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Laurinda S. Dixon. *The Dark Side of Genius: The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500-1700.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013. xii + 254 pp. $39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-271-05936-5.

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Commissioned by Iain C. Hutchison (University of Glasgow)

It is a pleasure for this reviewer to have been asked to review Laurinda S. Dixon's *The Dark Side of Genius: The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500-1750*, primarily because, as a medievalist, he did not expect to understand and follow so much of it, as it concerns itself with the centuries following what many scholars consider to constitute medieval Europe. Yet, one assumes many readers will share this reaction: her book treats expertly early modern art history, and, simultaneously, rewards its reader by connecting its subject matter so closely, not only to developments that were then current, but also, and most importantly, to the intellectual histories of the preceding centuries. In short, tracing out the history of the melancholic persona in art illustrates both the interconnectedness of many fields by their shared interests and investments in melancholia and the utility of Dixon's interdisciplinary approach.

A few definitions are in order. When Dixon uses melancholia, she seems quite aware of the term's slippery nature, as early on she describes a contemporary meaning as "a psychological condition akin to depression or bipolar disorder," while nevertheless maintaining that term's historical connotations: "But melancholia was once defined as a corporeal illness, as widely feared as cancer and heart disease today" (p. 2). By making clear the term's multiple meanings, Dixon also draws attention to the historical blurring between disciplines. Indeed, just as melancholia was said to be a corporeal disorder, tied to creativity, it is also something of an illness and defining featuring, marking and characterizing the minds and bodies of the melancholics.

For scholars of the body, disease, and disability, this approach pays dividends. Indeed, Dixon demonstrates that her focus on melancholia naturally calls attention to various theories of the body, its health and diseases. Reflecting melancholia's own role in humoral theory, Dixon fleshes out that this mark of genius is also a mark of various premodern conceptions of how the mind and body were seen as inseparable, and outward and inward states matched. As historians have made clear, humoral theory defined not only conceptions of the body, but also treatments for various illnesses from ancient Greece to early modern Europe. These four humors—phlegm, black bile, yellow bile, and blood—influenced more than medicine, however. Organizing bodies and their treatments according to the four humors also meant that identity and personality could also be linked to this humoral system, emphasizing the readability of the humoral system and four personalities it produced (melancholy, sanguine, choleric) in literature, art, and medicine.

It is precisely this shorthand—the legibility of bodies and traits through outward symbols—that serves as the basis for Dixon's book, allowing her to remark that "today, artists and physicians may meet occasionally over cocktails, but the two professions were once co-dependent" (p. 3). And this blurring of disciplines frames her beginning discussion of Albrecht Dürer's ***Melencolia I*** (1514), where Dixon traces "the turning point in history, when the conventional medieval perception of art as a predominately manual craft was augmented by the belief that artists possessed unique intellectual and creative gifts" (p. 1). Dixon's reading of this image, one she notes is perhaps hermetically sealed to modern viewers, introduces her exploration of melancholia, which she historicizes briefly in the context of medicine, theories of the body, and the idea of art as craft. What makes Dixon's methodology and approach so fascinating is her emphasis that melancholy in the early modern period had simultaneously negative and positive connotations, and that it is often the positive connotations that illustrate the movement from craft to genius in terms of artistic creation.

To trace this development, chapter 1, "Saturn's Privileged Realm: Meaning and Melancholy," gives necessary background to the humoral system. Useful for its unfolding in detail of the progression of the humoral system, the chapter centers on how Saturn became intertwined in the melancholic personality, and how this humor tied to sadness and illness was linked with creativity and craft. In clear language, Dixon's chapter manages the necessary detail of a system of opposing humors. And, it is precisely the opposition of the humors (warm versus cold) that Dixon argues is "implicit in the visual representation of the melancholic persona" (p. 11). Implicitly, readers will see how medical treatments of the body—based on competing humors and contrasts—also seem to color the positive and negative aspects of the melancholic: in her words, they could be "somber, solitary, and sometimes sinister in their demeanor" while maintaining "enlightened insight" (p. 23). As with each of the following chapters, this investigation is aided by carefully chosen prints and illustrations, in color when appropriate.

