie zhi, liang biao duo yan ri,
> Qi juan qie si zhong, en qing zhong dao jue [70].[30]

From five different English translations, I chose that by W.A.P. Martin, the president of the Imperial University of Peking (after 1897), one of the most zealous promotors of Sino-Western intercultural underestanding. If not its wording, then certainly its spirit, is most congenial to the original:

> Of fresh new silk all snowy white
> And round as harvest moon;
> A pledge of purity and love,
> A small, but welcome boon.
>
> While summer lasts, borne in the hand,
> Or folded on the breast;
> 'Twill gently soothe thy burning brow.
> And charm thee to thy rest.
> But ah! when autumn frosts descend,
> And winter winds blow cold,
> No longer sought, no longer loved,
> 'Twill lie in dust and mould.
>
> This silken fan then deign accept,
> Sad emblem of my lot;
> Caressed and fondled for an hour,
> Then speedily forgot.[31]

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[30] Tan Zhengbi: *Zhongguo nuxingde wenxue shenghuo* [71] Literary Life of Chinese Women. Shanghai, Guangming shuju [72] 1930, p. 26.

[31] Lü Shu-xiang [73] and Xu Yuan-zhong [74] (eds.): *Gems of Classical Chinese Poetry in Various English Translations*. Hong Kong, Joint Publishing Co. Ltd. 1988, pp. 80–81.

If we read the original we do not find there any word expressing melancholy or sadness. There are only two terms connected with the feelings of a woman afraid of loss of her consort's love: *kong* [75] manifesting this anxiety and foreseeing the end, i.e., *jue* [76] of their *en qing* [77] intimate intercourse. No poison, no sword or its sheath, no hate, no complaint, no saturnine sentiments, no revenge, no killing, only *he huan shan* [78] doubled fan of union and joy, made of two layers of precious silk, glittering as frost or snow, and glued together, and put forever into a wooden box. The melancholy of the "deserted woman" is expressed in the form usual for the best Chinese poetry: *yanwai* [79] beyond the words, and *xiangwai* [80] beyond the images.

The love of Lady Ban, her fate and inner pains, were comparable to that of Medea, but their literary processing was quite different in the ancient Greek and Chinese traditions.

4

Not Lady Ban but Medea was the granddaughter of Helios, i.e., The Sun, who travelled across the sky in a chariot of fire drawn by four swift horses. Let us use her grandfather's means of transport and visit Western Europe more than one millennium later. In the 12th century lived there a certain "poeta doctus" comparable to Qu Yuan. His name was Bernardus Silvestris and he liked to ponder over the macrocosm and microcosm in his work entitled *De mundi universitate* (On The World as a Whole). He wrote a poem allegedly about Saturn, god of melancholy, his abode and his impact over the world and human beings. In Latin, of course, which used to be the common literary language of that age in Europe, just like *wenyan* [81] and its local variations in the Far East. Here we read:

> Illic fervet hiems, aestas algescit et aestus
> friget, delirat splendor dum flamma tepescit.
> Hic tenebrae lucent, hic lux tenebrescit, et illic
> nox cum luce viget, et lux cum nocte diescit.
> Illic Saturnus spatium percurrit avaro
> motu, progressuque gravi, longaque diaeta.
> Hic algore suo praedatur gaudia veris,
> furatur decus pratis, et sidera florum,
> algescitque calens, frigens fervescit, inundat
> aridus, obscurus lucet, iuvenisque senescit...
> Hic dolor et gemitus, lacrimae, discordia, terror,
> tristities, pallor, planctus, inuria regnant.[32]

> (There rules winter, summer is cold and hot weather
> is freezing. Splendor loses its charm and flame becomes tepid.

[32] Quoted according to *Saturn und Melancholy*, p. 186.

Darkness sheds its light, light its shadow,
Night is full of light and light is full of night.
There Saturn walks slowly through the space, moves clumsily
    and with gauche steps.
With frost he prevents the blooming in spring,
Steals the beauty of meadows and of flowers.
There he makes ice among the thaw, he let things freeze
    and simultaneously grow warm,
To be arid and to flow, to spark in dark and make young grow old...
Here reign sorrow and weeping, tears, disorder, terror,
Melancholy, pallor, complaint and injustice.)

Here we find the vivid description of saturnine scenery. It has nothing to do with the planet Saturn, the sixth in order from the sun but with the melancholic vision of daily life in late medieval epoch in Christian society and nature. The last two lines remind us of *Psalm 116, 3* where we may read: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold up on me: I found trouble and sorrow."

