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## THE EMINENT ROLE OF IMAGINATION IN BURTON'S TREATMENT OF MELANCHOLY

### Abstract

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* conveys an impressive body of medical and humanist knowledge through a multitude of voices and styles, leading some of its interpreters to reject its unity and originality. We sustain that, along with its curative strategies, Burton's understanding of the imagination, «the queen of mental powers», is probably the most innovative contribution of his work. Grounded on the Aristotelian model, Burton develops an operative conception of imagination that is central in the fulfilment of the prophylactic and therapeutic goals of the *Anatomy*. Burton describes the normal functioning of imagination, bridging between the physical and the immaterial soul with reproductive and creative features, but also its abnormal and/or pathological manifestations, particularly the way it has «the power to arouse the [melancholic] passions». The particular kind of delirium in which melancholy

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consists is described by Burton as the consequence of unbounded imagination, «first step and fountain of all grievances», initiating damaging forms of enjoyment. On the other hand, a kind of «guided imagining» is required for the inoculation and relief of melancholic syndromes. These goals are not simply stated, through dietetic prescriptions and truncated spiritual measures. Burton constructs a reading experience that relies on the imagination as a way to understand, prevent and cure sensory, emotional, and cognitive iterations of melancholy. Inspired by the story of Zisca's drum, Burton designed the *Anatomy* so that it has incantatory gifts for its reader, affirming that it must «drive away melancholy (thou I be gone)».

**Keywords:** Melancholy; Therapy; Imagination; Passion.

**Authors:** Burton.

### *O eminente papel da imaginação no tratamento da melancolia em Burton*

#### **Resumo**

A *Anatomia da Melancolia* de Robert Burton veicula um notável acervo de conhecimento médico e humanista através de uma multiplicidade de vozes e estilos, o que terá levado alguns de seus principais intérpretes a rejeitar a sua unidade e originalidade. Sustentamos que, a par de suas estratégias terapêuticas, a compreensão da imaginação, «rainha das potências mentais», é provavelmente a contribuição mais inovadora do trabalho de Burton. Apoiado no modelo aristotélico, Burton desenvolve uma conceção operativa de imaginação que é central para o cumprimento dos fins profiláticos e terapêuticos da *Anatomia*. Burton descreve o funcionamento normal da imaginação, mediando entre as partes corpórea e imaterial da alma, reconhecendo-lhe características reprodutivas e criativas, mas também suas manifestações anormais e/ou patológicas, em particular o seu «poder de suscitar paixões [melancólicas]». O tipo particular de delírio em que a melancolia consiste é descrito por Burton como consequência de uma imaginação irrestrita, «primeiro passo e fonte de todos os padecimentos», iniciando formas danosas de gozo. Por outro lado, um tipo de «imaginação orientada» é requerido para a inoculação e alívio de síndromes melancólicas. Tais objetivos não são somente enunciados através de prescrições dietéticas e orientações espirituais truncadas. Burton constrói uma experiência de leitura que se apoia na imaginação como via de compreensão, prevenção e cura de iterações sensoriais, emocionais e cognitivas de melancolia. Inspirado pela história do tambor de Zizka, Burton concebeu a *Anatomia* de modo a que a mesma tenha poderes encantatórios para seu leitor, afirmando que ela deve «afugentar a melancolia (ainda que eu tenha partido)».

**Palavras-chave:** Melancolia; Terapia; Imaginação; Paixão.

**Autores:** Burton.

Most of today's therapeutic practices depend on imagination as a resource, even when this is not explicit or reflected upon. Psychiatry, psychoanalysis, clinical psychology, and diverse forms of counselling, acknowledge imaginative patterns as causes of certain dysfunctions and rely on the way imagination configures one's narratives and self-understanding<sup>1</sup>. From a phenomenological viewpoint, these disciplines developed techniques to access and transform ordinary suffering and frustrations but also medical conditions ranging from several forms of dementia to psychoses and depression. Some of these approaches are supported on physiological models of causality, particularly of cerebral functioning. However, the efficacy of their treatment can only be conceived, implemented, and assessed within the strict boundaries of «psychic work» and interpersonal communication.

The history of melancholy, both as an existential and medical condition, can be written in parallel with the evolving conceptions of the faculty or power of imagination. In the present paper, we aim to present Burton's understanding of imagination and its consequences for the implementation of a strategy for the prevention, relief, and cure of melancholy<sup>2</sup>. Not only does Burton gather an immense knowledge concerning the functioning and therapeutic application of the imaginative faculty, but he also attempts to explore its potential by preparing a reading experience with curative effects which, moreover, acknowledges and explores the valences (and dangers) of the written medium. The *Anatomy of Melancholy* is not limited to a retrospective reading of previous attempts to explain (and treat) melancholy attending to the role of imagination, both on its outset, symptoms, and recovery. An attentive reading of the book shows that Burton's own voice is not simply engulfed by his profuse citations, but proposes an encompassing and systematic model for the treatment of melancholy. At the same time, while constituting the summit of ancient and medieval knowledge of melancholy, the conception of imagination in the *Anatomy* is part of the transition from the quaternary ordering of the scheme Mundus-Annus-Homo, where man remained a

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<sup>1</sup> The collective volume edited by Jerome Singer and Kenneth Pope, *The power of human imagination. New Methods in Psychotherapy* (Plenum Press, New York, 1978), continues to provide a valuable overview of the uses of imagery and integrated imagery in a wide range of mental illnesses and dysfunctions. A brief update of the various forms of intervention through imagination can be found in T. Kirn – L. Echelmeyer – M. Engberding, *Imagination in der Verhaltenstherapie*, 2nd ed., Springer, Berlin Heidelberg, 2015, pp. 3-24.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space a detailed account of Burton's conception of imagination as both cause and cure for the multiple forms of religious and love melancholy cannot be provided in the present work.

passive expression of natural and cosmic potencies, into a consideration of the complexities of psychic and social temporality. This transition prefigures some of the central elements of the constitution of the therapeutic medium of modern society, namely the effort to legitimize the scientific and ethical grounds of its interventions.

### 1. The *Anatomy* as an imaginative construction

Prior to the exposition of Robert Burton's views on imagination, it is important to address the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the ever-evolving project of a lifetime<sup>3</sup>, itself as an imaginative construction. This aspect is not marginal to Burton's conception of imagination at least on two levels. On the one hand, the *Anatomy* can be interpreted as the refined product of a specific kind of melancholy issuing from Burton's own academic discontent<sup>4</sup>. Profuse imagination, as expressed in his satire, stems from a real impotence felt by the author, allowing a kind of compensation through the recreation of negative feelings. On the other hand, as I will explore in section six, in order for the *Anatomy* itself to function as a healing artefact, Burton designs a reading experience that relies on the possibility to capture and guide the imaginative activity of its putative reader. But how does the universal scope of the book, addressing an infinite range of types and variations of melancholy, allow for an individual journey of healing?<sup>5</sup> Burton focuses not only on the natural history of the disease, in its multiple manifestations, but also on the particular case of the patient since: «there is no Catholic medicine to be had: that which helps one, is pernicious to another»<sup>6</sup>. At the heart of the *Anatomy* lies this attempt to address and guide the individual towards cure relying on a unique text. The enjoyment in reading the *Anatomy*, frequently accounted by its readers is the

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Faulkner and Nicholas Kiessling calculate that from its first edition in 1621 until the sixth posthumous edition of 1651, the work grew approximately seventy percent. Cf. Id. «Introduction» in *The Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is, with All the Kinds...* (1651). Ed. T. C. Faulkner, N. K. Kiessling, and R. L. Blair, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. xxxviii.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 116–149.

