FIGURING MELANCHOLY: FROM JEAN DE MEUN TO MOLIERE, VIA MONTAIGNE, DESCARTES, ROTROU AND CORNEILLE

DISSERTATION

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By

Dorothée Mertz-Weigel, M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:

Professor Sarah-Grace Heller, Adviser

Professor Christiane Laeufner

Professor Geoffrey Turnovsky

Approved by

Adviser
French and Italian Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

To examine how melancholy has been represented in French writing from the medieval period to the seventeenth century, this dissertation attempts to compare its depiction in literary works with contemporary original medical texts. The historical knowledge of the periods in question is used as a tool in order to seek to understand the literature, or literary discourse, in a fuller way, and to situate it more clearly in the evolving context of both medical and literary practices with respect to the concept of melancholy and its transformation.

Melancholy appeared as an illness of the upper-class, and the writers of the thirteenth to the seventeenth century chosen for this study were writing primarily for this particular audience. In chapter one, the study of descriptions of melancholy and related states in the Roman de la rose, as well as fabliaux and nouvelles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggests that humor and divertissement, or entertainment, are indispensable for the good health of human beings. Without them, people risk becoming melancholic. Chapter two explores how Montaigne, through his study of human nature and thanks to melancholy, discovers that mind and body need to be kept together at all times when portraying or studying man. If this is not respected, man can become a “fool,” which can lead to melancholy. Chapter three examines how for Descartes, melancholy is the illness which best represents man’s weakness, its seat being the very union of body
and soul. In chapter four, I argue that the medical and literary knowledge about melancholy discovered in the first chapters is synthesized in the comedies chosen.

The authors studied here use melancholy to understand, define, represent, in other words, to figure human nature, and examine human weaknesses at a deeper level than does any other disease. This illness can be countered by “entertaining” the mind, and consequently can be treated with laughter and entertainment, which prove to be the best remedy against it, according to many sources. Intrinsically, without being aware of it, the authors of melancholy produced a unique kind of literature, crossing over traditional literary genres.
Dedicated to my husband, Pavel, my parents, Eveline and Jean-Michel, my sister Eléonore, and my late grand parents.
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VITA

June 9, 1976 .................. Born- Colmar, France

1998 ......................... B.A. English Literature and Spanish, Otterbein College

2000 .......................... M.A. French Literature, The Ohio State University

1998-2005 ...................... G.T.A. Department of French and Italian, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"La mélancolie est de toutes ces maladies la plus difficile, celle dont l’origine est la plus discutable, celle dont la définition est, semble-t-il, la plus vague."¹

Problematic : Why another study of melancholy?

Doctors and medicine are a frequent subject of French literature. Often, these doctors are the center of a comedy based around them and their (lousy) skills. Surprisingly, not only is medicine exploited for comic purposes, but also a particular illness that has mesmerized writers, philosophers, artists, and doctors for centuries: melancholy. Melancholy, now called depression, associated with sadness, despondency and even suicide, is often a focus in various works through the ages, and is sometimes surrounded by a comical atmosphere, as if to diminish its importance or the effect it has on people. Is it not easier to laugh about something frightening, such as an illness, or minimize its importance and impact? Melancholy could be less impressive when presented in a comical or minimizing way. Is it possible to find relief, or even a cure, in a way, by making fun of a potentially damaging, even fatal condition?

Andrew Solomon, a sufferer of depression who relates his illness in his work The Noonday Demon and talks about his recovery, reflects that, “A sense of humor is the best indicator that you will recover; it is often the best indicator that people will love you. Sustain that and you have hope.”² Humor or entertainment often surround melancholy in

¹ Pigeaud, Aristote, p. 71.
² Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 430.
French literature from the Middle Ages to the Ancien Régime. Melancholy appears to be an important factor in the lives of authors such as Montaigne and Molière, and in the way they deal with literature. It seems to be a source of inspiration for them, in the characters and situations they choose to examine. Literature also seems to be an outlet of expression for their melancholy. All this considered, melancholy may be the tie among the *Roman de la Rose*, Montaigne’s *Essays*, Descartes’s *Les Passions de l’âme* as well as his correspondence with Elisabeth of Bohemia, and a few seventeenth century comedies by Rotrou, Corneille, and Molière. Melancholy may also be a tie in the authors’ lives, and in the way they perceive literature. It can be theorized that a sense of humor, or some kind of entertainment, fills the gap that had been made in the illness observed: it allowed the authors to make a definite connection between mind and body.

**A dialogue across centuries**

*“To figure”*

It can be argued that melancholy has figured in the educated culture, medicine and even literature of France since Roman times, when Greek treatises of the Fifth century B.C. were disseminated through the schools of Gaul. Until the Middle Ages, these author’s accounts were studied, interpreted, translated, especially by Arabic doctors. In the Renaissance, specialists on melancholy such as Ambroise Paré or André Du Laurens were aware of what was written before them, and they, in turn, were read by the authors who followed, such as Robert Burton or Hyppolite Jules Pinet De La Mesnardière. Melancholy has been the subject of a constant dialogue between such authors/ doctors, because it is an ailment, a disease, a condition that provokes questioning, and is the
source of many misconceptions. This is why “to figure” is the best verb to describe what will be done in this dissertation. “To figure” not only means to represent, but it also means to define and to understand.

**A diachronic study of melancholy in French literature**

However, melancholy is not a medical concern only. It has also been used and studied in art and in literary texts. This is why the major texts chosen to figure melancholy in this study are *Le Roman de la rose*, anonymous *fabliaux* and *nouvelles* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Montaigne’s *Essays*, Descartes’ *Le Discours de la Méthode*, *Les Passions de l’âme* as well as the *Letters* of his correspondence with Elisabeth of Bohemia, and a number of seventeenth century comedies: Rotrou’s *L’Hypocondriaque ou le Mort Amoureux*, Corneille’s *La Place Royalle*, and Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Malade Imaginaire*. These works present different kinds of conduct necessary for the proper development and good life, without which melancholy takes over.

In the seventeenth century, Molière and other playwrights, influenced by what had been discovered before them, present a synthesis of the accumulated knowledge on human nature and melancholy. This literature presents a study of the human condition, usually, and concentrates on what human nature consists of. There is usually an internal fight dealing with the separation of body and soul. This is also where melancholy could be an important factor in the personal lives of the authors, because it allowed them to study the effect of the mind on the body. Montaigne and Descartes, for example, had a first-hand experience of this effect. Melancholy made them more aware of the human
condition and how humans function. They realized that human life consists in physical existence and also enjoying life (spiritual), and these two fundamentals could not be divided or separated. With their condition, they had to make a special effort to achieve this second constituent of human nature.

Melancholy is a central theme, whether implicitly or explicitly, to all the literary works chosen for this study. The grouping of these particular texts has never been done before, to my knowledge. The fact that melancholy connects the chosen texts is also a new take on the literary legacy left from one period of time to another. Previous scholars have examined melancholy in a way that generally focused on one particular century’s representations of melancholy and missed the larger scope of the condition’s influence on both earlier and later works. Many other centuries than the thirteenth to the seventeenth century offer equal interest in melancholy, but space will not permit a study which would integrate all the works on melancholy. All of the works chosen in this study belong to different genres, period and representations of melancholy, but they do it differently. Each genre chosen (work in the vernacular, essays, philosophical writings, correspondence, and plays), will represent melancholy with its own tools. My interest is in discovering how each author uses these different tools to represent melancholy and why they chose to represent people with this problem.

A brief historiography of melancholy

In order to show the role melancholy plays in the making of French literature, I will present a diachronic and comparative study of literary and medical texts dealing with melancholy.
A historical and literary overview of melancholy

A diachronic historical study has been conducted by Georges Minois, a historian, in *Histoire du Mal de Vivre: de la mélancolie à la dépression* (2003). His eleven chapters present in chronological order the history of what writers, theologians, philosophers and artists have called *taedium vitae, acedia*, sadness, depression, melancholy, spleen, nausea, etc. The symptoms of all these different states are described by the people who have observed them or lived them as being rather the same over the centuries. He follows melancholy in Europe throughout literary texts, but does not point out the links, which bring this study to the accumulated knowledge of human nature through melancholy by seventeenth century playwrights as presented in this dissertation. This work effectively shows the evolution of the concept in different historical periods of time, illustrating the idea that the popular understanding of melancholy followed a certain fashion depending on the time period considered.