Nearly at the same time another *poetessa docta* – Li Qingzhao [82] (1084–1151) lived in China. In 1129, in her middle years, after happy marriage with her husband Zhao Mingcheng [83], she became a lonely widow. Left alone amidst the disorder caused by the Jurchen then invading China's South, she wrote some of her most beautiful melancholic poems. One entitled *Sheng sheng man* [84] *To the tune Andante*, is as follows:

Xunxun miaomiao,/ lengleng qingqing,/ qiqi cancan qiqi./ Zha nuan hai han shihou,/ zuinan jiangxi./ San bei liang zhan tan jiu,/ zen di ta, wan lai feng ji!/ Yan guo ye,/ zheng shang xin,/ que shi jiu shi xiangshi.

Mandi huanghua tuiji,/ qiaocui sun,/ ru jin you shui kan zhe./ Shouzhe chuanger,/ du zi zen sheng de hei. Wutong geng jian xiyu,/ dao huanghun,/ diandian didi./ Zhe ci di,/ zen yi ge chou zi liao de?! [85]

From four different English versions accessible to me, I have selected the most literal rendition by the Taiwanese modern poetess Hu P'in-ch'ing [86] (1921–):

Searching, searching
Seeking, seeking,
Alone, alone,
Solitary, solitary,
Sad, sad,
Grieved, grieved,
Mournful, mournful.
The season is now warm, now cool,
The most difficult to bear.

Two or three cups of light wine
Resist not the rapid evening wind.
The wild geese pass by
And grieve my heart,
For they are old acquaintances.

The soil is loaded with yellow chrysanthemums.
Withered and spoiled,
Who cares to pluck them?
Alone I wait by the window,
How can the day get dark?
At dusk, the fine rain on the plane tree
Falls drop by drop, drop by drop.
To express all this,
Can the mere word "sadness" suffice? [33]

If we look more carefully at both poems, especially at their original Latin and Chinese versions, we see that they are more descriptive than that left to us by Lady Ban. Li Qingzhao's is more lyrical, although Bernardus Silvestri's has its charms, too. Silvestri's poem plays skillfully with antiphrases and Li Qingzhao's with onomatopoieas and *redoublements emphatiques* for the first time used in such rich measure in the history of Chinese poetry. In contrast with Lady Ban, Li Qingzhao reaches out for different words expressing some aspects of melancholy and she is quite sure that the *chou* [89] usually translated as sadness, is not able to convey all sorrow or grief felt in the recesses of the human heart after the death of a beloved husband. The European poem is more philosophical, the Chinese more literary in its peculiar Chinese way. The first could be very long within the macrocosm and microcosm of Medieval European world, the second should certainly finish its course at the point of the ineffability of this kind of human feeling, after reaching the abyss between the reality of the human psyche and the possibility of its artistic processing.

Li Qingzhao's poem starts almost as a lulling song. More than eight centuries later, in the first decade of the 20th cent., the modern Chinese poet Wang Duqing [90] (1898-1940), being on the knees of her illiterate mother, he taught her to learn it by heart. Wang Duqing's mother, at first maid and later despised concubine of his father and hated rival of father's first wife, was according to his own reminiscences, a "contemplative and melancholic (*youyu*) [91]" kind of woman, whom he never saw with a "very happy smile on the face".[34] When

[33] Cf. Hu Pin-ch'ing: *Li Ch'ing-chao*. New York, Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1966, pp. 37–38 and Sun Chong'en [87] (ed.): *Li Qingzhao shici xuan* [88] A Selection From Li Qingzhao's Poems and Songs. Peking, People's Literature Publishing House 1988, pp. 98–99.

[34] Wang Duqing: *Chang'an chengzhongde shaonian* [92] A Youth From Chang'an. Shanghai, Guangming shuju 1935, p. 9.

later after her death, he had the opportunity during his Italian trip to look at the famous painting *La Crocifissione dei Cappuccini* by Guido Reni (1577–1642) and observe the beautiful, melancholic face of St. Mary under the Cross, he began to cry and wrote one of his most moving poems, entitled *Shengmu xiangqian* [93] *Before the Madonna.* Although his mother is not mentioned there (only the Mother of Jesus and the mother of Confucius), her Southern beauty, the life full of sorrow and his deep and never fully enjoyed love for her, certainly left some imprint upon this work.[35] Wang Duqing was one of the most melancholic poets of modern China after the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

5

Now we may turn to the third meaning of the melancholy according to the trio of the writers of *Saturn and Melancholy*: "It may mean a temporary state of mind, sometimes painful and depressing, sometimes merely mildly pensive or nostalgic. In this case it is a purely subjective mood which can then by transference be attributed to the objective world, so that one can legitimately speak of 'the melancholy of evening', 'the melancholy of the autumn'..."[36]

For the reason of space and time, only "the melancholy of autumn" will be shortly analysed here. It is a pity that Professor Chen Peng-hsiang, of the Taiwan National Normal University, Taipei, is not present here. His book *Thou Hast Thy Music Too: An Autumn in Classical English and Chinese Poetry,*[37] is a rich source of information on the subject. Earlier in this paper, we mentioned that in China the "five elements" were applied probably even in more branches of study and human expression, but probably the most weighty reason for its literary application was different: deeper interest of Chinese for nature and for the flux of time. In Europe the impact of Judeo-Christian views on nature and time as secondary to God and depending on his grace, was too strong. Therefore not enough attention was paid to them up to the beginning of modern era, or even up to the 17th or l8th centuries. In ancient Greece, it was partly different, but there, as we have seen in *Medea*, dramatic and tragic vision overcame the calm and meditative observation of natural flux outside of human society.