<sup>5</sup> One of the first formulations of this tension, common to rhetorical and medical intervention, between the universal goal of restoring the order of the soul or the body, is found in the *Phaedrus* 271b-d. Cf. P. L. Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1970, pp. 92, 164-165.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson, 3 vols. J.M. Dent, London, 1932, II.5.1.5, p. 248. In the present work, all the transcribed citations follow the original spelling of Robert Burton.

first sign of this process. The «gentle reader» is convoked to assume an active posture, actualizing a selective use of his faculties that is intended to retroact in his own condition<sup>7</sup>.

The *cento* style adopted by Burton depends on a transformative imagination, able to articulate new arguments from a patchwork of ancient quotations, forming a «Rhapsody of rags»<sup>8</sup>. In this enterprise, proper of a «scribbling age»<sup>9</sup>, one always runs the risk of indigestion resulting from the consumption of multiple fragments<sup>10</sup>. Excessive consumption was understood by Burton as causing melancholy due to the exhalation of vapours obfuscating the brain and its faculties. In this analogy with the excessive ingestion of food, the excess of meaning can only be surpassed by metaphorization, a process that Montaigne, inspired by the classics, compared to the bees' honey-making and the webbing of spiders<sup>11</sup>. The fact that the composition is intended for the reader, demands the reorganization of those bits and pieces and their insertion in an unfolding argument<sup>12</sup>. The long enchainment of citations must allow a transposition from the diversity of their particular or literal meaning into a new precise sense. In Burton, this metaphoric exercise is not exempted from abuses to the original texts, but it always intends to deliver a new sublimated meaning.

Contrary to classical interpretations that view its compulsive citations, the alternation between styles, rhythms, and its contradictory attitudes towards the reader, considering it a «self-consuming artefact»<sup>13</sup> or a «monster

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<sup>7</sup> M. Heusser's thesis that Burton's professed guidance of the reader always leads to contradictions, ever new frustrations, and finally a resignation over a universal condition, results from the assumption of a linear form of therapeutic intervention which would be supportive and "user-friendly", cf. Id. «Interpretation analyzed and synthesized: Robert Burton's methods of controlling the reader in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*», *English Studies*, 70 (1), (1989), 37-52, p. 50. However, the reading process proposed by Burton follows a more subtle form of persuasion and suggestion than the classic forms of therapies of the soul or *medicina mentis*.

<sup>8</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> G. H. Tucker, «Déchets, déchéance et recyclage—corps, corps du monde et corps-text—chez Joachim Du Bellay et Michel de Montaigne», in D. L. Rubin (ed.), *Strategic Rewriting*, EMF Studies in Early Modern France 8, Charlottesville, 2002, 1–24, pp. 13-17.

<sup>11</sup> As remarked by Starobinski, similarly to the French author, Burton promptly swift from reading to writing, but not with the same autonomy, cf. Id., *L'Encre de la mélancolie*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2012, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> According to Holbrook Jackson «[h]e is an author in literary mosaic, using the shreds and patches he has torn from the work of others to make a picture emphatically his own. Books are his raw material. Other artists fashion images out of clay, contrive fabrics and forms of stone, symphonies of words, sounds, or pigments. Burton makes a cosmos out of quotations», Id. «Introduction» in Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, op. cit., I, p. xi.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972, pp.

of knowledge»<sup>14</sup>, one must see those artifices of the *Anatomy* as a «nervous response to [Burton's] sense of the overwhelming, ever-burgeoning and ungovernable scope of melancholy»<sup>15</sup>. More recent scholarship, particularly the works of John Miller<sup>16</sup>, Angus Gowland<sup>17</sup> and Mary Ann Lund<sup>18</sup>, showed how those considerations, paradoxically found on some of its more acute readers like Stanley Fish, Jackie Pigeaud, and Jean Starobinski, resulted from an exclusive focus on the Preface «Democritus Junior to the reader» which obliterated the unity of Burton's project. Despite the intensity of its satirical «venting the spleen»<sup>19</sup> and the pure entertainment it provides, at its core the *Anatomy* preserves a serious intent which consists in the prevention and relief of melancholic symptoms: bodily, psychological and behavioural<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. Defining melancholy

Sometimes the infinite categorization of melancholy seems to aim for containment of the real disease by erecting a rational dominium over its

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303-352. Jean Starobinski advocates a similar idea, cf. *L'Encre de la mélancolie*, op. cit., pp. 193 ff.

<sup>14</sup> G. Williams, «Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*», *English Literary History*, 68 (2001), 593-613, p. 605. See also: J. Pigeaud, «Reflections on Love-Melancholy in Robert Burton», D. A. Beecher - M. Ciavolella (eds.), *Eros & Anteros. The Medical Tradition of Love in the Renaissance*, University of Toronto Italian Studies Dovehouse Editions, Toronto, 1992, pp. 211-231.

<sup>15</sup> C. Tilmouth, «Burton's 'Turning Picture': Argument and Anxiety in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*», *RES*, 56 (2005) 524-549, p. 526.

<sup>16</sup> J. Miller, «Plotting a cure: The reader in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*», *Prose Studies*, 20: 2 (1997), 42-71.

<sup>17</sup> A. Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> M. A. Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in early Modern England. Reading The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> «In both traditional and early-modern medical theory, then, the spleen was something of a puzzle: the seat of both mirth and melancholy, a repository of vapours, dregs, or acids that were dangerous, whether suppressed or released. Not surprisingly, the non-medical writers, when they make venting the spleen into a metaphor, reflect this ambivalence. The ambiguity is enhanced by the double sense of the word 'vent'. To vent means to utter, to give out or give forth, in the sense of to publish or spread abroad». D. Griffin «Venting Spleen», *Essays in Criticism* 40 (1990), 124-135, p. 125. Griffin notes that Burton seems to take his satire as a «kind of 'safety valve' - a relatively harmless venting of spleen or steam» (pp. 131-132).

<sup>20</sup> On Burton's transition (and conciliation) between the satirical pressure of the scholar's melancholy and the therapeutic project of the *Anatomy* see: Miller, «Plotting a cure», art. cit. pp. 43-47; Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, op. cit. pp. 13-28. On satire as the best way to channel the discontent of the commonwealth, see: Griffin, «Venting Spleen», art. cit., pp. 131-132.

instantiations. Burton is aware that different discursive conditions lead to diverse definitions of the disease. He proposes a complementarity, which never fully erases a latent confrontation, between the medical discourse and moral psychology. The first resorts to physical prescriptions and intervention, -diet, pharmacology, and surgery- the second proceeds through moral exhortation and spiritual guidance, particularly in the form of sermons and consolatory discourses<sup>21</sup>.

One helps the vices and passions of the Soule, Anger, Lust, Desperation, Pride, Presumption, &c. by applying that spiritual physic; as the other use proper remedies in bodily diseases. A divine in this compound mixed malady can do little alone, a physician in some kinds of melancholy much less, both make an absolute cure (...).<sup>22</sup>

We must note how this definition already attempts a containment of those infinite instantiations of the diseases, pointing to the practical aim of the work.

For pedagogic and pragmatic reasons Burton resorts to division or *diairesis*, defining melancholy through the categories of Genus, species, Proprium, *differentia* and *accidens*<sup>23</sup>. According to this method: «[t]he *summum genus* is dotage, or 'anguish of the mind' (...). We properly call that Dotage (...), when some principal faculty of the mind, as Imagination, or Reason is corrupted, as all Melancholy persons have»<sup>24</sup>. Burton seems to point towards a distinction between diseases of imagination and diseases of reason, stating that he «will single such as properly belong to the phantasy, or imagination, or reason it self, which Laurentius [du Laurens] calls the diseases of the mind»<sup>25</sup>. Melancholy is a species of delirium, accompanied by the nefarious effects of *melaina chole*<sup>26</sup>. The *proprium* of melancholy is the way it affects the inner

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<sup>21</sup> «Burton presents his writing as practical, linking melancholy and divinity in terms of medical treatment and its equivalent, pastoral care. He envisages himself as a kind of 'whole Physician' by combining his ministerial vocation with his interest in medicine». M. A. Lund, «Robert Burton the Spiritual Physician: Religion and Medicine in 'The Anatomy of Melancholy'», *Review of English Studies* 57 (2006), 665-683, p. 667.

