

Andrei Codrescu

from TEXANS

Manny had heaven-o-phobia, fear of heaven, which means that he always landed feet first in the most ideal situations and it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to complain about anything because everything was so heavenly. Often, in some chalet in the Alps, or in a first-class Parisian restaurant, he tried to rephrase his predicament, and asked his (every time more beautiful) new date: “What do you do if you’re a masochist and they appoint you dictator?” and his date, who was often a lawyer, would answer: “You use your power to draw contracts specifying the exact amounts of pain you’d like your subjects to inflict on you.” This did not satisfy Manny. He knew that pleasure doled out so exactly would only cause him to feel more, well, heavenly. He could see no way to become a sadist with a broken heart.

One of his friends, an older man named Volya, had found refuge in nostalgia. He would often sigh, after two vodkas: “Things haven’t been the same since Stalin died.” Volya had been a professor of Russian, but who’d retired in disgust two years short of his retirement, because he couldn’t stand the theoretical avalanche in the humanities department at his university, an avalanche that had buried even his beloved Pushkin. After three vodkas, he would shout in his accented English so that everyone in the pub could hear: “I used to think Onegin was a poem, now it’s just a fucking text!” Volya could make Manny laugh one night and cry the next. That was typical of the Russian soul, he thought to himself.

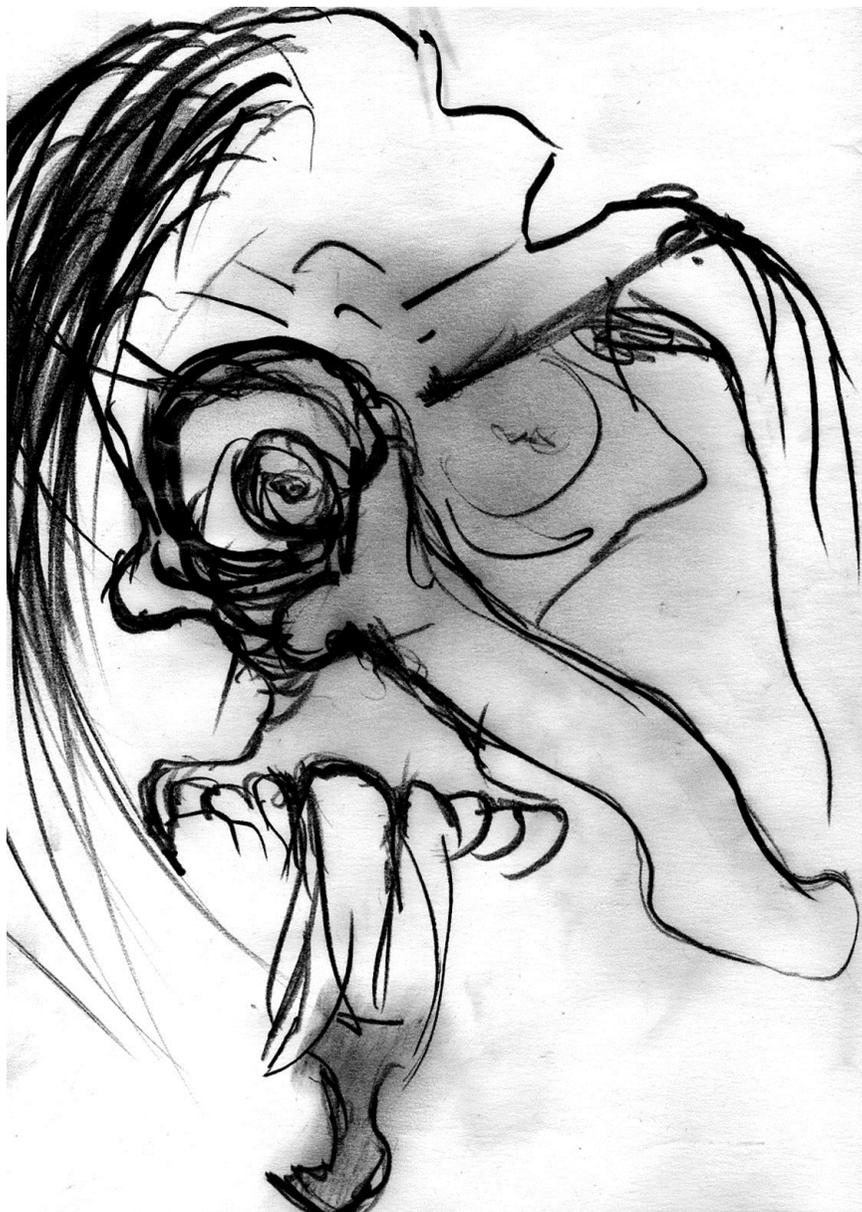
One reason for Manny’s heaven-o-phobia, and why he envied Volya, was that he couldn’t stand to be bored. Volya was never bored. “There is no boredom when you are in the presence of genuine difference,” he said. And Manny would argue that Volya’s own resistance to an unfamiliar reading of Pushkin was a form of boredom, a refusal to change how Onegin was always read, to which Volya would reply, “Resistance to the unfamiliar sometimes masquerades as boredom, but this isn’t the case when the unfamiliar is more boring than the familiar. What’s more,” he added, putting a philosopher’s finger in his cheek, “Boredom is a transcendent value.”

