

On Moods

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Let the reader imagine me sitting at home, wrapped in a dressing gown, on the evening of the first day of Easter. A fine rain is falling outside, and I am alone in the room. I stare for a long time at the blank sheet of paper lying in front of me, pen in hand, vexed by the confused crowd of things, events, and thoughts all demanding to be written down. Some of them are tempestuous in their demands, being young still and effervescent like new wine; but in opposition to these many an old, ripened, clarified thought arises, like an old master who surveys the strivings of the youthful world with an equivocal eye. Let us say it openly: our temperament is conditioned by the conflict between these old and new worlds, and the current situation of the conflict is what we call 'mood' or also, with some disdain, 'temper'.

Like a good diplomat I rise above the quarreling parties and describe the state of the commonwealth with the impartiality of a man who every day attends inadvertently the sessions of all the parties, applying in practice the very principle that he mocks and scorns from the rostrum.

Let us admit it: I am writing about moods, insofar as I am right now *in* a certain mood; and it is fortunate that I am just in the mood for describing moods.

Today I played Liszt's *Consolations* many times over, and now I feel how its tones have penetrated my being and continue, spiritualized, to resonate within me. I recently underwent a painful experience that had to do with a parting or a not-parting, and now I notice how this feeling and those tones have fused together, and I see that the music would not have appealed to me had I not just had this experience. So the soul strives to attract what is like it, and the current mass of feelings squeezes like a lemon the new events that impinge upon the heart, but always in such a way that only a part of what is new fuses with what is old, and a residue is left over which is not yet able to find anything related to it in the household of the soul, and thus lodges here alone, quite often to the displeasure of the older residents with whom it often comes into conflict. But look! Here comes a friend, there a book is opening, a girl passes by. Listen! Music! Already new guests are streaming in from all sides into the house that stands open to all, and the one who was just now standing alone finds many noble relatives.

It is quite marvellous: it is not that the guests come because they want to, nor that the guests come as they are; but rather those guests come who must, and indeed only

those who must come. Anything the soul *cannot* reflect simply does not touch it; but since it does not lie within the power of the will to make the soul reflect or not, the soul is touched only by what it wants. And that seems absurd to many people: for they recall how there are many sensations that they resist. But what is it that ultimately determines the will? Or how often the will sleeps and only the drives and desires are awake! But one of the strongest desires of the soul is a certain curiosity, a taste for the unusual, which explains why we often allow ourselves moods that are unpleasant.

But it is not only through the will that the soul assimilates things: the soul is composed of the same or similar stuff as experiences, and thus it is that an event which finds no sympathetic resonance can lie so heavily on the soul as a burdensome mood, and can eventually assume such a preponderance that it compresses and constricts the other contents of the soul.

Moods thus arise either from inner conflicts or else from external pressure on the inner world. Here there is a civil war between two enemy camps, there an oppression of the populace by a particular class, a small minority.

Often, when I eavesdrop on my own thoughts and feelings and silently attend to myself, it is as if I heard the hum and buzzing of those wild factions, as if there were a rushing through the air as when a thought or an eagle flies to the sun.

Conflict is the constant nourishment of the soul, and the soul knows how to extract from it much that is sweet and fine. The soul destroys and thereby gives birth to new things, it fights energetically and yet gently draws the opponent over to its own side for an intimate union. And the most marvellous thing is that it never pays attention to the exterior – names, persons, places, fine words, handwriting are all relatively unimportant – but it treasures what lies within the covering.

That which is perhaps now your whole happiness or your entire sorrow may soon turn out to be only the garment of a yet deeper feeling, and will thus disappear when the greater thing comes. And thus our moods deepen themselves continually: no one of them is quite the same as the next, but each is unfathomably young and the birth of the moment.

I think of many a thing that I used to love; names and persons changed, and I don't want to claim that in actuality their natures would have become ever more beautiful and profound. What is true, though, is that each one of these similar moods signifies a step forward for me, and that for the spirit it is intolerable to go through the same stages again that it has already gone through: it wants to keep on extending itself into the depths and heights.

Dear moods, I salute you, marvellous variations of a tempestuous soul, as manifold as nature itself, but more magnificent than nature, since you eternally transcend yourselves and strive eternally upwards, whereas the plant still exhales the same fragrance it did on the day of creation. I no longer love as I loved some weeks ago; I am no longer this moment in the mood I was in as I began to write.

First I tried it in music, but it didn't work: the heart stormed on, and the music remained dead. Then I tried in verse: no, rhyme failed to capture it, at least not calm and measured rhythms. Away with the paper: take a new sheet, and now pen quickly scribble, ink – quick – here!

Mild summer evening, twilight streaked with pallor. Children's voices in the lanes, in the distance noise and music. A fair: people are dancing, colourful lanterns blaze, wild animals growl; here a shot rings out, there a rattle of drums, steady and insistent.

Inside the room it is darker. I light a lamp, but the eye of the day looks inquisitively through the half-drawn curtains. It would like to see farther, right into the middle of this heart which – hotter than the light, duskier than the evening, more animated than the voices in the distance – reverberates deep within, like a huge bell sounded in a storm.

And I implore a thunderstorm; does the tolling of the bell not attract the lightning? Now, you approaching thunderstorm, clarify, purify, blow fragrances of rain into my dull nature; welcome, at last, welcome!

There! You first bolt of lightning, there you flash, right into my heart; and from it arises something like a long, pale column of mist. Do you know it, the dark, treacherous one? My eye is already brighter, and I stretch my hand out after it, as if to curse. The thunder growls, and a voice rang out: 'Be cleansed!'

Heavy sultriness; my heart swells. Nothing moves. There – a light breath, on the ground the grass trembles – welcome, rain, soother, my saviour! Here it is desert, empty, dead: plant anew!

There! A second bolt! Dazzling and two-edged, right into my heart! And a voice rang out: 'Hope!'

A gentle fragrance rises from the ground, a wind comes up, and the storm follows, howling in pursuit of its prey. It drives broken-off blossoms before it, as the rain swims joyfully after.

Right through the middle of my heart. Storm and rain! Thunder and lightning! Right through the middle! And a voice rang out: 'Become new!'