<sup>22</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, op. cit., pp. 60 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.3.1, p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.1.3, p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> «When not in excess, black bile had a role to play in the natural functioning of the body, aiding digestion and nourishing bodily parts such as the bones and spleen». Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, op. cit., p. 63.

sense, differing from other conditions characterized by the impairment of the external senses, as it happens in palsy and cramps. Following the tradition opened by the Hippocratic *Aphorisms*<sup>27</sup>, Burton refers to persistent «fear and sadness, without any apparent occasion»<sup>28</sup> as melancholy's companions<sup>29</sup>. However, as his presentation makes clear, fear and sorrow are dysfunctional reactions towards a certain perception or thought<sup>30</sup>. Its specific differences are, contrary to Frenzy, the absence of fever and its chronicity and, in opposition to Mania, the absence of permanent destruction of mental faculties<sup>31</sup>.

Here the notion of an uncaused disturbance is central. Certain affections impose themselves on the subject and, immune to the will, they cannot be simply discredited or reviewed from the «outside». Normal fear and sadness are «reasonable» responses to certain states of affairs that are «sensed» as affecting one's preservation or wellbeing. In normal conditions they can be shared and reviewed in face of new circumstances. The difference in melancholy is that the passions of fear and sadness are apparently uncaused or disproportioned, and, even in the cases they allow communicative sharing, cannot be easily removed:

Though they do talk with you, and seem to be otherwise employed, and to your thinking very intent and busy, still that toy runs in their mind, that fear, that suspicion, that abuse, that jealousy, that agony, that vexation, that cross, that castle in the air, that crotchet, that whimsy, that fiction, that pleasant waking dream, whatsoever it is.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* VI, 23, in *Works of Hippocrates*, vol. 4, Loeb Classical Library, William Heinemann / Harvard University Press, London / Cambridge, 1959, p. 183.

<sup>28</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.3.1, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> One can see the similarities with Richard Surphlet's translation of du Laurens work published two years after the original, melancholy said to be «[a] kinde of dotage without any fever, having for his ordinarie companions, feare and sadnes, without any apparent occasion». *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight: of Melancholike Diseases; of Rheumes, and of Old Age*, London, 1599, pp. 86–87.

<sup>30</sup> For this reason: «[i]n the second edition of 1624, completing the topical scheme, Burton revised his definition and made fear and sorrow technically non-essential accidents rather than 'true Characters'» Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, op. cit, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Later in the century, Melancholy will be in greater contrast with forms of madness characterized by internal delusion, as a form of psychic suffering that maintains the individual within the shared meaning of the community, cf. M. Macdonald, «Insanity and the Realities of History in Early Modern England', *Psychological Medicine*, 11 (1981), 11–25, p. 16; K. Hodgkin, *Madness in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, pp. 53–59.

<sup>32</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.1.2, p. 394.

In some mental pathologies imagination's role is limited to symptomatology, namely in mania and frenzy (today's forms of psychotic break)<sup>33</sup>, or is secondary, like in forms of dementia. However, in melancholy imagination plays a constitutive part both at the outset and in the progress of a condition or disease.

This constitutive nature is made evident when, besides the innate temperaments, Burton stresses the distinction between melancholy as a disposition towards a certain mood<sup>34</sup>, and melancholy as a habit<sup>35</sup>. Instead of deriving from the fallen condition of humankind, the universality of what Burton exposes as the «Character of Mortality»<sup>36</sup>:

melancholy of which, we are to treat, is a habit, *morbis soticus*, or *chronicus*, a chronic or continue disease, a settled humour, as Aurelianus and others call it, not errant, but fixed; and as it was long increasing, so now being (pleasant, or painful) grown to an habit, it will hardly be removed.<sup>37</sup>

Burton makes clear that Melancholy unfolds in the sensible part of the soul, «between the confines of sense and reason»<sup>38</sup>, temporally impairing the rational soul which retains its attributes of immateriality, indivisibility, and immortality<sup>39</sup>. In the Renaissance, this religious conception of the soul is under pressure not only from the emergent form of medical enquiry but also new models of astral influence and occultist beliefs. Notwithstanding his subscription of the Christian dogma, according to which the rational soul could not be affected by the material<sup>40</sup>, Burton accepts the role of magic and

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<sup>33</sup> «The emotional symptoms of mania were considered secondary: their cause was located entirely in the violent force of the confused animal spirits that were the evident cause of the primary symptoms of delirium and fury, whereas the fear and sadness of melancholy were introduced as primary symptoms themselves, resembling the emotions caused through the apparatus of perception and opinion rather than being related immediately to the diseased animal spirits». J. Schmidt, «Melancholy and the Therapeutic Language of Moral Philosophy in Seventeenth-Century Thought» *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65 (4), (2004), 583-601, pp. 596-597.

<sup>34</sup> Of which «no man living is free» Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.1.5, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Burton project is not directed simply to innate and unchangeable conditions but also the universal melancholy, as the common misery of the postlapsarian Man, which is unavoidable and can only benefit of small relief: «[m]y purpose and endeavour is, in the following discourse to anatomize this humour of melancholy, through all its parts and species, as it is an habit, or an ordinary disease, and that philosophically, medicinally, to show the causes, symptoms, and several cures of it, that it may be the better avoided» Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I., p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.1.5, p. 144.

<sup>37</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.1.5, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I,2,3,3, p. 258.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.1.5.

<sup>40</sup> Even if, legitimizing Melanchton's *De anima*, the medical science will be able to describe

the devils both as cause and cure of diseases. Since it mediates the subject's relation with the material world, both directly, through the common sense, and indirectly, through *phantasia*, imagination is central to the influence of the supernatural powers.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Burton's understanding of imagination

The «Digression of Anatomy» differentiates each of the five (external) senses and, following the tradition, attributes the imagination an estimative power or faculty<sup>42</sup>. Accordingly, Burton preserves the distinction between *sensus communis*<sup>43</sup> and *phantasia*. The first refers to a kind of transposition of sensory data into the mental register, inner sense, therefore: «it is not a faculty above the different senses but only their centre, where all the different perceptions converge. It may be permitted to speak of 'consciousness' here, but with the proviso that the inner sense *qua* sense contains not more than the imprints of the different sense-perceptions at any moment. Since even in the inner sense the imprints of the perceptible forms last only as long as the perception itself, what lingers on in it when I avert my eye is then already a *phantasia*, an after-image»<sup>44</sup>. Recognizing its autonomy towards the other powers of the soul, Aretheus was the first to introduce the specificity of this inner appearance (*phantasia*) in the melancholic, namely the tendency

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the cognitive processes and the moral Will grounded in its own explicative model, cf. Starobinski, cf. *L'Encre de la mélancolie*, op. cit. pp. 230-235.

<sup>41</sup> «our vain fear and crazed phantasy shall suggest and feign, as many silly weak women and children in the dark, sick folks, and frantic for want of repast and sleep, suppose they see that they see not : many times such terriculaments may proceed from natural causes, and all other senses may be deluded». The devil acts not only directly, through the *Balneum diaboli*, but mediating in the susceptible phantasy «by mediation of humours», he can also resort on other agents such as witches and magicians. Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., III.4.2.6, p. 429. Cf. J. Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007, pp. 49ff.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. A. Gowland, «Melancholy, Imagination and Dreaming in Renaissance Learning», in Y. Haskell (ed.), *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period*, Brepols, 2012 Turnhout, 53–102.