A world history of depression

Andrew Solomon, a journalist and sufferer of depression, examines the condition in personal, cultural and scientific terms in *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas to Depression* (2001). Solomon’s work is well documented, and offers a readable analysis and description of depression, not only in Europe but throughout the world. He also offers a discussion about the role of pharmacotherapy in treating depression.³ This work takes a historical, rather than a literary perspective. As a result of the author’s depression and his

interest in learning more about it, he traces the different definitions, symptoms, treatments and cures of melancholy through time, and throughout the world, to realize that although scientists know more about the brain now than in the fifth century B.C., they still have not found a cure for the illness. This work is useful in pointing out the different steps followed by melancholy as an illness, but being more medical and historical, it does not offer any indication of the importance of melancholy in French literature.

A literary juxtaposition

Compared to Minois’ work which was that of a historian, Jennifer Radden presents a diachronic study of literary texts on melancholy in *The Nature of Melancholy: from Aristotle to Kristeva* (2000.) While some reviewers have observed that, “her imputation that melancholia is overrepresented in women is factually incorrect,” others feel that this book is “useful in having the rich pickings of so many seminal writers captured in one volume.” It presents a “compelling and accessible history of the identifying and describing Western thinkers have applied to the titular emotional disposition.” Each brief chapter situates chronologically the ideas of theorists’ on melancholy within the larger frame of their philosophical, theological, or medical writings, and then offers excerpts to demonstrate Radden’s theory that, “from Aristotle until Freud, melancholy’s analysis underwent an accretion process as its place in culture

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and its role in behavior were examined.” 7 This work is more literary, however, Radden
does not link any of the texts, medically or literarily. The texts are juxtaposed
chronologically, but do not show any continuity in the treatment or the understanding of
melancholy in literary texts.

A clinical study

Stanley Jackson oriented his research toward the psychological history of
melancholy in *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*
(1986.) He provides discussions of leading medical writers’ ideas about the symptoms
and treatment of the illness. This work is different from the others on melancholy in that
it is, “a distillation of earlier authorities rather than a study of men and women who have
suffered from melancholy and depression.” 8 This book, according to MacDonald, has
one fault in that, “it fails to advance very much our understanding of the meaning of
melancholia in Western culture or to suggest fresh perspectives from which it may be
studied.” 9 Despite this flaw, Jackson’s discussion of medical ideas and treatments is very
reliable and sometimes entertaining. 10 Over all, Jackson’s work is scholarly and therefore
is valuable as an addition to professional literature, 11 also meaning that this work might
be hard to read for people who are not familiar with the jargon Jackson uses, although it

is a very consistent and coherent work. This work was more clinical, more complicated, but did not indicate why melancholy could be an essential constituent to French literature.

The authoritative work on melancholy and its evolution through time

Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl have extensively studied the iconography, philosophy and history of melancholy in their work entitled *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, History, and Art* (1964.) This very impressive and complete study on melancholy does not have a literary goal either, but it asks us to forget everything we know about melancholy and to reconstitute ancient, medieval, and pre-modern approaches on the topic. This

...somme érudite qui suit, de l’Antiquité jusqu’à Dürer, le thème fascinant de la mélancolie…. [est] un événement, tant elle fait date par la qualité et l’intelligence de son savoir, l’admirable précision des traductions proposées, l’iconographie entièrement renouvelée. Il n’est pas douteux qu’elle doive figurer en bonne place dans la bibliothèque de tout homme cultivé et, partant, de tout philosophe.

The three authors’ work is more of a philosophical review of the paths taken by melancholy. It gives the reader an extensive understanding of the chronology of melancholy medically and in its representation, but it does not show how the accumulation of knowledge about the illness causes literature to arrive at a synthesis of what melancholy really is and how it needs to be portrayed.

These works prepare the way for a study of melancholy where literature and medicine are examined side by side from antiquity to the sixteenth century in order to see how one could have been influenced by the other, or why authors chose to portray

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melancholics in their works or on stage. The present approach will take an interdisciplinary methodology: it shows the medical and literary link among works. This study brings together the medical field and the literary field, and examines melancholy as an important factor in the authors’ inspiration, as well as the use of humor or diversion as the most important weapon in the authors’ struggle with their disease.

A history of melancholy

Definition of melancholy used in current days

In modern day psychology and psychiatry, melancholy is still a term used by psychologists and psychiatrists, because depression involves melancholy, but is not limited to it. Melancholy’s main symptoms are “tristesse affective, indifférence affective, et retard psychomoteur.” Many kinds of depressions exist that belong to a group called “manic-depressive psychoses.” This is the type most related to melancholy:

The manic-depressive psychoses are a group of ‘major affective disorders’ characterized by severe disturbances of mood-elation or depression, far beyond the range of normal mood swings- that dominate the mental life of the patient. They are classified as manic type, depressed type or circular type.

The diagnosis of manic-depressive psychosis is based on the following:

(1) a distinct and marked phasic disturbance or affect, in which thinking it consonant with mood; (2) no intellectual or personality deterioration; (3) well defined attacks; (4) a history of manic-depressive illness in family members; and (5) precipitating psychologic factors inconspicuous or insufficient for the degree of illness.

For depression the classical symptoms are as follows:

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15 *Dictionnaire de Psychologie*, p. 425.
16 *Dictionnaire de Psychologie*, p. 425.
17 *Handbook of Psychiatry*, p.192.
18 *Handbook of Psychiatry*, p. 194.
depressed mood, (2) slowed thinking, and (3) psychomotor retardation. The predominant emotions are despondency, gloom, agitation, perplexity, hopelessness, and helplessness. The patient feels extremely inadequate, has no confidence, and may feel that he is a worthless person.  

Melancholy and depression are often used interchangeably by current psychoanalysts, such as Julia Kristeva, although, for them, melancholy is the condition which reacts to antidepressants and is irreversible on its own, and depression is less frequent and intense in its manifestation.  

When Jean de Meun, Montaigne, Descartes, Rotrou, Corneille and Molière use the term melancholy, they describe a condition which can be likened to what is now called depression.

From Hippocrates to Freud: humoralism to psychology

Hippocrates

Melancholy has been studied and discussed since Ancient Greece, and has been alternatively associated with genius and folly over different time periods. Ancient Greek doctors believed that a sick mind reflected a sick body and that illness of the mind was somehow related to illness of the body:

It ought to be generally known that the source of our pleasure, merriment, laughter and amusement, as of our grief, pain, anxiety and tears, is none other than the brain. It is specially the organ which enables us to think, see and hear, and to distinguish the ugly and the beautiful, the bad and the good, pleasant and unpleasant. Sometimes we judge according to convention; at other times according to the perceptions of expediency. It is the brain too which is the seat of madness and delirium, of the fears and frights which assail us, often by night, but sometimes even by day; it is there where lies the cause of insomnia and sleep-walking, of thoughts that will not come, forgotten duties and eccentricities. All such things result from an unhealthy condition of the brain.

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19 Handbook of Psychiatry, p. 196.
20 Kristeva, Black Sun, p. 9.
21 Hippocrates, Sacred Disease, p. 143.
Since it was the brain which was sick, a physical element of the body, it is clear that for Hippocrates, an illness of the body was causing the illness of the mind, such as madness, melancholy, or delirium.

Greek medical philosophy was based on the theory of the four humors. The four humors are yellow bile\textsuperscript{22}, phlegm\textsuperscript{23}, blood, and black bile\textsuperscript{24}. An equal balance between those four humors characterized health:

The human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These are the things that make up its constitution and cause its pain and health. Health is primarily that state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportion to each other, both in strength and quantity, and are well mixed. Pain occurs when one of the substances presents either a deficiency or an excess, or is separated in the body and not mixed with the others.\textsuperscript{25}

The excess or lack of one of them would cause a disease. Melancholy was believed to be caused by an excess of black bile. In Greek, black bile is \textit{melaina chole}, which is where the term melancholy originated. Hippocrates said that people suffering from melancholy could have been born with it, or could have contracted it through a trauma in their lives: “Patients with fear or depression of long standing are subject to melancholia.”\textsuperscript{26} The symptoms of this illness included sadness, anxiety, moral dejection, tendency to suicide, aversion to food, despondency, sleeplessness, irritability and restlessness.\textsuperscript{27} In order to rebalance the humors, Hippocrates recommended a change of diet and the oral

\textsuperscript{22} Yellow bile is also known as choler. It represented bitterness of spirit. It is also the yellow-brown or greenish fluid secreted by the liver which helps digestion.