How so? Manny was outraged.



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Boredom forces you to transcend the boring situation! Exclaimed Volya. Another vodka, please! I hate the things I see in my rearview mirror. Nothing *is* actual size. And I don't just mean the things behind the car. I mean everything. People. Houses. Ideas. Myself. Everything is either small-



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er or larger than it appears, but all it can do is *appear*. Nothing can do anything more than to appear. Even when things disappear, they aren't actual size. The holes they leave behind when they disappear are the least accurate, actually. They are bigger or smaller, but never the size of the things that disappeared through them.

"Sounds like you need a guru," Manny's date, a statuesque perfume model who had transformed herself from a homeless punkette into an international star with the aid of a spiritual guide, said, "There are very few genuine gurus anymore, you can go to three or four states in the U.S. without running into any of them. But I know this guy..." She wrote Siddhude on the cloth napkin and an email address, "Tell him Torte sent you." She handed it to him on wave of musk. In her contract, she had to wear it, it turned heads, it attracted dogs and rats.

"What's so great about gurus? Maybe they call them something else now. I think that there are more of them, actually. Everyone with more than two thousand friends on Facebook is a guru," Manny said. He received the musk-scented email napkin, took out his phone and wrote a mail to Siddhude, "Torte sends me. She smells professional. I have a problem with the size of holes in the world." Send.

"Whatever. The point is that gurus are actual size. Right, Volya?" She was flirting with his friend, musking him casually with a flick.

Manny would have argued, but he feared that he would inevitably lead her to some comment about "actual size" when the time came to enter her body in all its simplicity. Her name was Torte and she was everything a torte should be: creamy, layered, flaky, not a napoleon or a cannoli, but a chocolate cake: she was all creamy roses. She was heaven. Entering her would be heaven because she was heaven and coming inside heaven was, well, heavenly. The air burned crimson around the scent-wrapped vodka bottle Volodya had placed thoughtfully in the vicinity of her décolletage. Grey goose. Then terror set in for Manny, he took his eyes off heavenly Torte and his heart pounded a-rhythmically mirroring the moving stock graph on the TV crawl. The market was collapsing. His heaven-o-phobia briefly subsided. He would hand her over to Vlya and state calling clients.

If the advertisers who sold her scent of carnality and mystery had known to what depraved depths Torte had descended before meeting Siddhude they'd have either cancelled her or tripled her publicists. The virtuous and the bored now use the news like they once used the Bible, for titillation and flagellation. But for real titillation and flagellation... ouch! Torte's rotundities where molded by whips she had closets full of. Torte was the better masochist, technically, but Manny felt that his inability to draw completeness from her experience as a put-down. He was a suffering masochist. What's the fun in that? Her passion was the last two decades of the twentieth