<sup>43</sup> *Sensus communis* was considered the «receptor of all sense impressions (Avicenna defined it as 'the center of all the senses both from which the senses are diverted in branches and to which they return, and it is itself truly that which experiences'). It unites and compares impressions from all five external senses, but it is also the source of consciousness» M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> D. Frede, «The Cognitive Role of Phantasia in Aristotle», in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, M. C. Nussbaum - A. O. Rorty (eds). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 284.

to fear and sorrow<sup>45</sup>. It is this second power, which deepens the perceived, its properties, affective valence, and possible uses, distinguishing between the prospect of good and damaging, relying on memory of previous experiences<sup>46</sup>. According to such estimation, it mobilizes vital spirits which, following stoic and galenic physiology, dilate or contract the heart depending on their positive or negative prospects. At this point, Burton is particularly tributary to du Laurens' *Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight*, which exposed the autonomy of the imagination towards the scholastic conception of the *sensus communis*, particularly when the French physician points to the profound imagination enabled by an exceptional quality of melancholic temperament<sup>47</sup>.

After exploring the five external senses, Burton defines «phantasy, or imagination» as «an inner sense which doth more fully examine the species perceived by common sense, of things present or absent, and keeps them longer, recalling them to mind again, or making new of his own»<sup>48</sup>.

Besides the presentation of normal imagination, Burton addresses its pathological configurations relying on classical and contemporary accounts.

Burton considers imagination «a suspect faculty» both due to its susceptibility -since it is at mercy of some affections<sup>49</sup>-, and power -the way its representations can deepen and extend their objects and aims, misinforming the heart. Paraphrasing Th. Wright's *The passions of the minde*<sup>50</sup>, he exposes the development of embodied forms of imagining:

to our imagination cometh by the outward sense or memory, some object to be known (residing in the foremost part of the brain), which he misconceiving or amplifying presently communicates to the heart, the seat of all affections. The pure spirits forthwith flock from the brain to the heart, by certain secret channels, and signify what good or bad object was presented; which immediately bends itself to prosecute, or avoid it (...) <sup>51</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. J. Pigeaud, «La rhétorique d'Arétée». In: *La médecine grecque antique. Actes du 14ème colloque de la Villa Kérylos à Beaulieu-sur-Mer les 10 & 11 octobre 2003*, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris, 2004, 177-197, pp. 187-192.

<sup>46</sup> Gradually *phantasia* loses the «sense of feeble sensation which it had in Aristotle» Pigeaud, «La rhétorique d'Arétée», art. cit. p. 193.

<sup>47</sup> A. du Laurens, *Discours de la conservation de la vue: Des maladies melancholiques; des catharres; et de la vieillesse*. Paris, 1597, p. 116.

<sup>48</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.2.7, p. 159.

<sup>49</sup> As demonstrated by J. Radden in her recent book, *Melancholic habits: Burton's anatomy & the mind sciences* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2017), Burton rejects an extreme cognitivist view of emotions, *i.e.* their complete transparency of the passions.

<sup>50</sup> T. Wright, *The Passions of the minde in generall*. T. O. Sloan (ed.), A reprint based on the 1604 edition. University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1971.

<sup>51</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.3.1, p. 252.

The activity of the imagination is not a pure representation of the sensitive or cognitive features of certain objects or events, it is modulated by the corporeal and psychic effects of the affections themselves. What Burton describes as the circuit of the animal spirits is decisive for the intensity and quality of the imagination. Here, the heart is the seat of that modulation but also interdependent with the production of certain passions<sup>52</sup>. In accordance with stoic doctrine, feelings of joy or sorrow attract different kinds of animal spirits and can lead to their degradation, through excessive heat or excessive cold<sup>53</sup>, favoured by a certain complexion, humour temperatures and previous mental events affecting core personality.

Chronic forms of melancholy arise when these interactions between the imaginative modulation of the sensory or mnesic images and the bodily circuits become autonomous not only towards reason but also towards the external senses. In the subsection entitled «Of the Force of Imagination», Burton expresses the central role of this inner faculty in Renaissance anthropologic scheme: «as it is eminent in all, so most especially it rageth in melancholy persons, in keeping the species of objects so long, mistaking, amplifying them by continual and strong meditation, until at length it produceth in some parties real effects, causeth this, and many other maladies»<sup>54</sup>.

The Aristotelian comparison between dream and melancholic states is presented when developing the «Inward senses»<sup>55</sup>. Referring to sleep, which like some forms of melancholy is caused by the effects of vapours filling the nerves, Burton affirms that the faculty of imagination «is free, and many times conceives strange, stupend, absurd shapes, as in sick men we commonly

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<sup>52</sup> On the prevalence of the language of affections and passions over emotions, that persists until 1660 see: A. O. Rorty, «From Passions to Emotions and Sentiments», *Philosophy*, 57 (1982), 159–172; S. James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Wright, *The Passions of the minde...*, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

<sup>54</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.3.2, p. 253. Here Burton touches on the conception of melancholy as a monomania exposed by the authors of *Moral Treatment*, referring an imaginative fixation, the nodal point of delirium, the «point mélancolique» in which other representations are grounded. Cf. M. Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1961, pp. 217-220. Even for painters there was a risk of becoming melancholic by retaining mental images long enough to cause abstraction and detachment from reality. Attempting to confirm painting as a liberal art, Romano Alberti states that «vediamo che li Pittori divengono malenconici perché, volendo loro imitare, bisogna che ritenghino li fantasmi fissi nell'Intelletto: a ciò dipoi li esprimeno in quel modo, che prima li havean visti in presentia; Et questo non solo una volta, ma continuamente, essendo questo il loro essercitio: per il che talment tengono la mente astratta et separate dalla materia, che consequentemente ne vien la Malencolia (...)» *Trattato della nobilità della pittura* Rome, 1585, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Aristotle sustains that the melancholic are deeply affected by sensory data and prone to a conscious state similar to dreaming. Cf. *Insomn.* 460b 28 – 462a 7; *Div. Somn.* 463b 12-22.

observe», a little further he says that in melancholy it is «most powerful and strange, and often hurt»<sup>56</sup>. Even when outward senses and common sense rest, inward faculties of imagination and reason remain free producing «imaginary dreams»<sup>57</sup>.

Melancholy haunts with «monsters» and «prodigious things», but these deliriums are materially caused by a distempered brain. Burton considered its various manifestations, some consistent with contemporary syndromes<sup>58</sup>, ranging from distortion of a normal conception of oneself (being made of glass or butter), to uncertainty regarding one's identity (being afraid of a suicide urge) or relation to others (afraid of being improper/inconvenient or ungrateful). These basic beliefs, which contemporary psychoanalysis explains as resulting from an empty or traumatized self, make impossible the spontaneous insertion in the world, affecting the core of one's self-understanding. The subject can try to cope with these forms of vulnerability, attempt to convince himself through reason of the ungrounded nature of his beliefs and/or simulating normal behaviour. However, such strategies can aggravate the sense of dissonance with the world, a sense of emotional disconnection, proper of the melancholic mood.

#### 4. Contemporary interpretations

The eminent role of imagination in the therapy of melancholy proposed by Burton depends on the re-evaluation of the classical model of faculties. Imagination is the mediator between body and mind, essential to understand the dynamic cause and propagation of melancholic disease. The theme of mediation between mind and body is a key topic of treatises on melancholy from the period. It can be found in the various mediation of the *spiritus* of Ficino, Hieronymus Nymann, but also in Th. Bright. As already noted by Ficino, imagination can be considered the highest of the sensory faculties and the lowest of the intellective faculties, effecting the interaction between body and mind, particularly through passions.