\textsuperscript{23} Phlegm is the humor which was believed to cause sluggishness or dullness and characterizes apathy and calmness as well as composure (…) It is also the thick, stringy mucus secreted by the mucous glands of the respiratory tract.

\textsuperscript{24} “l'une des quatre humeurs cardinales, qu'ils supposaient être sécrétée par la rate et, en cas d'excès, agir sur le caractère en provoquant des accès de mélancolie, d'hypocondrie.” \textit{Trésor de la langue française}. 

\textsuperscript{25} Hippocrates, \textit{Nature of Man}, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{26} Hippocrates, \textit{Aphorisms}, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{27} Hippocrates, \textit{Epidemics}, p. 71.
administration of mandrake (plant believed to have a magic value, sedative and aphrodisiac properties) and hellebores (plant with purgative and emetic properties,) cathartic and emetic herbs that were thought to eliminate the excess of black and yellow bile. He also believed in the curative power of talking and being active. In other words, Hippocratic cures of melancholy are very similar to the ones used now to treat depression, since he believed that melancholy was a disease of the brain that should be treated with oral remedies and remaining active in life.

Plato and Socrates

Plato (427-347 BC) and Socrates (469-399 BC) belonged to a different school than Hippocrates. For Plato, melancholy signified primarily a moral insanity, the consequence of a clouding and weakening will and reason. He saw melancholy as a symptom of the soul of a tyrant, the worst soul of all. Plato and Socrates resisted Hippocrates’ medical ideas, and held a more philosophical view of the body. They believed that serious disorders were to be treated by philosophers. Plato’s method of curing melancholy can be compared to that of Freud’s and psychodynamic therapy, as suggested by Andrew Solomon.

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28 Hippocrates, Nature of Man, p. 205-209.
29 “Disruptions long called melancholia are now signified by the strangely causal word depression, which was first used in English to describe low spirits in 1660, and which came into common usage in the mid-nineteenth century.” Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 285.
30 Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, p. 17.
31 “[Plato’s] tripartite model of the adult psyche—the rational, the libidinal, and the spiritual—is uncannily like Freud’s.” Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 287.
Aristotle

Aristotle (384-322 BC) rejected both hippocratic and platonic theories, in that he thought that the soul was very important, and also believed that doctors were very wise and not just craftsmen. He proposed a theory of a united self in which body and soul would affect one another. He stipulated that a disease of the body affects the soul, and that diseases of the soul come from the body, unless they are diseases born in the soul itself. He said that the heart had a regulatory mechanism that controlled the equilibrium of the humors, on which heat and cold had a potential disruptive influence. The major difference between Aristotle and Plato is that Aristotle’s view of melancholy was not all negative. In effect he believed that a mixture of a certain amount of cold black bile and a sanguine temperament was necessary to have genius. But if a person had only an excess of cold black bile, this person would be very depressed. The idea of melancholic genius circulated in antiquity, was revived in the Renaissance, and has been revived regularly ever since.

In Aristotle’s view, all geniuses are melancholic: “Pour quelle raison tous ceux qui ont été des hommes d’exception, en ce qui regarde la philosophie, la science de l’Etat, la poésie ou les arts, sont-ils manifestement mélancoliques.” Aristotle came to this conclusion by noticing that the black bile (one of the four humors present in the body) can be characterized as hot (sanguine) or cold (melancholic), although it is cold by nature. If the cold black bile is in excess in the body, it creates “apoplexies, des torpeurs, des athymies, ou des terreurs”, but if it becomes hot, it is at the origin of "des

32 Aristotle, Problemata XXX, I, p. 83.
33 To each body fluid corresponded a season (Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring,) and a characteristic: hot, cold, moist, dry. The Black bile was associated with Fall, as well as with cold and dry.
états d’euthymie accompagnés de chants, des accès de folie, et des éruptions d’ulcères et autres maux de cette espèce.”

Aristotle noticed that people who naturally had a mixture of sanguine and melancholic humors within themselves presented characteristics of all kinds spontaneously. Those for whom the mixture of the two tends to be hot are:

menacés de folie (manikoi) et doués par nature, enclins à l’amour, facilement portés aux impulsions et aux désirs […] beaucoup, pour la raison que la chaleur se trouve plus proche de la pensée, sont saisis de maladies de la folie ou de l’enthousiasme […] Mais ceux chez qui la chaleur excessive s’arrête dans sa poussée, à un état moyen, ils sont certes mélancoliques mais ils sont plus sensés, et s’ils sont moins bizarres, en revanche, dans bien des domaines, ils sont supérieurs aux autres, les uns en ce qui concerne la culture, d’autres les arts, d’autres encore la gestion de la cité.

The mixture of sanguine and melancholic bile had to be present at a certain level of warmth for Aristotle’s theory to be applicable. Aristotle also said that individuals who naturally have this mixture within themselves are more prone to the sicknesses of the black bile which affect one or another bodypart depending on the individuals. In general, according to Aristotle, melancholics are inconstant because the power of the black bile is inconstant. Aristotle finally concluded that "tous les mélancoliques sont donc des êtres d’exception, et cela non par maladie, mais par nature." This sentence was going to be remembered by philosophers and doctors over the next centuries.

**Transitional phase**

Nothing very drastic happened to the understanding or definition of melancholy from the time of Aristotle until the first century B.C. The first person to bring Greek

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34 Aristotle, *Problemata XXX*, 1, p. 95.
38 Aristotle *Problemata XXX*, 1, p. 107.
medicine to Italian soil was Asclepiades of Bithynia (124 BC- c.40 BC), who came to Rome in 91 BC. His teachings were transmitted by Aulus Cornelius Celsus (ca. 25 BC-45 AD) through his work *De Medicina*, very much influenced by Hippocratic writers. It is from his writings that we learn of a systematic division of mental illness into three categories, the second and third ones describing melancholy.\(^{39}\) This work was very much influenced by Hippocratic writers but did not make a systematic use of the theory of the four humors.\(^{40}\) Celsus said that prolonged despondency with prolonged fear and sleeplessness caused the disease of the black bile. He recognized only melancholy and mania, and limited his distinction further, by making melancholy independent of the black bile and treating it as an early symptom of mania.\(^{41}\) In his view, melancholy was caused by a bad diet and in general a bad way of life, and it could be cured by a regular diet and well-balanced sexual activity. His emphasis was on dietary and psychological remedies.

Menodotus of Nicomedia in the first century AD combined all previous teachings and recommended a cure for depression that resembles the one often prescribed for depressive patients today: a combination of oral medication, as Hippocrates had described (Hellebores); self-examination, from Aristotle’s teachings; as well as traveling, gymnastics, massage, and mineral water.\(^{42}\)

The next two people whose views on melancholy influenced western thoughts were Soranus of Ephesus (98-138 AD), and Rufus of Ephesus (98-117 AD.) The first one’s important writings on mental diseases came to us through a Latin translation done by

\(^{39}\) Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p.45.  
\(^{40}\) Jackson, *Melancholia*, p. 33.  
\(^{41}\) Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 46.  
Caelius Aurelianus at the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century.\textsuperscript{43} He described melancholy and mania as chronic diseases without fever and more specifically melancholy as the basic form of madness from which all forms of mental disturbance develop. According to Jackie Pigeaud, he is the only coherent psychiatrist of Antiquity, because he believed that jointly with the treatment of the body, one must take care of one’s soul, and that the treatments for the latter are dialogue, reading, and theater.\textsuperscript{44}