Without the necessity to pay attention to divine sanction of any kind, or even its presence in nature and in time, the Chinese had more possibilities of rumination over their cyclical understanding of the natural phenomena and its specificities, like in *Zhuangzi*, in the chapter *Zeyang* [94], where we read: "The yin and yang shine on each other, maim each other, the four seasons succeed

[35] GÁLIK, M.: Matres Dolorosae*: Musings Over Wang Duqing's* Before the Madonna *and Guido Reni's* La Crocifissione dei Cappuccini, to be published later in *Festschrift* for Lionello Lanciotti.

[36] *Saturn und Melancholy*, p. 1.

[37] Taipei, Lucky Bookstore 1981.

each other, give birth to each other, slaughter each other."[38] Or: "The seasons have their end and beginning, the age their changes and transformations."[39] Zhuangzi seemed to have no preference for any of four seasons, but the majority of Chinese poets highlighted *qiu* [95] autumn and *chou* [89] sadness, the feeling connected etymologically and phonetically with this third among the four year seasons. Word composites containing *qiu* abound in Chinese language and literature, and Professor Chen is right when he insists that in English "whether in its isolated or compound form, the word 'autumn', derived from the Latin 'autumnus", does not carry with it so intricate a web of associations".[40] Autumn, is treated there too, but relatively late, in the poetry by William Blake, Percy Bysse Shelley or John Keats, the romanticists, where melancholy is also prevalent. The same also holds for old Chinese poetry, and already in Qu Yuan's pupil Song Yu's [96] *Jiu bian* [97] *The Nine Arguments*, we find some of the best specimens of melancholic poetry. One of them is even reminiscent of English spleen of the 18th century and of "unhappy consciousness" (unglückliches Bewußtsein) by Georg W.F. Hegel of the 19th century:

> Jing miao qiu zhi yao ye xi,
> xin liao lei er you ai.
> Chun qiu zhuo zhuo er ri gao xi,
> ran chou chang er zi bei.
> Si shi di lai er zu sui xi,
> yin yang bu ke yu li jie.
> Bai ri wan wan qi jiang ru xi,
> ming yue xiao shuo er jian hui.
> Sui hu hu er qiu xin xi,
> lao ran ran er yu shi.
> Xin yao yue er ri xing xi,
> ran chao chang er *wu ji*.
> Zhong can ce zhi qican xi,
> chang tai xi er zeng xi.
> Nian yang yang yi ri wang xi,
> lao shan kuo er *wu chu*.
> Shi wei wei er ji jin xi,
> jian yan liu er chouchu [98].

Here follows the translation by David Hawkes with minor changes corresponding to my understanding of some places in the text:

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[38] *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 291 and *A Concordance to Chuang Tzu*, p. 72.

[39] Loc. cit.

[40] Chen Peng-hsiang: op. cit., p. 81.

When I think of the long nights of late autumn,
My heart is tormented and full of sorrow.
Springs and autumns are growing in number,
And sadly I grieve and feel self-pity.
Four seasons come and go and fulfil the year;
Yin and yang alternate: I scarce can keep abreast.
The white sun reddens towards his setting,
The bright moon pines and wastes away.
All too quickly the year will be ended,
And old age comes creeping on apace.
My heart is distraught, in spite of daily fortune.
I am disappointed and there is *no hope*.
My breast is bitter with grief and anguish,
And sigh after long sigh I heave heavily.
Swiftly the years roll by, ever receding,
And old age finds me alone, with *no place* to go.
My affairs press upon me and urge me forward;
But I linger on here in uncertainty.[41]

Nobody knows exactly where the idea of "unhappy consciousness" in Hegel's philosophical system came from. As we know from his *History of Philosophy*, the history of the world "is not the theatre of happiness, periods of happiness are blank pages in it".[42] The possible source is Hebrew antiquity, late Roman or medieval Christianity, even Protestantism or Romanticism.[43] Roland Lambrecht sees a possible source in *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (354–430).[44] Probably the most famous words from this great book addressed to God: "our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee",[45] put at its beginning, or another in Book Ten, Chapter Forty, used Hegel when writing about the "unhappy consciousness" as one important part of our *conditio humana*: "Here (in this world, M.G.) I can stay, but would not, there (in Heaven, M.G.) I would, but cannot, both ways miserable."[46]

The situation with the *persona* of Song Yu's poem is similar. For Song's "lyrical hero" as well for the Church Father, there was "no hope" and "no place" to go. Whether forever, or during the lifespan in this *vallis lacrimarum.* "Any-

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[41] HAWKES, D.: op. cit., p. 97 and MA MAOYUAN: op. cit., p. 242.