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<sup>56</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.2.7, p. 159. And following Avicenna, he says of melancholics that «they wake, as others dream».

<sup>57</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.2.7, p. 160. On the similar causes and functioning of melancholic imagination and the state of dreaming in renaissance medical and philosophical theories see: Gowland, «Melancholy, Imagination and Dreaming...», art. cit., pp. 65-102.

<sup>58</sup> See: M. Macdonald, *Mystical Bedlam: madness, anxiety and healing in seventeenth century England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 150-160.

Other authors highlighted the physiological unbalance (*diathesis*), focusing solely on the passive role of imagination, at mercy of the humour. Du Laurens and Th. Bright distinguished between psychic suffering and forms of self-debasement and melancholy. The treatment of the first is reserved to the divines since it is a matter of divine grace; the second is the domain of physical remedies applied by the physician<sup>59</sup>. The decisive aspect is that, while agreeing with his contemporaries «neoterics» that the distorted imagination of the melancholic results from the natural or corrupted qualities of the humours, Burton also points to the imagination as the «first step and fountain of all our grievances»<sup>60</sup>.

Even if authors such as Lemnius, du Laurens, Huarte and Platter seem to admit this cause, they are simply following the Ficinian *topos* of an occupational hazard in which overexertion contributes to a corruption of the humours<sup>61</sup>. The experience of a certain passion provokes physiological changes. Wrath, for instance, attracts warm and dry humours (bile; choler), while fear or sadness transform the quality of black bile due to the prevalence of the cold and dry.

Without any great difficulty may be declared how passions seduce the will because the wit being the guide, the eye the stirrer and director of the will, which of itself, being blind and without knowledge, followeth that the wit representeth, propoundeth, and approveth as good, and as the sensitive appetite followeth the direction of imagination, so the will affecteth, for the most part, that the understanding persuadeth to be best.<sup>62</sup>

In Timothy Bright's *Treatise*, melancholy was described as causing «manie

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<sup>59</sup> As expressed by Gowland «[I]n the case of melancholy, it seems, no neo-Galenic physician risked heresy accusations by claiming that the immortal rational soul, or the understanding, could itself be directly touched or primarily affected by melancholy» («The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy», *Past & Present*, 191 (1) (2006), 77-120, p. 97).

<sup>60</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I,2,3,1, p. 252.

<sup>61</sup> «For all men for the most part at the beginning of the Spring and downfall of the Leafe (at which season of the yeere this humour doth most rifely abound) are subjected to Melancholicke affections, namely, those that be Magistrates and Officers in the Commonwealth, or Students which at unseasonable times sit at their Books and Studies. For through overmuch agitation of the troubled with minde, naturall heat is extinguished, and the spirits as well Animal as Vitall, attenuated and vanish away: whereby it commeth to passe, that after their vitall juyce is exhaued, they fall into a cold and dry constitution». L. Lemnius, *The touchstone of complexions*, trans. Thomas Newton. London, 1576 [1561], II, p. 217. Cf. also F. Platter, *Praxeos Medicæ Tomi Tres*, Basel, 1625, vol I, p. 29. J. Huarte, *The Examination of Mens Wits*, trans. R. Carew, London, 1594 [1575], p. 73; A. du Laurens, *Discours de la conservation*, op. cit., pp. 139 ff.

<sup>62</sup> Wright, *The Passions of the minde...*, op. cit., p. 20.

fearefull fancies, by abusing the braine with ugly illusions» instead of offering it «true report[s]». In analogy with the uncaused laughs and gaiety elicited by sanguine temperament, Bright stresses how in the melancholic temper, fear and sadness «may also arise without occasion of outward terror either presently molesting, or fearing us by likelihood, or possibility of future danger»<sup>63</sup>. Affective and cognitive impairments characteristic of melancholy are the direct expression of the effects of the humour whose spirits are gross and heavy due to innate constitution or unnatural causes. In the first case, the symptoms arise as the result of an excess of black bile produced by the spleen or due to its qualities, namely its «thikenesse». In the second case, following the views exposed in Ficino's *De Vita*, there is a degradation of the spirits of the humours constituting the individual, resulting from mental overexertion which burns the finer spirits of the blood making them grosser<sup>64</sup>. Aligned with the galenic tradition, Bright highlights how this *diskrasia* of the humours has particular incidence in the organs considered the seat of the passions, the heart, and the seat of thinking, the brain. Instead of providing «due discretion of outward objectes»<sup>65</sup> the reports of the senses become useless due to the cloudy vapours which destroy the clarity of the animal spirits, «all the clerness of those sanguineous»<sup>66</sup>. In an explanation that goes back to Aristotle and was developed by Galen in *De locis affectis*<sup>67</sup>, Bright sustains that normal concoction of the foods is turned more difficult due to the grosser spirits and the reduction of the natural heat, which causes the release of vapours that ascend to the brain<sup>68</sup>. Among others, Bright resorts to the metaphor of the «splenetick fogge» occasioning an «indifferency alike to all sensible thinges»<sup>69</sup>. Another of the faculties that is indirectly affected is the memory, since both «common sense and fantasie (...) deliver but fables instead of true report, and those tragicall that dismay all the sensible frame

<sup>63</sup> T. Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, London, 1586, p. 100.

<sup>64</sup> A similar explanation was considered by Jacques Ferrand to be the origin of «love melancholy», cf. Id., *De la maladie d'amour ou mélancholie érotique. Discours curieux qui enseigne à cognoistre l'essence, les causes, les signes, & les remèdes de ce mal fantastique*, Denis Moreau, Paris, 1623, pp. 61-65.

<sup>65</sup> Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>66</sup> Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> Galen, *De locis affectis libri VI*, III, 10 in *Opera*, II, cols 889-90.

<sup>68</sup> «This commeth to passe, because the instrument of discretion is depraved by these melancholic spirites, and a darknes & cloudes the melancholic vapours rising from that pudle of the splene obscure the clearness, which our spirites are endued with, and is requisite to the due discretion of outward objectes». Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>69</sup> Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, op. cit., p. 103.

of our bodies»<sup>70</sup>. As a result of this continuous distorting of memory, with origin in external and internal senses, Bright highlights the recalcitrance of melancholic passions, indifferent to various forms of care and consolation even when, from an external observation, the patient has all the conditions to surmount them<sup>71</sup>. This theme will resonate in Burton's *Anatomy*, particularly when he explores the formation and reinforcement, both bodily and mental, of erotic phantasms.

In his imponent *Praxeos Medicae Tomi Tres*, first published in 1602, Felix Platter, the Swiss physician formed in Montpellier, states that melancholy «denominated from black Choler is a species of alienation of the mind in which the imagination and judgment are so perverted that without any cause the victims become very sad and fearful. For they cannot adduce any certain cause of grief or fear except a trivial one or a false opinion which they have conceived as a result of disturbed apprehension»<sup>72</sup>.

Burton refers to Galen sustaining that «the mind itself; by those dark, obscure, gross fumes, ascending from black humours, is in continual darkness, fear, and sorrow; divers terrible monstrous fictions in a thousand shapes and apparitions occur, with violent passions, by which the brain and phantasy are troubled and eclipsed»<sup>73</sup>.

Besides these «natural» and sensible aspects, Burton emphasizes the agency of the individual, the way his conduct affects his cognitive and affective patterns.