Next, Dixon turns to what she calls "religious melancholia" as she depicts a kind of spiritual history of Saturn's children, positing that "before Renaissance philosophy and science invented new secular models, the saturnine qualities of privilege and intellect—eventually ascribed to lovers, scholars, and artists—were associated with extreme piety" (p. 31). Here, one of Dixon's strengths is her ability to see beyond her own foci as an art historian, bridging disciplines and time periods to highlight how the depiction of religious figures also fit into the development of the melancholic persona in art. Her concentration, therefore, on St. Jerome in chapter 2 is especially useful for both historians of early modern art and scholars interested in the presentation of early Christianity in later centuries. Her opening statement in chapter 2, anticipating the move of melancholia from religious to secular realms, introduces chapter 3, which takes portrait miniatures as its focus, and shows how these portraits operate as "concrete representations of an Aristotelian paradigm in which body and mind were completely integrated, and outward appearance was a sure indicator of the temper of the soul" (p. 55). Throughout this chapter, Dixon makes the connection among humors, passion, and illness, and the imbalance in the humors that could cause passions to be aroused and illness to set in. Her exploration of lovesickness, in particular, will be a useful continuation, for example, to Mary Wack's ***Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*** (1990), continuing Wack's examination of vision in the development of lovesickness. Indeed, these miniature portraits could play an outsized role, prompting, like an imbalance of humors that they often depicted, an arousal of the passions and the onset of love illnesses.

Chapter 4 interrogates the movement of the melancholic persona into the realm of the scholar. In a chapter that touches perhaps too closely on the conditions faced by many academics, Dixon shows how then-contemporary pressures and problems confronting the scholar contributed to the depiction of the scholar as a melancholic himself. But, as was true for the other uses of the melancholic persona, in religious and amorous contexts there were both negative and positive consequences for such a development as scholars might be portrayed as dejected and out of mind. Yet, simultaneously, Dixon argues that "the dark side of Saturn was offset in the early modern era by its associations with the venerable ancients, whose works were at the core of the university curricula throughout the seventeenth century and beyond" (p. 88). And this privileging of melancholia as a scholarly stance, evocative both of antiquity and of present difficulties, introduces chapter 5 and its subject, "The Privileged Profession: Artists and Melancholy." Dixon here tracks the ways in which, particularly for Albrect Dürer, artists came to be seen as ruled by Saturn, marked by melancholia. By concentrating on self-portraiture, Dixon illustrates how artists came to see themselves not only in their paintings, but also as gloomy geniuses. "The new breed of post-Neoplatonic melancholic artist, invented by Dürer, was characterized above all by superior imagination and intellect; thus men of letters were united medically with suffering artists under the common influence of black bile" (p. 117). This chapter, in some ways, seems the most rewarding of the book. Self-portraits connected the aims of artists and physicians. Indeed, Dixon contends that these paintings suggest how artists "were fulfilling popular expectations of how artists should look," as they linked outward appearance and inner being as effectively as the surgeons versed in Claudius Galen and humors (p. 123).

Finally, chapter 6 describes the material trappings of the melancholic master, the brooding artist as he crafts a persona who is akin to a religious hermit, a lover, or a scholar. Cataloguing the set places of these paintings and engravings, Dixon moves from music, both as cure and as physical instrument, to women as companions and musicians themselves. What Dixon has traced as a kind of privileging of the melancholic is bolstered by the study of these material signs. The melancholic artist might be sad, lonely, and dejected, but certainly, often, he was surrounded by the good life. The epilogue details how this melancholic persona was largely set aside with the advent of the Enlightenment as artists achieved a kind of status and position that made the melancholic persona somewhat unnecessary. What is so fascinating about this epilogue, in particular, and the book, in general, is how Dixon traces the development and deployment of the melancholic personality, tying it both to social self-creation and social position. Once again, this prominence of artists rendered the melancholic unnecessary until the nineteenth century, when, in her words, "the arts looked backward, steeped in historic revivalism," and supported implicitly by the gradual professionalization of the medical field (p. 183). Once artists became cut off forever from surgeons and physicians, the melancholic persona was revived.

Dixon's ***Dark Side of Genius*** is, without hyperbole, a work of some genius. Full of well-written prose and careful conclusions, the book exists at the intersection of a few different disciplines, among which history of medicine looms large. Scholars of almost any discipline, who have interests in the body, its illnesses, and its composition, will find something here to reward them.

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