[42] Quoted according to Will DURANT: *The Story of Philosophy*. New York, Garden City Publishing Co., Inc. 1943, p. 224.

[43] LAMBRECHT, R.: *Melancholie. Vom Leiden an der Welt und den Schmerzen der Reflexion*. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt Taschenbuchverlag GmbH 1994, p. 133.

[44] Ibid., pp. 134–139.

[45] *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Transl. by Edward Bouverie Pusey. New York, Quality Paperback Book Club 1991, p. 1.

[46] Ibid., p. 270.

where out of the world”[47] by Charles Baudelaire expresses the same conviction, although the modern French decadent poet would probably have a different ambition than St. Augustine. On the other hand, Søren Kierkegaard, both pupil and rival of Hegel, and according to one authority, “the profoundest interpreter of the psychology of the religious life... since St. Augustine”,[48] would agree, although the melancholic disposition of his psyche, pressed him to manifest his thoughts in a more existential way, in the form of a “philosophy of despair”, or the “sickness unto death” unthinkable for Song Yu, St. Augustine or even Baudelaire.

*

In one of his seminal works entitled *Either/Or* Kierkegaard presented his readers with a peculiar dream:

“Something wonderful happened to me. I was carried up into the seventh heaven. There all the gods set assembled. By special grace I was granted the favor of a wish. ‘Will you,’ said Mercury, ‘have youth, or beauty, or power, or a long life, or the most beautiful maiden, or any of the other glories we have in the chest? Choose, but only one thing.’ For a moment I was at a loss. Then I addressed myself to the gods as follows: ‘Most honorable contemporaries, I choose this one thing, that I may always have the laugh at my side.’ Not one of the gods said a word, on the contrary, they all began to laugh. Hence I concluded that my request was granted, and found that the gods knew how to express themselves with taste...”[49]

Not only the gods knew it. Kierkegaard himself discovered “laughter” in the midst of woe and melancholy, in his high “castle of grief” built like an eagle’s nest high up among the clouds, when he heard by chance the minuet from *Don Juan*, or when he imagined being himself in the company of nice girls, or enjoying the pleasures of dance. From time to time, as he confessioned, his soul was also “joy-intoxicated”.[50]

Melancholy and joy, grief and laughter are joined together, they are, if not steady, then more or less frequent companions of life. Even the “discoverer” of “trouble and sorrow” and the “pains of hell” in the *Psalm 114*, manifested simultaneously his thanks to God who delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears and his feet from failing.[51] There were pleasant moments in the life

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[47] Baudelaire, Ch.: *Le Spleen de Paris*. In: *Œuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire*. Neuilly-sur-Seine, Éditions de Saint-Claire 1974, p. 485.

[48] This is the opinion of Reinhold Niebuhr, well-known modern Protestant theologian, quoted from: *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Ed. by Robert Bretall. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1973, p. xxvii.

[49] *A Kierkegaard Anthology,* p. 36.

[50] Ibid., p. 35.

[51] *Psalm 114*, 8.

and work of those we have mentioned above: Medea, Qu Yuan, Song Yu, Ban Jieyu, St. Mary, Jesus Christ, St. Augustine, Li Qingzhao, Luther, Hegel, Baudelaire, even the mother of Wang Duqing. Her son certainly saw her with laugh or smile when she hugged or played with him.

But still, in the literary or artistic processing of melancholy or grief, there is usually more value than in the manifestation of joy or laughther. Just as in the *Ecclesiastes, or The Preacher*: "To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;... Sorrow *is* better than laughter, for by the sadness of countenance the heart is made better."[52]

I tried not to be a "cramped scholar" in my exposition. Whether I succeeded or not, is a question I am not authorized to answer. If I "gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness" (and melancholic phenomena in the corners of the world under consideration are part and parcel of both), I do not think, in contradiction to the *Ecclesiastes*, that my efforts could be characterized as "vexation of spirit".[53] Europe and China are different realms of human expression due to many reasons caused by the mythological, historical, philosophical, religious, psychological, literary and artistic development. Melancholy is an all-human phenomenon, and both in China and Europe, in history and in our age, has its specific features that are still waiting for further and deeper research.

[52] *Ecclesiastes, 3*, 4.

[53] Ibid., *1*, 17.