Arguing that temperament and life setbacks «incline without compelling», Burton proceeds from the medical to the ethical. His defence of the duty to care for oneself is based on the practical possibilities of the subject, devising his ability to control imagination and regulate the associated passions of the soul.

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<sup>70</sup> Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>71</sup> «We do see by experience certaine persons which enjoy all the comforts of this life whatsoever wealth can procure, and whatsoever friendship offereth of kindnes, and whatsoever security may assure them: yet to be overwhelmed with heavines, and dismaide with such feare, as they can neither receive consolation, nor hope of assurance, notwithstanding ther be neither matter of feare, or discontentment, nor yet cause of daunger, but contrarily of great comfort, and gratulation. This passion being not moved by any adversity present or imminent, is attributed to melancholie». Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>72</sup> F. Platter, *A Golden Practice of Physick*, London, 1664, p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.3.1, p. 419.

## 5. Causes

After considering the way melancholy is affected by the natural elements (bodily constitution and qualities), Burton assesses the importance the tradition grants to the six non-naturals (diet, evacuation, environment and climate, exercise, sleep and the passions of the soul). His use of ramist charts is misleading. Contrasting the brevity with which it is analysed by other authors, along the new editions of the *Anatomy*, Burton devotes increasing attention to the sixth non-natural, the passions. Not only are these affected by physiological symptoms (through vapours), they also play a role as causes. The way something is perceived by the imagination has physiological consequences, for the judgment affects the heart that «immediately bends itself to prosecute, or avoid»<sup>74</sup> the object in question. Instead of being a mere symptom as it happens when melancholy is caused by physiological unbalance, passion as a cause of melancholy implies an imaginative work in close connection with the heart. If vehement or continuous<sup>75</sup> the passions, not only the sad one's but also those that debilitate humoral equilibrium<sup>76</sup>, can «produce a habit of melancholy at the last, which having gotten the mastery in our souls, may well be called diseases»<sup>77</sup>. If it remains unchecked it becomes untreatable and uncontrollable by the will.

Throughout the *Anatomy*, isolation and idleness (both frequent in the socio-political context of Elizabethan England) are seen as the major factors triggering melancholy. They tend to propitiate the free play of the imagination around a certain desire or idea which may trigger the passions.

Even tenuous perturbations have a wayward nature. At first, passions so diverse as rage, idleness<sup>78</sup>, or solitude can provide enjoyment; in Burton's

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<sup>74</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.3.1, p. 252.

<sup>75</sup> «Those which are light, easy, and more seldom, to our thinking, do us little harm, and are therefore contemned of us: yet if they be reiterated, 'as the rain (saith Austin) doth a stone, so do these perturbations penetrate the mind'». Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.3.1, p. 252.

<sup>76</sup> This reference to the excessive consumption of humours or spirits is common, particularly considering the activities of love and devotion, but also the study, cf. Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.3.1, p. 422.

<sup>77</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.3.1, p. 252.

<sup>78</sup> «When you shall hear and see so many discontented persons in all places where you come, so many several grievances, unnecessary complaints, fear, suspicions, the best means to redress it is to set them awork, so to busy their minds: for the truth is, they are idle. Well they may build castles in the air for a time, and soothe up themselves with phantastical and pleasant humours, but in the end they will prove as bitter as gall, they shall be still I say discontent, suspicious, fearful, jealous, sad, fretting and vexing of themselves; so long as they be idle, it is impossible to please them (...).» Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.2.6, p. 244.

lexicon they enable the sweet activity of «melancholizing». However, the exit from the pressures of everyday life, of human interdependences, cannot go on forever. Reality strikes back. Soon, this self-indulgent exploration of morbid pleasures becomes an unbearable burden, menacing one's autonomy and the care of oneself. Regarding idle forms of contemplation, Burton says:

a most incomparable delight it is so to melancholize, and build castles in the air, to go smiling to themselves, acting an infinite variety of parts, which they suppose and strongly imagine they represent, or that they see acted or done: *Blandæ quidem ab initio*, saith Lemnius, to conceive and meditate of such pleasant things, sometimes, 'present, past, or to come,' as Rhasis speaks. So delightsome these toys are at first, they could spend whole days and nights without sleep, even whole years alone in such contemplations, and fantastical meditations, which are like unto dreams (...) they cannot, I say, go about their more necessary business, stave off or extricate themselves, but are ever musing, melancholizing, and carried along (...) until at last the scene is turned upon a sudden, by some bad object, and they being now habituated to such vain meditations and solitary places, can endure no company, can ruminate of nothing but harsh and distasteful subjects<sup>79</sup>.

The case of sadness [*Insanus dolor*] is representative of the dynamic conception of the cause of melancholy. Instead of presenting truncated categories of cause and symptoms, the passions elicited by melancholy retroact as causes of further sorrows.

In this catalogue of passions, which so much torment the soul of man, and cause this malady (for I will briefly speak of them all, and in their order) the first place in this irascible appetite, may justly be challenged by sorrow. An inseparable companion, 'The mother and daughter of melancholy, her epitome, symptom, and chief cause:' as Hippocrates hath it, they beget one another, and tread in a ring, for sorrow is both cause and symptom of this disease.<sup>80</sup>

The symptomatic manifestation of melancholy reinforces and becomes identical with the cause. Burton is aware that without the participation of the

<sup>79</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.2.6, p. 246.

<sup>80</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.3.4, p. 248.

subject, his ideation, there would be no melancholy in the full sense of the term, only physiological occurrences that disturb the subject<sup>81</sup>. Imagination stirs the passions and has physiological and emotional consequences that retroact in the psychic states.

## 6. Reading experience

Burton privileges the phenomenological experience of melancholy, highlighting its dependence on the social and political context, but also on the moral conduct of the individual. The novelty of his approach is testified in his resort to consolation as a resource for the relief of melancholy, which is exceptional among his immediate medical predecessors<sup>82</sup>. In the successive editions of the *Anatomy*, the sections devoted to the physiological bases of black bile production, including the considerations regarding its qualities and transformations, remain almost intact, while those devoted to the monitorization of psychic and social factors, influencing or aggravating melancholic condition, are considerably expanded. There are various signs which point to a consistent strategy of cure or relief that is centred on the reading activity.

Burton exposes his purpose referring to Jan Žižka, the military leader of the 15th century, whose wish was that after his death his skin would be used in a drum so that he could continue to mark the rhythm of his troops and terrify his enemies.

I doubt not but that these following lines, when they shall be recited, or hereafter read, will drive away melancholy, (though I be gone) as much as Zisca's drum could terrify his foes<sup>83</sup>

This reading experience is dependent upon Burton's own legitimation as the possessor of a singular knowledge. While he stresses his medical and

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<sup>81</sup> On this distinctive aspect which explains the persistence and preservation of melancholy both in everyday language and psychopathology, see: G. Swain, «Permanence et transformations de la mélancolie», in *Dialogue avec l'Insensé*, Gallimard, Paris, 1994, 167-187, p. 168.

<sup>82</sup> Particularly present in *Anatomy's* «Consolatory Digression». Cf. A. Gowland, «Consolations for melancholy on renaissance humanism». *Society and Politics* 6 (1) (2012), 10-38, pp. 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I., p. 38. This idea, taken from Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essais* published in 1603, appears in the fourth edition (1632) of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Cf. Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion*, op. cit. pp. 1-2.

pastoral credentials as grounds for his exposition of the theories on the causes and treatments of melancholy –«by my profession a Divine, and by mine inclination a Physician»<sup>84</sup>–, the ultimate credibility of his counsels derives from his personal experience of melancholy: «that which others hear or read of, I felt and practiced myself, they got their knowledge by Books, I mine melancholizing»<sup>85</sup>.