**Rufus of Ephesus**

Rufus (ca. first century AD) was a Greek physician of the Roman Empire whose views have influenced medical views on melancholy up to modern times.\textsuperscript{45} For him, the melancholic man was sad, fearful, longing for coitus, and had some speech difficulties. He also said that much thinking and sadness cause melancholy. In contrast to the Aristotelian view that the black bile and a melancholic temperament lead to intellectual preeminence or a predisposition to melancholy the disease, Rufus said that the activity of the mind was the direct cause of melancholy.\textsuperscript{46} This idea of a more modest relationship of intellectual activity to melancholy was to appear in later accounts of the illness.\textsuperscript{47} Rufus was the direct source of Constantinus Africanus’ *De Melancholia*. Constantinus had a great influence on medieval medicine in general, and his views on melancholy were crucial to late medieval and Renaissance thought on the illness.\textsuperscript{48} Constantinus, who was

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\textsuperscript{43} Jackson, *Melancholia*, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{44} Pigeaud, *Aristote*, p.112.
\textsuperscript{45} Jackson, *Melancholia*, p.36.
\textsuperscript{46} Jackson, *Melancholia*, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{47} Jackson, *Melancholia*, p.37.
\textsuperscript{48} Jackson, *Melancholia*, p.36.
closely connected with the medical school of Salerno in Italy, had a decisive influence on the development of medicine in the West during the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{49}

For Rufus of Ephesus, melancholy was mainly caused by what he called “bad life hygiene,” which included a diet filled with foods that would make the black bile thicker and would lead it to clog the veins and cause damage, as well as too little or too much exercise. He also believed that some people were born melancholic, and others became melancholic. He talked about different degrees and types of melancholy, where the black bile might affect the blood only, the head only, or the hypochondria only. In this regard he seems to have been the originator of this triadic classification that Galen adopted and that became a crucial feature of texts on melancholia for many centuries thereafter.\textsuperscript{50}

Rufus categorized melancholia into three types according to the basic site of the disease: “(1) a form in which ‘the whole body is full of a melancholy blood’; (2) a form in which ‘only the brain has been invaded’; and (3) a form in which ‘the hypochondria’ is ‘primarily affected’”.\textsuperscript{51} Rufus introduced the notion that melancholy was due to the buildup of unreleased sexual fluids infecting the brain.\textsuperscript{52} With him, the symptoms and causes of melancholy were established.\textsuperscript{53}

What Rufus did in the historical process of the conception of melancholy was to re-establish the link made in \textit{Problem XXX}, cited above, between melancholy and intellect. He saw the intellectual man as threatened by melancholy, but he also saw the activity of the mind as the direct cause of melancholy. His treatment of melancholy

\textsuperscript{49} Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, \textit{Saturn and Melancholy}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{50} Jackson, \textit{Melancholia}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{51} Jackson, \textit{Melancholia}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{52} Solomon, \textit{Noonday Demon}, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{53} Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, \textit{Saturn and Melancholy}, p. 50.
involved releasing melancholy in any way possible: blood letting, purge, but also still the use of hellebore. He also formulated a new oral remedy, which was used until the Renaissance. It was a liquid made of colocynth (bitter apple or bitter cucumber used to relieve anger and causing great abdominal pain), yellow bugle (yellow flower), germander (evergreen perennial), cassia (Chinese cinnamon), agaric (fungus), asafetida (gum resin of various plants, used as an antispasmodic), wild parsley, aristolochia (calico flower), white pepper, cinnamon, spikenard (perennial), saffron, and myrrh, mixed with honey hydromel (alcohol made with fermented honey) and salt water. The methods used and described by Rufus are very mild compared to the chains and other techniques used by contemporaries to let the melancholic spirit out. Most of the theories on melancholy promulgated in the Middle Ages were those presented by Rufus of Ephesus and reiterated by Galen. His ideas were to govern the views of medical schools up to the present time, because Galen associated himself with them, and they were embraced by the ninth century Arabic writers. The teachings of Rufus of Ephesus dominated the thoughts on melancholy for over fifteen hundred years.

**Galen and his contemporaries**

A chapter on melancholia is included in the book *On the Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* (second century AD) by Aretaeus, a possible contemporary of Galen. He is the first to associate melancholy and mania. What is interesting to notice is that this physician noticed a tendency towards the recurrence of the disease, showing that

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56 Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p.49.
57 Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 49.
melancholy could already have been considered depression, a state that generally cannot be cured simply with a good diet.

Galen is the one physician, with Hippocrates, who would be quoted and known in the Middles Ages. Claudius Galen (131-201 AD) arrived at a neurological and psychological synthesis of the work of all his forebears. In his work *On the Affected Parts*, he took Hippocrates’ teachings on humors as an established fact, and mixed the ideas of humors with notions of temperature and moistures, thus formulating the idea of nine temperaments, each representing a type of soul. One of them was dominated by melancholy, and was conceived not as pathology, but as part of the self: “[The atrabilious humor] develops in some persons in large quantities either because of their original constitution or when the customary diet is transformed into this humor by digestion in the blood vessels.” The idea that people could be born with melancholy, and that it was not necessarily contracted was a new idea with Galen.

He also described three types of melancholy, in which he believed that the black bile was the essential etiological factor that affected the brain: “it is occasionally possible, when the entire blood in the vessels has become melancholic [turned into black bile], that the brain itself has undergone such damage according to the general rules of illness.” With the first type, the brain was primarily affected. With the second type, the entire mass of the blood was touched. With the third type called hypochondria melancholy, the upper abdominal area was affected. For Galen, the cures for melancholy were also related to a particular diet to avoid all food that could cause an excess of black bile in the

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60 Galen, *Affected Parts*, p. 89.
blood. He also recommended avoiding worries, anxiety and sleeplessness. In some cases, bloodletting could be used as well as frequent bathing, exercises, massage and all kinds of active motion for their evacuative effects.\textsuperscript{62} This last cure can be the subject of many possible interpretations. Over all, Galen refused to allow that a condition caused by the loss of a loved one could lead to melancholy. He concluded that since a married man is accustomed to frequent intercourse, the absence of his partner could lead to an excess of seeds that spread throughout the body like a poison:

I knew some persons in similar constitution who repressed their sexual needs out of modesty. They finally became dull and inactive. Others again, for no evident reason, had a sad and hopeless expression on their faces like melancholics; they lost their appetite and had a poor digestion. I also knew a man who refrained from sexual pleasure because of the grief for his wife. Since he had previously enjoyed intercourse quite frequently, he became nauseated, could hardly digest the food he consumed and evidently, if he forced himself to eat more, promptly vomited. He became despondent neither for this reason not for any other obvious cause, as do melancholic patients. This condition subsided, however, as soon as he took up his earlier habits.\textsuperscript{63}

Consequently, melancholy in this analysis is not caused by the loss of the loved-one, but rather by the lack of sexual intercourse. Since love could turn into a disease, it was no longer the exclusive interest of writers and philosophers but became part of the official curriculum of physicians, since they began to study its symptoms and methods to cure it.\textsuperscript{64}

After Galen, only a few writers dealt with melancholy, but most just added some practical features and are really considered compilers of the ancient medical information. The writings of Oribasus of Pergamon (325-403), Paul of Aegina and Alexander of Tralles are the center of Byzantine medicine that conveyed the Greek medical tradition to

\textsuperscript{62} Galen, \textit{Affected Parts}, p. 90-94.  
\textsuperscript{63} Galen, \textit{Affected Parts}, p. 184.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ferrand, \textit{Treatise}, p.59.
the East via Arabic and to the West via Latin. In these translations, Arabic writers tended to fuse definitions of different melancholies into one great group. Alexander of Tralles added additional symptoms to melancholy, like a spasm of the fingers. To Aegina, we owe the additional treatment of using cautery to cure melancholy.

The Stoics

Parallel Galen’s psychopharmaceutical treatment was another development of the treatment and understanding of melancholy, conflicting with Galenic thoughts and following with the paradigm of the Church. Its origins relate to the Stoic philosophers who believed that external agency caused mental illness. For the Stoics, a wise man can never be overtaken by madness because the notions of wisdom and madness were mutually exclusive. Melancholy also represents for them the main danger which threatens the exceptionally skilled man. This idea will be taken on by Montaigne, as studied in Chapter Two.

