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Melancholy and the Folly of Love

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> I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness. (Shakespeare, *AYL*, IV.i.10-18)

Thus Jaques, at the opening to Act Four of *As You Like It,* leads us through a maze of differing effects of melancholy as expressed through different characters and circumstances. From this we might infer that Shakespeare was to some extent knowledgeable about melancholy. He certainly expected his audience to be able to follow Jaques' line, even if a true appreciation was tainted with Jaques' acerbic disposition to belittle, even make fun of, the various characters. This all-encompassing melancholy to which Jaques and Shakespeare refer also offers a line of discussion relevant to the discourses of folly.

Melancholy had been recognised as a common condition from earliest times, and it was traditionally associated with an excess of black bile creating a depressive imbalance in the four bodily humours. Hippocrates noted its effects, and Aristotle, in the *Problemata*, drew attention to it with a question: "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics

or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious [i.e., melancholic] temperament?" (XXX.1.953a.10-14). This assessment leads one to suppose it was, amongst other possibilities, a symptom of deep thoughtfulness and creativity. Burton goes further to characterise excessive study as itself a major cause of the disease. During the medieval period, rather more invidiously, it came to be associated with *Accidia*, or Sloth, a direct reference, one might think, to its capacity to reduce the subject to inactivity, indecision and, on occasion, suicidal thoughts. *Accidia*, in its turn, was strongly linked with medieval teachings concerning the mortal sin of spiritual despair (Gowland, p. 69). By the time Robert Burton published his *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621 he had adopted the view, in accord with that of Cicero, that "no mortal man can avoid sorrow and sickness, and sorrow is an inseparable companion to melancholy" (I: 101). Following Galen, Burton also identified fear as a main ingredient of this disorder. He explains that "Many times by violence of imagination they produce it" (II: 11) and that, furthermore, they consider the danger peculiar to themselves and their own situation. In the body of his work, Burton itemised a plethora of symptoms and actual descriptions of melancholic states of mind and their physical effects, all of them rendered as a species of disordered behaviour, behaviour for which the individual sufferer was often held responsible. Perhaps the most original aspect of his concern with melancholy, however, was his conclusion that it was in fact a disease of the mind, a pathological condition that deserved sympathetic treatment rather than the traditional moral condemnation. In addition, he considered that melancholy appeared endemic in the period in which he was living. He even suggested that "Folly, melancholy, madness, are but one disease, *Delirium* is a common name to all" (I: 55), and it is in light of that broad definition relating those three conditions that it becomes possible to link melancholy and folly in the following discussion.

Turning to the relation between love and melancholy, Burton, in his introduction, suggested that all lovers were simply "mad", and love is described as "madness, a hell, an incurable disease" or "an impotent raging lust" (I: 153); in other words, love may indeed be regarded as a species of folly akin to madness. In the later part of his book, Burton included one whole Partition, as he called it, devoted to a condition he described as love-melancholy. Significantly, the engravings on his title page included a figure of the *inamorato* dressed in fashionable clothes, his hat pulled down over his eyes in a gesture of withdrawal, his arms folded in a resigned kind of way and books of music and poetry strewn about his feet. Love-melancholy is presented pictorially, therefore, as of a similar

significance as diseases like hypochondria, superstition and mania, conditions that also had their places on the title page.

This love-melancholy, as described by Burton, arises when what appears to be an insoluble barrier comes between the lover and the object of his or her desire. This may be as a result of the restraining conventions of courtship, the intervention of parents, unequal social status, including racial and religious differences, beauty and ugliness, intelligence and stupidity, desire and refusal, and, according to Burton, these factors include, rather surprisingly, jealousy. The representations of these situations in drama will, of course, be of varying degrees of intensity, as might be exemplified, for instance, in *Romeo and Juliet* or *As You Like It*, *Othello* or *The Winter's Tale*. But the point is that all or any of such circumstances can provide a dramatist with a ready-made plot that demands some kind of resolution. Whether that is comic or tragic in outcome will be according to his choice and/or according to the nature of the source from which he derives his story.