Among the rhetorical techniques Burton uses, we may point to the alternation between moral reproaches and companionship towards the reader, his «ordinary traveller»<sup>86</sup>. A more conciliatory tone, contrasting with the satirical reproaches and reprimands of the preface is present in the second partition of the *Anatomy*, devoted to the cure of melancholy.

In the preface, we find a constant affirmation of the author's superiority towards a world that have gone mad, but particularly towards the reader. This attitude is consistent with the full assumption of the *persona* of Democritus, marked by intense scorn of others' passions that sometimes becomes indistinguishable from hate. The adoption of a satiric mask allows Burton to vent his own spleen, to imaginarily come to terms with his frustrations. But, more importantly, it also assumes a therapeutic function, it reinforces a symmetry between the patient's/reader and the healer/author, in Lacan's terms the «subject supposed to know». The construction of this superiority has various resources: the infinity of authorities convoked, the display of terminology supposed to cover all the types of illness, the denunciation of the frailties of the wisest of men and the recrimination of the reader, both for his faults and for the condition of dependence (and passivity) he displays as a reader. This latter aspect appears as a constant defiance to be up to the challenges posed along the reading process. But this attitude doesn't hold for long and the author comes to assume his own failures and shortcomings. Democritus Junior exposes himself as a sufferer of the disease he attributes to

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<sup>84</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 37. Burton displays the opposite trajectory of most of the authors devoted to the study and cure of melancholy. Instead of proceeding from the knowledge and practice of medicine to explore the «spiritual physic» of consolation he is formed as a divine that adventures in the realm of the physiological.

<sup>85</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 22. This marks the constant self-referential character of Burton's discourse: «Burton's attitude towards rhetoric is not simply instrumental; rather, the nature of rhetoric is one of his book's many subjects. As the means by which a melancholic author discourses about melancholy, in many respects his rhetoric itself seems to be melancholic: intentionally 'affected' by the passions of his condition, 'corrupt', disordered, and perhaps even dysfunctional. A. Gowland, «Rhetorical Structure and Function in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*», *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 19 (2001), 1-48, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 32.

moral lassitude and demands the reader's commiseration. This alternation, as it happens with various interludes suspending technical expositions, can be considered, more than a form of counselling through the exertion of control over the reader<sup>87</sup>, an essential part of the project to maintain him engaged in a prophylactic and curative project.

Burton's insistence on the susceptibility to chronic self-consuming sadness is not merely informative. It is rhetorically constructed to arouse anxiety and a preventive attitude «the best and soundest of us all, is in great danger»<sup>88</sup>. In that sense, right from the beginning, he adverts the more vulnerable to distress «that he read not the Symptoms or prognostics in the following Tract»<sup>89</sup>.

Burton enters into dialogue with a 'you' discussing the possibilities of reformation of the mind. He refrains from providing a universal formula to prevent chronic melancholy, but the injunction «Be not solitary, be not idle»<sup>90</sup> sums the essential of his advice. The «rectification» of body and mind occupies the central sections of the second partition, where the recommendation is to restore vital heat through distractions, «change of ayre and variety of places» and recreational exercises<sup>91</sup>. And activities normally deemed as symptoms are reconsidered, namely the cognitive exercises of reading and studying since they counteract «idleness and melancholy»<sup>92</sup>. When the disease becomes chronic the best thing to do is: «impart our misery to some friend, not to smother it up in our own breast»<sup>93</sup>. Additionally, it is necessary to rediscover the joys of life, to be merry<sup>94</sup>.

Mirroring the attitude of Democritus Junior, which distances himself from the spectre of mental suffering, Burton highlights the illusory exemption from the troubles of melancholy. Here again, Burton points to the labour of imagination in creating an always precarious sense of security<sup>95</sup>. He cites

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Heusser, «Interpretation analyzed...», art. cit., pp. 37-44.

<sup>88</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.1.4, p. 408.

<sup>89</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I, p. 38.

<sup>90</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., III.4.2.6, p. 432.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.4.1.

<sup>92</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.4.1, p. 86.

<sup>93</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.2.6.1, p. 107.

<sup>94</sup> «Many and sundry are the means, which Philosophers and Physicians have prescribed to exhilarate a sorrowful heart, to divert those fixed and intent cares and meditations, which in this malady so much offend; but in my judgement none so present, none so powerful, none so apposite as a cup of strong drink, mirth, music, and merry company» Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.6.3, p. 115.

<sup>95</sup> «It is an ordinary thing for such as are sound to laugh at this dejected pusillanimity, and those other symptoms of melancholy, to make themselves merry with them, and to wonder at such, as toys and trifles, which may be resisted and withstood, if they will themselves: but let him that so wonders, consider with himself; that if a man should tell him on a sudden, some of his

Petrus Bayrus<sup>96</sup>: «and put case (saith he) in one that walks upon a plank, if it lie on the ground, he can safely do it: but if the same plank be laid over some deep water, instead of a bridge, he is vehemently moved, and 'tis nothing but his imagination, *forma cadendi impressa*, to which his other members and faculties obey»<sup>97</sup>.

## 7. 'Brief Therapies' and cures of the *laesa imagination*

The cure of *laesa imaginatio* by imagination itself was common in Renaissance medical treatises but it tended to be applied as a last resort, whenever the conventional physiological intervention of purgation and bloodletting proved inefficient<sup>98</sup>. Burton draws on a considerable repository of these stories present in the works of Lemnius, Platter and du Laurens. Moreover, he accounts for the possibility of transforming the imaginative reconfiguration of false beliefs/fixations without correcting them. He narrates some popular anecdotes:

If they say they have swallowed frogs or a snake, by all means grant it and tell them you can easily cure it—'tis an ordinary thing. Philodotus, the physician, cured a melancholy king, that thought his head was off, by putting a leaden cap thereon; the weight made him perceive it, and freed him of his fond imagination. A woman (...) swallowed a serpent, as she thought; [her physician] gave her a vomit and conveyed a serpent such as she conceived into the basin; upon the sight of it she was amended. The pleasantest dotage that I ever read was of a gentleman at Senes in Italy who was afraid to piss lest all the town should be drowned; the physician caused the bells to be rung backward and told him the town was on fire, whereupon he made water and was immediately cured.<sup>99</sup>

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especial friends were dead, could he choose but grieve? Or set him upon a steep rock, where he should be in danger to be precipitated, could he be secure? His heart would tremble for fear, and his head be giddy». Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.3.1 p. 420.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. P. Bayrus, *Novum ac perutile opusculum : de pestilentia et de curatione ejusdem per utrunque regimen*, Turin, 1507.

<sup>97</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.3.1 pp. 420-421.

<sup>98</sup> In his study on the moral dimensions inherent to Renaissance medical practice, Winfried Schleiner mentions various cases of the use of ruse as a way to cure melancholy, cf. Id., *Medical ethics in the Renaissance*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 1995, pp. 22-29.

<sup>99</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.6.2, p. 114-115.

Similar examples of these popular anecdotes in Renaissance medical literature, appear in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, mentioning madness and dream states where normal assumptions are suspended:

How could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthenware, or that they are pumpkins, or are made of glass.<sup>100</sup>

It is highly significant that at this point Descartes prefers a physiological explanation where bodily processes influence the imaginative activity<sup>101</sup>. At the same time, his approach is purified from the narrative of the fall and the polemics concerning the demonological causes of melancholy<sup>102</sup>.

Rational thought is incapable to invert the influence of these beliefs and the passions they arouse. Along with these precursors of brief therapies, Burton explored something closer to the placebo effect. Instead of frailties, the acknowledgement and orientation of expectations become resources of therapy.

Defining melancholy as a «compound mixt malady» Burton can only propose to cure it by affirming himself as a «whole physician»<sup>103</sup>, despite not being a practitioner himself.