The Church Fathers and the appearance of acedia

For Saint Augustine (354-430 AD), the gift of reason is what separated men from beasts, which consequently meant that the loss of reason reduced man to a beast. With this in mind, it was easy for the Church to say that the loss of reason was a mark of God’s punishment for sins committed, and was often said to be an evidence of possession. In this way of thinking, melancholy was a turning away from God, a sin. Chrysostome, in a

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66 Heffernan, The Melancholy Muse, p.16.
67 Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, p. 54.
68 Pewzner, Prestige, p.534.
letter to Stagirius dating 380 or 381 AD, described “monastic melancholy,” when defining the latter’s condition. Stagirius suffered convulsions, troubles of speech, despaired of his salvation and had an irresistible desire to commit suicide. Urging Stagirius to rely on divine providence, Chrysostome recognized that the melancholic sadness made the devil’s victory easier. Melancholy started to be associated with sin.

John Cassian in the fifth century AD wrote at length about the sin of sloth and acedia, an illness of the soul only:

En sixième lieu, nous avons à combattre ce que les Grecs appellent l’acédia et que nous pouvons nommer le dégoût ou l’anxiété du cœur. Voisin de la tristesse, cet adversaire éprouve surtout les solitaires, attaque plus souvent et plus durement ceux qui demeurent dans le désert. C’est surtout aux environs de la sixième heure qu’il les trouble, excitant à heures fixes, comme une fièvre qui revient périodiquement, leur âme malade par les ardeurs violentes qu’il y allume. Enfin, quelques-uns parmi les anciens déclarent que c’est le ‘démon de midi’ dont parle le psaume 90.

He described acedia as heaviness, torpor, but especially despair for salvation, which made monks mute and interrupted their dialogue with men and with God. The melancholic temperament predisposed to a life of intellectual activities and contemplation. At the same time, a contemplative person was exposed to the wrongdoings of acedia, which meant that working and avoiding idleness would prevent acedia: “les Pères d’Égypte, instruits par ces exemples interdisent aux moines, et surtout aux jeunes, de rester sans rien faire; à l’assiduité du travail, ils mesurent leur ferveur et leur progrès dans la patience et l’humilité.” A person with a melancholic temperament

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69 Pewzner, Prestige, p.534.
70 “Car [l’âme] est vraiment assoupie à l’égard de toute contemplation des vertus et de toute vision des sens spirituels, l’âme qui a été blessée par ce trouble,” Cassien, Institutions, p. 391.
71 Cassien, Institutions, p. 385 & 387.
72 Cassien, Institutions, p. 421.
could fall into idleness, and could consequently fall into contemplation and be taken over by *acedia*, whose symptoms are so close to those of melancholy that the boundaries among the two states were not clearly defined and seemed to be interchangeable to the scribes who were transcribing the information. *Acedia* corresponded to the state of melancholy of religious people, while melancholy corresponded to the depressed state of all others. According to Alliez and huber, “[Acedia] extends beyond the conventual life and finishes by progressively integrating and disappearing in the vast domain which we now call depressive states.” Cassian even listed melancholia as one of the eight temptations one must resist on earth, and the only way to resist it was by countering it: “L’expérience prouve donc qu’on n’échappe pas à la tentation d’acédie en fuyant, mais qu’il faut la surmonter en y résistant.” This idea of fighting a disease by facing it would be followed later by other writers, such as Montaigne and Burton.

*Acedia* and melancholy were originally different conditions that could be easily identifiable and distinct. With the Arabic compilers of Byzantine medicine in the fourth and fifth centuries, the different illnesses likened to melancholy, such as love sickness and *acedia*, were connected and their definitions were fused into one group.

The Middle Ages

The religious path of melancholy: Sin and *Acedia*

During the Middle Ages, the concept of *acedia* was developed. It was a common affliction in the monasteries, where the “noonday demon” tempted the perfectionist

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73 Alliez, Huber, *Acedia*, p. 78.
75 Heffernan, *The Melancholy Muse*, p. 16.
monks in the loneliness of their cell and threatened them with sloth, a lazy sort of sadness. The idea of *acedia* was consequently considered as a sin, while physicians perceived it as a mental disease. But eventually, the idea of *acedia* was assimilated into the medical thinking of melancholy.\(^\text{76}\)

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (*ca*.1225-1274) had a theory that placed the soul above the body, but below the divine, and consequently could only be touched by either God or the devil. If a person had a disease, it could only be of the soul alone, or of the body alone. Melancholia was assigned to the soul and the Church put *acedia*, the monk’s melancholy, among the nine deadly sins.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was another author of the Middle Ages, a mystic, who associated melancholy with sin, especially original sin:

There are other persons who are sad and fearful and vacillate in their moods so that there exists no right disposition and state for them. They are like a strong wind that is useless for all plants and fruit. From this *flegma* grows in them that is neither moist nor dense, but tepid. It is like *livor* that is tenacious and stretches like gum. It produces black bile that first originated from Adam’s semen through the breath of the serpent, since Adam heeded its counsel in taking food.\(^\text{77}\) Through the Devil’s first suggestion, when the human transgressed God’s precept with the food of the apple, this melancholia belongs to the nature of every human being. From this food black bile developed in Adam and his entire kind rouses every plague in human beings.\(^\text{78}\)

Hildegard of Bingen’s description of melancholic men is negative for two reasons: first, the fact that melancholy is related to original sin and that it exists in every man gives an impression of determinism that men cannot escape their fate. Secondly, the description she makes of melancholic men is full of details which enables the reader to picture a monster-like figure: the melancholic man’s brain is fatty, their faces are dark, their eyes

\(^{76}\) Heffernan, *The Melancholy Muse*, p. 10.

\(^{77}\) Hildegard of Bingen, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 39.

\(^{78}\) Hildegard of Bingen, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 40.
are firelike and viperlike, they have rough, hard flesh and large bones, they do not experience proper love and consequently are bitter, foolish, and overflowing with lust: with women they are without restraint like asses. Even their offspring, if they manage to have any, are unhappy and tortured; cannot be loved, and do not like social contact with others, “for they are beset by many fantasies.”

It appears that the negative reputation of melancholy/ depression comes from the medieval association of illness with sin. This idea was not only applied to melancholia, but to all diseases. As Solomon states, “It is from this tradition that the stigma still attached to depression has grown. The soul, being a divine gift, should be perfect; we should strive to sustain its perfection; and its imperfections are the primary source of shame in modern society.”

The medical path: ancient tradition and evolution

Besides the religious path the definition of melancholy took, there was a more medical path which continued the ancient tradition started by Hippocrates and Galen. Constantinus Africanus (1010–1087) recognized the three types of melancholia described by Galen, and indicated a variety of causes and symptoms related to melancholia. In his writings we find that activities of the mind tended to precipitate melancholia; those who excessively studied philosophy and science were also especially inclined to melancholia as well as very religious people due to their excessive desires toward God and their fear of God’s anger. This author obviously knew of the concept of **acedia**, but in his mind,

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79 Hildegard of Bingen, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 60-61.
the monks’ condition was not different from that of the ordinary man. Contrary to Galen, with Constantinus came another source of the sadness of melancholia: the loss of a loved one or of especially beloved possessions, such as a scholar’s loss of his books.\footnote{Jackson, \textit{Melancholia}, p.61.} In his conception, love sickness, \textit{acedia} and mourning appeared to be different stages of the same illness: melancholy. The three had the same symptoms and seemed to have the same kinds of causes, and consequently were going to be cured with the same types of remedies, which were intended to evacuate the reason of the illness: a corrupt melancholy humor. In effect, “various evacuative remedies were prescribed to relieve the patient of the corrupt materials: especially purgatives, also sternutatives [to make people sneeze].” Coitus was recommended as both evacuative and calming”.\footnote{Jackson, \textit{Melancholia}, p. 61.} This last remedy prescribed by Constantinus Africanus was definitely surprising for a time when chastity was praised by some, especially when Chrysostome had recommended perseverance in abstinence to fight against the melancholy of the ascetic.\footnote{Pewzner, \textit{Prestige}, p.535.} Constantinus synthesized all the different theories of different times and chose what he thought went together the best.