Early in the *Anatomy*, in the Partition concerned with love-melancholy, Burton cited the example of Calisto, who idolises Melebea (III: 136). Calisto's "soul was soused, imparadised, imprisoned in his lady" (140); the fire of love "devours the soul itself" (143). Although his source is *La Celestina,* rather than the anonymous play *Calisto and Melebea* that Rastell published about 1525, nevertheless the details are the same. The play represents Calisto as what Richard Axton calls, "an idle, Petrarchan mooncalf" purporting to suffer from a "fashionable courtly melancholy" (*Calisto*, ed. Axton, p. 18). Indeed, as is evident from Burton's own writing, the whole concern with love-melancholy derived as much from the Petrarchan tradition in poetry as it did from observations of actual experience. In the opening scene of *Calisto and Melebea*, Calisto's complaint arises from Melebea's outright rejection of him. The only reward that he gets from her for his proffered love is that she says, "where thou art present, / Whyle I lyff, by my wyll I wyll be absent" (ll. 71-72). In response he wails:

> Lo, out of all joy I am fallyn in wo,
> Uppon whom advers Fortune hath cast her chauns
> Of cruell hate, which causyth now away to go
> The keeper of my joy and all my pleasauns. (ll. 73-76)

While such complaints, as I have suggested, have this long tradition in poetry, the clearly apparent love-melancholy reads, perhaps, like a new strain in the

drama, and the anonymous English playwright takes some pleasure in ridiculing Calisto on account of it. Indeed, Melebea has already given her judgement on

> These folysh lovers then, that be so amerous,
> From pleasure to displeasure how lede they theyr lyfe,
> Now sory, now sad, now joyous, now pensyfe! (ll. 10-12)

When Sempronio, Calisto's servant and confidant, attempts to dissuade his master from his pursuit of the young lady, he emphasises the delusional nature of Calisto's love. His love-feelings are regarded by Melebea, Sempronio and Sempronio's low-life confederates as pure folly in the sense that they are, to them, a totally unrealistic obsession.

A similar vein of comedy is exploited in John Heywood's *A Play of Love,* published in 1533, where the first character to appear is Lover not Loved. In his debate with Loved not Loving, his situation emerges as extreme. As he expresses it,

> Before I sawe her I felt no malady,
> And syns I saw her I never was fre
> From twayne the greatest paynes that in love be.
> . . . . . .
> Desyre is the first upon my first syght,
> And despayre the nexte upon my first sewt.
> . . . . . .
> For hopeless and helpeles, in flames of desire
> And droppes of despayre I smolder in fyre. (ll. 215-24)

Loved not Loving has no time for this argument. She claims, as would Melebea, that to be the subject of an unwanted love is far more painful. She argues vehemently against the case brought by Loving not Loved, and, as in Calisto's case, his position is the subject of some ridicule. It might seem, therefore, that most often dramatists see this condition as a subject for comic exploitation and a cause of laughter.

For Burton, however, love-melancholy was not merely a fashionable affectation to be scoffed at. He would want to insist instead that, on examination and despite the literary examples with which his work is littered, it goes beyond fashion and belongs rather to a universal melancholy that he sees as a disease of the mind. While lovers may look lean and pine away, this is, for Burton, "because of the distraction of the spirits" which causes disfunction of the liver, leaving the members weak "for want of sustenance" (III: 124). Lovers look lean and pine

"as the herbs of my garden do this month of May, for want of rain" (124). Burton's diagnosis is maybe somewhat unreliable, since, as I have indicated, his main examples are taken from the poets. However, in light of Burton's insistence that the condition should be taken seriously, it could also allow of an interpretation of the dramatic representation of this "disease" less as a mere literary trope and more as a species of naturalism. As the dramatists and poets suggest, however, the condition of love-melancholy is usually brought on by the obsessive contemplation of the figure of a beloved who, for a variety of reasons, remains inaccessible. Of course, not all examples are comic. Take, for instance, Burton's own characterisation of the tragic predicament of Dido, Queen of Carthage. It gives a clear example of how the fever of love takes hold and overrules reason in the face of the object of desire. While Virgil himself is Burton's source, I would draw attention to Christopher Marlowe's representation of Dido, derived from the same original but providing an animated portrait of the condition. Dido, struck by Cupid's dart, suddenly turns from Iarbas, who has courted her intently enough, and reveals her feelings for Aeneas:

