

Melancholia

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Watch what happens sometimes when a young child is allowed to just have his or her feelings. The feelings usually run their course and the child comes full circle.

—Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*

“I’m sad.
It feels like the whole world
is inside me,” says
my five-year-old grandson, naming,
as well as any poet or philosopher,
the invisible darkness
of heart,
the black bile
of soul,
that oppresses
like an anvil sky.

This ancient affliction,
grief gathering to greatness,
anomie the enemy
of King Saul and Jeremiah,
Hamlet and Camus,
Woolf and Styron,
among so many.

Dowland sang it darkly
and Dickinson,
oppressed by winter light,
felt a funeral in her brain:
countless generations
descending to darkness.

Such sadness of soul reaches
even the heavens, as shown
in Dürer's drawing
where the despondent angel,
ungladdened by rainbow or sunburst,
broods with alchemical lassitude
amid symbols of falling time
and empty scales.

Even God,
who sang the whole world into being,
must feel it himself
when the weight of history
presses down, when
sequestered hates
and serial annihilations
lean everything backward to chaos
and no flood or fire
can extinguish
the blackness.

For some it seems an eternity.
For others, it passes
like the going of a great storm,
as with my grandson,
who says,
hours later,
"I'm okay now—
the whole world
is outside me."