\textbf{A revival of genius and melancholy in the Renaissance}

In fifteenth century Italy, there was an attempt to reconcile classical ideas on melancholy with the accepted medieval knowledge by Marsilio Ficino.\footnote{“In bringing together the classical idea of the temperaments with the medieval fascination with horoscopes, Ficino described Saturn as the weighty, isolated, ambivalent planet that reigned over melancholy.” Solomon, \textit{Noonday Demon}, p. 296.} Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) was a great philosopher of the Renaissance in Italy who cherished melancholy, and still using medieval ideas on melancholy in his writings, reverted to Aristotle’s idea
of divinely mad sadness: “reasons must be assigned why Democritus, Plato and Aristotle assert that not a few melancholics sometimes so excel everyone in intelligence that they seem to be not human but rather divine.”\textsuperscript{86} He is responsible for the revival of the notion of melancholy as a sign of genius in the Renaissance. He considered himself melancholic and believed that melancholy could lead to the separation of the body and soul or ecstasy, because a mind far removed from the body would be more perfect, and more pure. In other words, artists who were inspired experienced ecstasy during a temporary insanity, which made of melancholy a prerequisite to inspiration:

But of all learned people, those especially are oppressed by black bile, who, being sedulously devoted to the study of philosophy, recall their mind from the body and corporeal things and apply it to corporeal things. The cause is, first, that the more difficult the work, the greater concentration of mind it requires; and second, that the more they apply their mind to incorporeal truth, the more they are compelled to disjoin from the body. Hence their body is often rendered as if it were half-alive and often melancholic.\textsuperscript{87}

Realizing the side-effects of melancholy on his own life, he recommended that all melancholics exercise, change their diets and listen to music.\textsuperscript{88} This glamorization made melancholy a widespread and common affliction all over Europe. According to Solomon, it came to be an illness of the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{89}

The French doctor André Du Laurens, in his \textit{Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight: of Melancholike Diseases; of Rheumes, and of Old Age} (1599), divided the mind into three parts: reason, imagination and memory.\textsuperscript{90} He stated that melancholy was a disease of imagination: “All melancholike persons have their imagination troubled, for

\textsuperscript{86} Ficino, \textit{Three Books}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{87} Ficino, \textit{Three Books}, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{88} Ficino, \textit{Three Books}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{89} Solomon, \textit{Noonday Demon}, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{90} Du Laurens, \textit{Discourse}, p. 72 (Trsl. Richard Surphlet).
that they devise with themselves a thousand fantastical inventions and objects, which in
deed are not all: they have also verie oft their reason corrupted.”\textsuperscript{91} Du Laurens also
divided melancholic complaints into three categories. The first one is the one which
tackles the imagination, so it has its seat in the brain. The second one is lovesickness,
which affects the whole body: “There is another kind of melancholie verie ordinarie and
common, which the Greeke Phisitions call Erotike, because it commeth of a furie and
raging love.”\textsuperscript{92} The third one is hypochondriacal melancholy, which affects the
hypochondria, the bowels:

> There is a third kinde of melancholie, which is the sleightest and least dangerous
> of all the rest, but the most difficult and hard to be thoroughly knowne: for the
greatest Phisitions doe make doubt of his essence, causes and particular seate of
residence; it is commonly called Hypochondriake.\textsuperscript{93}

The symptoms and cures of all three illnesses are quite similar, with some variations. The
original cause of all melancholies are the same for the three, however, because Du
Laurens in his general description of melancholy and its cause did not differentiate
between the three. The physicality of the disease was very clear also. The reason why
melancholics are sad was because “the spirits, being made wilde, and the substance of the
braine, as it were cloudie and darke, all the objects thereof appeare terrible, and that the
mind is in continuall darkenes.”\textsuperscript{94} A remedy proposed by Du Laurens in order not to see
darkness anymore was to look at very bright colors, possibly a sort of diversion or
entertainment for the brain.

\textsuperscript{91} Du Laurens, \textit{Discourse}, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{92} Du Laurens, \textit{Discourse}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{93} Du Laurens, \textit{Discourse}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{94} Du Laurens, \textit{Discours}, p. 90.
A doctor of the sixteenth century, Ambroise Paré, while talking about the equilibrium of the four humors in the body, had a more psychological explanation of melancholy, with cures that resemble those that Descartes would mention a century later. For him, melancholy had psychical causes due to the worries and tiffs of the mind.\textsuperscript{95}

Timothy Bright, in 1586, recognized that melancholy was a physiological disease that had an influence on both body and soul. He said that melancholy was a physiological pathology, due to the abundance of black bile, which influenced the spirit. Consequently, he observed that the physical condition of a melancholic man afflicted his soul, which is a sign that it is an illness which has an influence on both body and soul. Since it shaped body and spirit, both had to be taken into consideration to cure the illness.\textsuperscript{96} Bright understood that melancholy had to be cured with an effort on the mind.

These doctors list numerous possible causes for melancholic disease: original sin, astral influence, heredity, old age, love, religion, and spending time with books. There also are numerous remedies used to cure it: sharing one’s melancholy rather than keeping it inside, occupying the body and the soul, as well as pharmaceutical treatments like purgatives, and blood letting. If a first remedy did not work, a second one was used: they all worked with more or less success. In the sixteenth century, melancholy still remained somewhat mysterious despite certain “advances.” One step forward in the diagnosis of melancholy was the belief that it could be cured with effort of the mind: Du Laurens,

\textsuperscript{95} Paré, \textit{Œuvres Complètes}.
\textsuperscript{96} Minois, \textit{Mal de Vivre}, p. 149-51.
Bright and Paré believed that thought could alleviate the condition. This notion will be developed by Montaigne in his Essays and later by Descartes in his Passions de l’âme.

The seventeenth century: An anatomy of melancholy

The seventeenth century brought melancholy its first thorough Anatomy, written by Robert Burton in England. He devoted his entire life to the study of melancholy: “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy.” He put together in his work all the thoughts on melancholy that had been written since a thousand years, with the addition of his personal thoughts and experiences. This work synthesized and attempted to reconcile the philosophies of Aristotle and Ficino, Shakespeare’s sense of character, Hippocrates and Galen’s medical insights, the religious impulses of the medieval and Renaissance Church, as well as personal experiences of illness and introspection. Burton introduced an approach to understanding the union between mind and matter by locating the ties between philosophy and medicine, science and metaphysics. Interestingly, Burton presented all views on melancholy and seemed to agree with all of them, although they could be contradictory. But, he created a map of distress, gave physical and mental descriptions of melancholics, classified all current treatments, legal (given by physicians) and illegal (given by magicians) for melancholy, and touched on the difficult problem of suicide (although melancholy was fashionable in the

97 Burton, Anatomy, p. 20.
98 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 301.
99 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 301.
Renaissance, suicide was still forbidden by law, and Burton discussed the religious implications of committing suicide.\textsuperscript{100}

The great transformer of medicine in the seventeenth century was René Descartes (1596-1650.) He especially showed interest for the treatment of mental illnesses. The influence of the mind on the body, and of the body on the mind is explained in his work \textit{Les Passions de l’âme} (1649.) Although his followers seemed to have concentrated on the total separation of body and soul, Descartes’ own application of his theory was not so drastic when talking about real human beings rather than in the abstract. This caused considerable reversal in the fate of the depressed, according to Solomon.\textsuperscript{101} The origin of depression is still a question which is unanswered today.

\textbf{The eighteenth century and the asylum}

The eighteenth century thinkers put the depressed, the melancholic person, in a dehumanized position. Many considered the body as a machine, and despite the huge leaps forward in the progress of science, views of the depressed regressed. The depressed continued to be on the margins of society and were cast into asylums where they would sometimes suffer the most horrifying treatments, especially if their case was severe. The most famous asylum in England was Bedlam, and in France was L’Hôpital de Bicêtre.\textsuperscript{102} Dr. John Monro, the chief physician of Bedlam, said that melancholy was incurable.\textsuperscript{103} Hermann Boerhaave, another famous physician of the eighteenth century, also proposed

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{100}] Burton, \textit{Anatomy}, p. 390 and p. 416.
\item[\textsuperscript{101}] Solomon explains: “The endless hairsplitting about what is body and what is mind—whether depression is a ‘chemical imbalance’ or ‘a human weakness’—is our legacy from Descartes. Only in recent years have we begun to resolve this confusion.” Solomon, \textit{Noonday Demon}, p.306.
\item[\textsuperscript{102}] Solomon, \textit{Noonday Demon}, p. 309.
\item[\textsuperscript{103}] Solomon, \textit{Noonday Demon}, p. 309.
\end{itemize}
to inflict great pain on patients suffering from melancholy in order to distract them from the pain within their minds. Melancholy had ceased to be the fashionable aristocratic ailment of the Renaissance. It was considered the sign of moral decay and weakness, especially by the Protestant ascetics of the later Eighteenth century.