> I'll make me bracelets of his golden hair,
> His glistening eyes shall be my looking glass;
> His lips an altar, where I'll offer up
> As many kisses as the sea has sands;
> Instead of music I will hear him speak;
> His looks shall be my only library. (III.i.85-90)

This mood clearly matches the obsessive behaviour to which Burton draws attention. What is perhaps most remarkable about Marlowe's play is the portrayal of three disappointed lovers: Anna, who loves Iarbas, who loves Dido, who loves Aeneas. For Iarbas, it seems, the passion is most extreme of all. When he is dismissed by Dido she says, "I charge thee never look on me". He replies, "Then pull out both mine eyes, or let me die" (III.i.55). Dido's distress as Aeneas leaves Carthage and herself behind is of a piece with such an extreme of love melancholy, as is her final suicide.

Shakespeare, of course, also reveals an interest in the condition of love, though with him, as with Rastell's author and Heywood, it is very often represented as a comic extreme of folly. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, we are first introduced to Orsino, who is shown to be melancholy and in love with Olivia, who is denying him. His effete posturing does indeed seem ridiculous. Then Olivia,

in an impossible case, falls for Cesario, doubly misdirected, since the latter is Viola, a woman in disguise. Finally, Malvolio is tricked into aspiring to the love of Olivia. By virtue of these mis-directions, and with the aid of Feste, Shakespeare is able to reveal the absurdity of the supposed "Petrarchan" fallacy whereby the lover is obsessed with the image of their beloved, which is necessarily far from the reality.

Shakespeare presents a very similar image in quite another context in *Hamlet*. Whereas Malvolio's yellow stockings, cross-garterings and smilings are held up as ridiculous, Hamlet's display of love-melancholy as reported by Ophelia may well be meant to be taken seriously, when he appears to her

> with his doublet all unbraced,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
> Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other. (II.i.78-81)

Polonius becomes convinced first that Hamlet is mad on account of love and that the cause of his madness is Ophelia's rejection of him. For Claudius and Gertrude he describes how Hamlet

> Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
> Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
> Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
> Into the madness wherein now he raves,
> And all we wail for. (II.ii.147-51)

Since Polonius is clearly a figure of ridicule to Shakespeare as well as to Hamlet, even this portrayal might create out of the image of the lover gone mad a sense of comedy within the tragic frame. But Hamlet, of course, has much else to be properly melancholy about. Burton also included in his *Anatomy* cases where love turns sour, as, for instance, in the case of Othello, when it can breed jealousy. This further manifestation of the love-melancholic state of mind also leads directly to a tragic outcome.

But to return to Jaques' all-embracing melancholic disposition, it may be possible to characterise *As You Like It* as Shakespeare's most delightful presentation of the extremes of love. Orlando's love-sickness, for instance, is represented as no more nor less of a melancholy disposition than that of poor Silvius or that of young Phoebe. Nevertheless, Shakespeare represents Orlando's behaviour in love

to be a folly, possibly akin to madness. It certainly seems so to Touchstone, who pillories him for carving Rosalind's name on the trees and hanging songs and sonnets on them. Furthermore, Celia claims that she found Orlando in the forest lying under a tree "like a dropped acorn" and "stretched along like a wounded knight" (III.ii.228, 233-34). Shakespeare surely must have seen those Oliver and Hilliard miniatures representing singularly dandified young men lying around apparently doing nothing much in a pastoral setting. Then, in a scene of the most delightful interplay between them, Rosalind taunts Orlando for his lack of the commonplace symptoms of the lover when she says he should have

> A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not. … Then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. (III.ii.358-66)

So Orlando is mocked from all sides about his love-sickness, and the sincerity of his feelings is severely challenged. Once better educated by Rosalind, however, he can become an acceptable suitor. There is also a reward for Silvius' fidelity in love, while Phoebe has to make do without Ganymede. In this case the love-melancholy has proved curable through leg-pulling and mockery and a sort of comic arbitrariness in resolution.