Following the tradition, Burton grants white hellebore (with its purgative qualities) its fair share in the treatment of physiological unbalance

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<sup>100</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*. Ed. and trans. E. Haldane - G.T.R. Ross. 2 vols. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, vol 2, p. 12-13. AT VII:18.

<sup>101</sup> As noted by C. E. McMahon, this calls for a review of the generalized assumption that after Descartes' scission between *res cogitans* and *extensa*, «imagination's role in the disease process was irrevocably taken from it», not only attending to his epistolary writings on the passions, but already in a foundational text of dualism, Id. «The Role of Imagination in the Disease Process: Pre-Cartesian History», *Psychological Medicine*, 6 (1976), 179-184, p. 183. On the other hand, the implications of dualism in the understanding and treatment of mental diseases was very limited. Cf.: R. B. Carter, *Descartes' Medical Philosophy: The Organic Solution to the Mind-Body Problem*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1983; S. W. Jackson, «The imagination and psychological healing», *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 26(4) (1990), 345-358, p. 349.

<sup>102</sup> «To give some satisfaction to melancholy men that are troubled with these symptoms, a better means in my judgment cannot be taken, than to show them the causes whence they proceed; not from devils as they suppose, or that they are bewitched or forsaken of God, hear or see, &c., as many of them think, but from natural and inward causes, that so knowing them, they may better avoid the effects, or at least endure them with more patience». Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.3.3.1, p. 419.

<sup>103</sup> Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion*, op. cit., pp. 112-139.

by expurgating damaging or excessive humours. Besides this subscription of pharmaceutical intervention, he mentions following Constantinus Africanus<sup>104</sup>, the traditional dietetic measures, whose goal was to counter dryness and coldness characteristic of the melancholic complexion through sleep, exercise and bathing. But his attention extends to the psychic and social dimensions of the disease.

«The six non-natural things caused it, & they must cure it»<sup>105</sup>. The first five can be seen as the necessary condition for the regulation of the sixth, the passions. The passions deriving from *amor sui* (lust, anger, ambition and pride) are particularly engaging of the imagination. Proceeding from wrong beliefs they demand the ideation of desires that will have damaging consequences due to their excess (psychological, physical and social). The other group of passions relates to discontent and loss, which involves musing over an empty self, leading to self-loathing.

The interaction with the body is ever-present in passions. Partially subscribing to the stoic doctrine, Burton sustains that the understanding/intellect must regulate their course. This is particularly the case regarding «sensory appetites» where the immediate pleasure must be ratified by the intuition of an objective conception of the good. This is what Burton presents as the Will: «Aristotle calls this our rational appetite; for as, in the sensitive, we are moved to good or bad by our appetite, ruled and directed by sense; so in this we are carried by reason. Besides, the sensitive appetite hath a particular object, good or bad; this an universal, immaterial: that respects only things delectable and pleasant; this honest»<sup>106</sup>. The regulation of imagination (ratification or abhorring of certain desires) not only prevents certain fixations and distortions, creation of appearances, but also the growing of habits that cause and/or reinforce a certain physiological disposition. In this context, Burton points to the concepts of vice<sup>107</sup> and *akrasia* as a hallmark of melancholy, both associated with an irreversible degradation of character.

New patterns of activity require vigilance and self-control of one's affections. The present moment is the occasion for the subject's agency, the examination of appearances and representations:

<sup>104</sup> Id., *Opera*. 2 v. Basel, 1536-9, pp. 283-298.

<sup>105</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.1.1, p. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.2.11, p. 167.

<sup>107</sup> «The principal habits are two in number, virtue and vice, whose peculiar definition; descriptions, differences, and kinds, are handled at large in the ethics, and are, indeed, the subject of moral philosophy». Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.1.3.1, p. 169.

Thou thinkest thou hearest and seest devils, black men, &c., 'tis not so, 'tis thy corrupt fantasy; settle thine imagination, thou art well. Thou thinkest thou hast a great nose, thou art sick, every man observes thee, laughs thee to scorn; persuade thyself 'tis no such matter : this is fear only, and vain suspicion. Thou art discontent, thou art sad and heavy; but why. 'upon what ground' consider of it: thou art jealous, timorous, suspicious; for what cause? examine it thoroughly, thou shalt find none at all, or such as is to be contemned; such as thou wilt surely deride, and condemn in thyself, when it is past. Rule thyself then with reason, satisfy thyself, accustom thyself, wean thyself from such fond conceits, vain fears, strong imaginations, restless thoughts<sup>108</sup>.

Commitment and involvement of the patient are required. He must pursue «honest endeavours», «desire his own good»<sup>109</sup>. Self-monitoring or vigilance must be directed not only towards one's diet, but also to the ability to control one's judgments. Reason must regulate the way things are perceived and recalled in one's thoughts: «settle thine imagination, thou art well»<sup>110</sup>. But there is no way to a full inoculation. Not everything falls under the dominium of the will. Certain affections impose onto the melancholic subject and their invalidation from the exterior is innocuous. Burton insists that everyone is at mercy: «Humble thyselfe therefore»<sup>111</sup>.

## Conclusion

Contrasting with other classic mental conditions, in melancholy imagination plays a constitutive part both as a cause and in the progress of the illness. The estimative power of imagination, the way it values external and internal objects, retrieved in first-person experience, is determinant for the recurrence of beliefs and affective responses with consequences in the bodily mixture.

*Pace* Foucault's conviction that a form of moral treatment of mental illness can only emerge in the eighteenth-century<sup>112</sup>, Burton's understanding and treatment of melancholy rely on the exploration of the moral causes and

<sup>108</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.6.1, p. 106.

<sup>109</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.6.1, p. 104.

<sup>110</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., II.2.6.1, p. 106.

<sup>111</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy*, op. cit., I.2.5.5, p. 381.

<sup>112</sup> M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard, New York, 1965, p. 122.

self-understanding of the illness. Here we find evidence that the distinction between the physiological force and the psychic meaning which differentiates the melancholic passions from the effects that characterize the other classical mental disorders<sup>113</sup>, is recognized well before the eighteenth century. Following the tradition, the *Anatomy of Melancholy* holds the natural and unnatural forms of black bile to be the cause of the melancholic affections. But Burton is particularly attentive on how emotional and cognitive processes affect and cause the transformations of black bile themselves. According to this «psychosomatic» model, both the idleness and the emotional upheavals affecting the imagination can transform the humours and animal spirits. This new humour and the unbalance retroact on one's disposition occasioning the dominium of uncaused types of fear and sadness.

Even if Burton seems to simply compile and reproduce the immense variety of medical and spiritual approaches to psychic suffering, he is consistent in highlighting that the soul is not merely a slave of bodily mixtures. This was already stressed in Galen's psychagogical texts<sup>114</sup>, with pedagogical and ethical resonances, but is systematically explored by Burton. The English scholar emphasizes how imagination plays a key role in the constitution, fading and extension of passions. At the same time, he grants the reader/patient an active role in the transformation of his condition.

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<sup>113</sup> J. Pigeaud, « Le rôle des passions dans la pensée médicale de Pinel à Moreau de Tours » *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 2 (1980), 123-140, pp. 125. Concerning the gradual penetration of the language of physics into the medical concepts, see: J. Starobinski, «Le Mot réaction: de la physique à la psychiatrie», *Diogenes* 93, (1976), 3–30.

<sup>114</sup> Texts which aim for the «transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves». M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, trans. G. Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005, p. 407. On the particularities of Galen's Psychagogical approach to mental conditions, see: C. Carvalho, *On the significance of Galen's concept of Hegemonikon and its role in the therapy of passions*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2016, pp. 71ff.

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