However, another revival of the view of melancholy as genius occurred. It was this time due to the spirit of Romanticism, that let in disillusion and used depression as the source of inspiration and knowledge rather than as folly: men of the end of the nineteenth century “ont retrouvé et cultivé cette tradition qui a accordé une place de plus en plus importante à la contemplation de soi-même, au souci de soi, à ce qu’on pourrait appeler la culture de la douleur.”

The nineteenth century and a re-humanization of the mentally ill

The nineteenth century thinkers show a shift back to more compassionate views of melancholics, first with a French physician, Philippe Pinel and his Treatise in 1806, where he showed a reform of the treatment for the mentally ill. For him, mentally ill patients should be treated kindly, and morally, and any act of violence against his patients was vehemently punished. Also, an achievement of the nineteenth century was the establishment of the asylum as a residence for the care of the mentally ill. In these institutions, cures for melancholy include such Hippocratic treatments as diverting the

104 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 309.
105 “[They] attributed depression to society’s decadence and pointed to high rates of the complaint among an aristocracy nostalgic for its past.” Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 311.
106 Pewzner, Prestige, p.539.
mind from its illness by exercising, walking, conversing, and reading. One drawback of the asylum was that the depressed individual was taken away from any person (family member or other) who would love him. A student of Pinel, Jean-Etienne Esquirol, excluded melancholy from medical treatises in the nineteenth century (1805), abandoning it to poets. It would only be recovered with Freud.

The nineteenth century was also the moment when doctors reached back to Hippocrates and his idea that mental illnesses are diseases of the brain. Although they did not find which part of the brain was malfunctioning, they came to the understanding that one disease could cause various manifestations in one patient (which had been noticed by sixteenth century doctors and authors as seen above,) and consequently led to the acceptance of manic-depression.

The twentieth century: development of psychology and anti-depressants

The twentieth century shows two major movements in the treatment and understanding of melancholy. Freud, in his publication of the “Fliess Papers” in 1895, argued that the notion of the unconscious replaced the idea of the soul and established a new locus and cause of melancholia. At the same time, Emil Kraepelin published his classification of mental illness containing the definition of depression as we know it

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110 Pigeaud, Maladie, p.122.
111 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 319.
112 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 319.
113 “One [movement] was the psychoanalytic, which has in recent years spawned all kinds of social science theories of mind. The other, the psychobiological, has been the basis for more absolutist categorizations.” Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 322.
114 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 323.
This classification forms the basis of DSM-IV, the manual of diagnosis of mental diseases used today. Kraepelin is known as the father of psychobiology. These two men, “representing the psychological and biochemical explanations of illness, established the rift that the field of mental health is now trying to close,” in Solomon’s view. Freud wrote that melancholy is a kind of mourning that rises from a feeling of loss of libido, of desire for food, or for sex. Kraepelin believed that there was a difference between acquired and inherited mental illnesses and that all mental illnesses had an internal biochemical basis.

The twentieth century was the time of the discovery of anti-depressants, which was responsible for the definitive split between psychoanalysis and neurobiology. Although melancholy and its causes and cures have been discussed for over a thousand year, Hippocrates’ idea that it is a disease of the brain that can be treated with oral remedies is still valid today. The main difference is in the way physicians talk about the remedy:

Scientists of the twenty-first century A.D. are better at formulating the remedies that were those of the fifth century B.C., but the basic perceptions have in essence come full circle. Social theories, in the meanwhile, conform to an Aristotelian mode of thought, though the development of specific kinds of psychotherapy is more sophisticated than its distant antecedents. What is most distressing is that these two kinds of insight are still being argued as though truth lay elsewhere than between them.

Melancholy evolved significantly from the fifth century B.C. until the twentieth century. Over the past 25 centuries, melancholy, depression and similar conditions have

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115 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 323.
116 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 323.
117 Freud, Mourning and Melancholia, p. 39.
118 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 327.
119 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 332.
120 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 334.
been a major concern in the Western World. The condition has troubled numerous thinkers, philosophers, writers, doctors, scientists, and still continues to do so. This dissertation will not try to put an end to the problems of melancholy. It is not a medical work. What this study intends to present is an understanding of the mechanisms of melancholy within literary works from different time periods, and the impact this illness has had on the making and defining of seventeenth century French comedies.

**Outline of the study**

In the following chapters, I will study major literary French works from the medieval period to the seventeenth century, as well as original medical texts from the same time periods, in order to find out the link between melancholy and literature in the works studied.

Chapter four will present a number of comedies from the seventeenth century by Corneille, Rotrou and Molière, which present melancholic characters on stage. The challenge here will be to understand the purpose of using melancholics as characters on stage when a playwright wanted to put a person with a disease in a play. Why is it primarily comedies that present melancholics as characters, as opposed to tragedies or other theatrical forms?

Seventeenth century comedies present a synthesis of previous notions of melancholy. First, melancholy appears as an illness of the upper-class, and the writers of the seventeenth century were writing for this particular audience, with a possibility of correcting their audience’s vices in mind, or rather, with the intention to show them what an *honnête homme* should or should not do. This intention could be applied to the way of
dealing with melancholy, where mind and body need to be considered together at all times. One should laugh and be entertained to avoid contracting melancholy. Consequently, a comedy where people’s vices and faults are shown should be the medium chosen to try to correct those vices and help people fight the possibility of becoming melancholic. A melancholic character has been taken over by his excess of passions, a behavior that was unacceptable for the honnête behavior of the time. This illness can be countered by “entertaining” the mind, by cheering up the senses, and consequently can be fought with laughter and entertainment: the best remedy against it (an anti-depressant).

The first three chapters will lead to the synthesis of three elements made by writers of seventeenth century comedies. The first element is that humor and divertissement are indispensable for the good health of human beings otherwise man becomes melancholic. The second is that mind and body need to be kept together at all times when portraying or studying man, otherwise man can become a fool, which can lead to melancholy. The third one is that melancholy is the illness which best represents human weakness.

The first chapter will study Le Roman de la rose by Jean de Meun, as well as some fabliaux and nouvelles from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the major work from the Middle Ages, the Rose, there are mentions of Hippocrates and Aristotle, and even Galen. Could the author have had access to the different theories on melancholy these authors presented? The protagonist of the story, the young man, has lost his rose: he suffers from an illness likened to melancholy, and he is trying to find a cure. What gives him relief for his illness is getting the rose: a sexual healing.
The *nouvelles* and *fabliaux* give an additional insight on the presentation or representation of melancholics in the French Middle Ages. Most of the time, the cure suggested has to do with a sexual healing, even in the most religious situations. The situations of cure are comical and not only give a sexual relief to the characters, but also give a comical relief to the reader. Knowing that coitus and entertainment were two given cures for melancholy, there is a possibility to see a parallel between the healing in the works with a preventive healing for the reader. This study will present the first of three components that make up the synthesis made by authors of seventeenth century comedies: humor and the “entertainment” of the brain are indispensable to keep man healthy, mentally and physically.

In chapter two, by placing Montaigne and his ideas in their historical context, it will be possible to examine which ideas influenced him or which authors he disagreed with about melancholy. Montaigne belittled his condition, which relates to the idea that the way melancholy is presented in French literature always managed to make it appear less important or tragic than it really was, or to divert the reader, or especially the author, from it. Interestingly, Montaigne as an author needed his melancholy to survive, because it lead him to his self-discovery.

In his long journey through the *Essays*, Montaigne was trying to discover who he was by studying himself. By doing so, he realized that in order to study man, body and mind had to be kept together. Once he discovered this, he realized that his illness, melancholy, was in the middle of this union, because it is his illness which made him realize that the two components which made him human needed to be kept together at all times. By discovering himself, Montaigne also discovered man and his limits. He would
not have reached this stage without melancholy as part of his complexion. The sixteenth-century medical views on melancholy differ from those of literary writers. It will be interesting to see where Montaigne stands.

This study will lead us to the second component of seventeenth century comedies: body and mind need to be kept together at all times: otherwise man is not human anymore. If this rule is not respected, man can become a fool, which can lead to melancholy, madness and possibly death.