Thus even before 1621, when Burton published *The Anatomy of Melancholy* with its long section on love-melancholy, this condition had been treated dramatically in a variety of different ways. But a play that was first performed by the King's Men in about 1628 offers an intriguing contrast to the preceding examples. John Ford undertook to frame a plot upon the changed premise that love-melancholy might be more than a solipsistic affectation. The play in question is *The Lover's Melancholy*, a title that does rather beg the question, but is the playwright's attempt to represent something of Burton's argument in fictional form.

Some people argue, not without justification, that the plot is somewhat over-engineered to meet Ford's needs. Nevertheless, the play has moments of genuine feeling and theatrical vitality. It is set in the kingdom of Cyprus, where an elder monarch, Agenor, has recently died and his son Palador is now on the throne. However, before developing Palador's situation, Ford fashions the opening scene to represent a young man, Menaphon, just returned from a self-imposed exile. He had gone away for a year in the hope that he could cure himself of his love for Princess Thamasta. He has been unsuccessful. His friend, Prince

Amethus, who is brother to Thamasta, has to tell Menaphon that, in the year of his absence, she has shown no change in her feelings of antipathy towards him. From their conversation we also discover that Amethus himself is, at present, also unlucky in love. His beloved, Cleophila, cannot return his love because she is too busy tending to her deranged father, Meleander, himself in despair over the loss of a second daughter, Eroclea. These loves are further complicated by differing social status. So we may see that Ford has set up a double love-melancholy that will demand a resolution. During this opening conversation, however, we hear also that Palador, the young prince who has inherited the kingdom, seems in no mood to take on that responsibility. We hear that

> He's the same melancholy man
> He was at his father's death; sometimes speaks sense,
> But seldom mirth; will smile, but seldom laugh;
> Will lend an ear to business, deal in none;
> Gaze upon revels, antic fopperies,
> But is not moved; will sparingly discourse,
> Hear music. (I.i.70-76)

As becomes evident in due course, all these symptoms are typical not just of melancholy *per se,* caused by the loss of his father, but of a love-melancholy the cause of which is, for the time being, concealed from both the audience and the other characters. Furthermore, Burton and many of his authorities would add to this personal difficulty the problem that a melancholy ruler makes a melancholy state, so it would seem that the amatory problems of Amethus and Menaphon may be of little consequence, compared to the condition of Palador and the possibly larger issues confronting the kingdom of Cyprus.

The plot develops with the arrival of a comic crew of courtiers surrounding a Doctor Corax, who takes on the big problem of discovering the cause of, and hopefully effecting a cure for, Palador's melancholy. Rhetias, a malcontent, challenges the doctor's capacity to cure anything, let alone the melancholic disposition. This opposition is important, since it draws attention to one of Ford's objectives, which is to embed in his drama a favourable account of Burton's exposition regarding melancholy and to give credence to the idea that melancholy is a disease that may be cured. In Act Three, when things are well under way, the doctor is finally challenged to render his diagnosis of Palador's condition and is questioned about his findings. He answers his critics:

Melancholy
Is not as you conceive, indisposition
Of body, but the mind's disease…
. . . . . .
A mere commotion of the mind, o'ercharged
With fear and sorrow; first begot i' th' brain,
The seat of reason, and from thence derived
As suddenly into the heart, the seat
Of our affection. (III.i.100-2, 106-9)

This is, in effect, a very concise summary of Burton's position that, of course, can hardly do justice to the voluminous nature of his book but is certainly sufficient for an audience to take in. The doctor's critics pursue their point with the query, "There are sundry kinds of this disturbance?"(110-11). Corax's reply is again brief but direct:

Infinite: it were
More easy to conjecture every hour
We have to live, than reckon up the kinds
Or causes of this anguish of the mind. (111-14)

Despite its brevity, Doctor Corax's account of Burton proves adequate to persuade his critics to allow him to proceed in the case. He then determines that a cure begins with a distraction, a prescription that holds good for Burton. So the Doctor persuades the Prince to view a Masque of Melancholy, and, fortunately, the Prince agrees.

The Masque itself sets out to present figures that show the qualities of melancholy in its many forms. So the conditions of Lycanthropy, of Hydrophobia, Delirium, Hypochondria, amongst others, are represented in the masque. Following these representations there is a pause in proceedings, arranged by the doctor, when the performance space is left empty. The Prince is disposed to enquire why, and the doctor explains:

One kind of melancholy
Is only left untouched; 'twas not in art
To personate the shadow of that fancy.
'Tis named Love-Melancholy. As, for instance,
Admit this stranger here. … (III.iii.92-96)

The doctor pauses while he selects a youth named Parthenophil from the audience and sets up a hypothetical situation that Parthenophil is enamoured of Princess Thamasta but finds it impossible to tell her of his love. The result is a disastrous example of love-melancholy, because

> Love is the tyrant of the heart; it darkens
> Reason, confounds discretion; deaf to counsel,
> It runs a headlong course to desperate madness. (103-5)

Doctor Corax then addresses the Prince directly: "O, were your highness but touched home, and thoroughly / With this—what shall I call it—devil …" (106-7). At this point, Prince Parador cries, "Hold!", the stage performance stops, he exits in confusion but demands that the youth Parthenophil attend his pleasure. The fact is that the Prince has half-recognised this youth: "For he is like to something I remember / A great while since, a long, long time ago" (IV.iii.29-30). It turns out, of course, that the youth Parthenophil is in fact the missing sister Eroclea in disguise. We, the audience, have come to know that a year or so ago she fled the kingdom to avoid the unwanted attentions of the old king Agenor. We have also come to know that she was betrothed to Palador by Agenor before the old man sought to take her for himself.

From this account it is not difficult to see how the play will turn out. But Ford provides a moving representation of the Prince's reconstitution as a healthy loving and loved individual. Act Four, Scene Three, opens with Eroclea nowhere to be found and the Prince restless and unnerved, thinking that the Doctor's masque was part of a plot to make him confess to the cause of his melancholy, an action which he has denied himself. For the first time, in private, the Prince reveals his true feelings when he says,

> My heart has been untuned these many months
> Wanting her presence, in whose equal love
> True harmony consisted. (IV.iii.52-54)

But Eroclea has been placed to overhear his words and now approaches and kneels before him. Under the influence of his doubts, the Prince at first believes she is part of that plot and speaks to her harshly:

> Stand up;
> 'Tis not the figure stamped upon thy cheeks,

The cozenage of thy beauty, grace, or tongue,
Can draw from me a secret that hath been
The only jewel of my speechless thoughts. (69-73)

The scene proceeds to the point where she has almost persuaded him to believe she is who she says she is. He continues to hesitate:

Join not too fast
Thy penance with the story of my suff'rings.
. . . . . .
But let me by degrees collect my senses. (118-19, 123)

When at last he has come round to see the truth of the situation, he concludes with "Come home, home to my heart, thou banished peace!" (136). A sententious conclusion it may be, but in the end the cure has been effected. The remaining plot issues are similarly resolved satisfactorily. Every Jack must have his Jill. But it is possible to see how Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* has influenced Ford in a positive way. The playwright has attempted to fashion a plot that can reveal some of the key symptoms of love-melancholy in a number of its forms. He has also been able to show how love-melancholy can take hold of a subject and thus appear more like the disease that Burton describes.

In conclusion, therefore, it may be understood that, in representing various forms of love-melancholy, playwrights from Anon. to Shakespeare through the sixteenth century seem to have been engaged in a critique of what, in much poetry of the period, may appear like an affected condition of folly at times akin to madness. In comedies, at least, the subject of the condition may be ridiculed as a means to a cure. The publication of Burton's *Anatomy* gave substance to the idea that such melancholy was not merely a folly, a fashionable whimsiness, but a genuine disease of the mind, even a genuine madness. Thus, under the influence of Burton's writing, Ford offered a more serious treatment of the condition and how it could or even should be dealt with through the medium of what might be called a sentimental comedy. It is not that he abjures altogether the pleasure of laughter—Dr Corax and a cast of hangers-on at court take care of that—but Ford takes the comedy beyond a "scornful tickling", beyond the discourses of folly, to a satisfying sense of reasoned closure.

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