The third chapter concentrates on Descartes and his *Passions de l’âme*. With Descartes, and the seventeenth century, the study of the brain and the understanding of melancholy develop to a new degree. Descartes discovers, through his own melancholy and that of Princess Elisabeth, that his Cartesian dualism of separation of mind and body is not enough to define human nature. Melancholy is part of his life, and part of Princess Elisabeth’s life as well. He tried to find a cure for it. He is mesmerized by this ailment that he has no real control over, and that refutes his previous theories.

It is arguable, however, that Descartes believed in a total body and soul separation at all times. More and more studies on his work develop the idea of a possible trialism, which makes it difficult to understand how the idea of Cartesian dualism took off as it did among the scientific world. Medical texts by seventeenth century doctors will help us see the discrepancy between Descartes’ thoughts on melancholy and what was known and believed in the medical field at that time.

This third study will lead us to the third component of seventeenth century comedies: melancholy is at the junction of body and soul. If there are three elements to make us who we are: soul, body and their union, and melancholy is at that union,
melancholy is the exact illness which best defines the human being’s weakness. Thanks to melancholy, the authors studied in this dissertation discover human nature and human weaknesses at a deeper level than with any other diseases. This is why melancholy is so mesmerizing. It allowed for an understanding of the way the soul affects the body and vice versa. By entertaining their brain, the authors keep it occupied away from gloomy thoughts. As Robert Burton said in his Anatomy of Melancholy “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy.”\textsuperscript{121} While entertaining themselves, to create a diversion from melancholy, they entertain a potential reader as well, and this is where humor or entertainment takes its effect. Intrinsically, without being aware of it, melancholic authors produced a kind of literature, being directed by melancholy and having in common elements only present in this particular literature.

\textsuperscript{121} Burton, Anatomy, p. 20
CHAPTER 2
ENTERTAINMENT AGAINST MELANCHOLY

Many of the characters who suffer from diseases that might be likened to “melancholy” represented in the vernacular literature of the Middle Ages are humorous figures, or fools, despite Aristotle’s observation that “…all geniuses are melancholic.” Melancholy or illnesses likened to it, such as lovesickness and acedia, are figured in the *Roman de la rose*, as well as in *fabliaux* and *nouvelles* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The symptoms of the protagonists can be compared to those described in medical treatises. Interestingly, the authors of the works mentioned chose a sexual encounter as a remedy for the illness of the hero presented in each story. Knowing that there were other remedies for melancholy or illnesses likened to it at the time, and that the literary sources used are comic or humorous, the choice of the remedy by the authors is explainable as a will to entertain readers to avoid contracting melancholy.

The passing and transformation of knowledge on melancholy up to the Middle Ages: A short summary

From a sickness of the black bile to a grouping of illnesses likened to melancholy into one category
As seen in the introduction, the earliest extant accounts of melancholy are those of Hippocratic times (460-370 BC). It is only with Aristotle (384-322 BC) that the positive attributes to melancholy were added. With him, the black humor becomes a symbol of genius. But also, for him, most melancholics were obsessed by sex, because they needed to evacuate the excess wind present in their veins.¹²²

The next generation of physicians with a great influence on Western thoughts was that of the Arabic physicians. Among them were Rhazes (865-923), Haly Abbas (994) and Avicenna (980-1037), whose thoughts developed from the Byzantine compilers. Avicenna’s work gained notice to the West by the second quarter of the thirteenth century. The thoughts of these Arabic physicians and philosophers influenced the West because they were translated into Latin by Constantinus Africanus (1010-1087.) Constantinus recognized the three types of melancholy indicated by Galen, and added a variety of causes and symptoms related to melancholy. With him, the association of love sickness, *acedia*, and mourning with melancholy was made.¹²³ As for the cures for all illnesses associated with melancholy, purgatives and coitus were recommended. It is interesting to notice that the same cures are recommended for all the illnesses likened to melancholy.

**The medieval compilation**

Over all, it is fair to say that the medical writings of the later Middles Ages owe a great debt to Galen, Constantinus Africanus and Avicenna. A number of Church Fathers, from St. Jerome to Isidore, for example, took note of classical medicine and conserved

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the information, but, as Jackson says, they showed a “considerable tendency to summarize… and reconsider the views of the classical authorities in light of Christian faith and morals.”\footnote{Jackson, \textit{Melancholia}, p. 47.} He indicates that ultimately, it was in the monasteries and cathedral schools that the Latin world carried on a tradition of systematic medical knowledge.\footnote{Jackson, \textit{Melancholia}, p. 47.} It is not surprising that, after such treatment and filtering, so many translations, as well as compiling and summarizing, the medical information about melancholy, \textit{acedia}, love sickness, and mourning was grouped under one category. The causes, symptoms and cures of melancholy, love sickness, \textit{acedia} and mourning being very similar, the grouping is even more intelligible.

\textbf{Medical knowledge of literary authors}

According to Luke Demaitre, by the tenth century, “the oracle and mecca for health seekers was the center of Salerno, where cures as well as care revolved around a ‘regimen,’ or dietary governance.”\footnote{Demaitre, “Medical Practice and Practitioners,” in Kibler and Zinn, eds. \textit{Medieval France: an Encyclopedia}, p. 605.} The information from Salerno was known in France and throughout Europe thanks to emanations from Chartres and individuals such as the monk Baudouin who was the French physician to Edward the Confessor. Until 1100, the majority of acute and chronic diseases “that demanded more intense attention seem to have been treated by monks, faith healers, good Samaritans, and part-time practitioners.”

Over all, only the clergy had access to literate instruction in health care. However, members of this class faced ethical difficulties when they wanted to apply their schooling
“particularly to lucrative transactions, surgical treatments, and such unseemly activities as
gynecology or even diagnosis by uroscopy.”\textsuperscript{127}

As far as medical texts are concerned, with the rise of the universities in the thirteenth
century, Avicenna’s \textit{Canon}, Galen’s \textit{Ars parva}, and Hippocrates’ \textit{Aphorismi} or
\textit{Pronostica} became available to students and scholars.\textsuperscript{128} Eighty percent of the medical
texts were written in Latin, with some particular texts dealing with health, hygiene, or the
plague written in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{129} One example of a medical text written in the
vernacular was the \textit{Régime Du Corps}, a famous guide which accompanied Countess
Béatrice de Provence in 1256 on her visit to her daughters, which shows how private
hygiene depended on social standing.\textsuperscript{130} However, educated clerks such as Jean de Meun
did not need translations of these medical texts.

As far as the theories used to cure patients, in the fourteenth century, humoralism and
astrology were used,\textsuperscript{131} probably as inherited from the centuries before. Doctors’ main
concern was the relief of the patient, often through psychological suggestion, because the
cure itself was left to God.\textsuperscript{132} In this environment dominated by the Church and faith, as
well as ethical difficulties faced by those with medical knowledge, a cure for any illness
was probably considered as a miracle from God, and not as the effects of a remedy.\textsuperscript{133}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] Tuchman, \textit{Mirror}, p. 105.
\item[132] Tuchman, \textit{Mirror}, p. 106.
\item[133] Zumthor, \textit{Essai}, p. 36.
\end{footnotes}
Carol Heffernan mentions that Chaucer (d. 1400) in England seemed to have the medical knowledge of someone who had gone through physician’s training. In her view, poets and physicians have an ability “to see in parallel ways” and this “accounts for the ease in which they move in and out of one another’s territory—not merely human nature, there for mutual viewing, but their works about that nature.”¹³⁴ It is true that many physicians and writers seek an understanding of human nature. This does not imply that poets had access to medical theories, but it certainly shows an interest in certain problems of the human condition. Physicians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were trying to cure with the means they had, and diagnosed their patients by looking at the color of their skin or their urine, for example, which are noticeable by everyone. Poets could also have made up their minds on a disease with the information available to the masses.

Around 1268-1280, Jean de Meun produced a continuation of the *Roman de la rose*, one of the most popular vernacular works of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries: the second part of. By that time, the medical treatises on melancholy had been translated into Latin from Arabic, and were accessible to Jean de Meun’s contemporaries at the university of Paris. Since the *Rose* was written by two different authors with an interval of some forty years between the two parts, the entire work covers most of the thirteenth century, and as David Hult observes, the two parts, “mettent en relief grâce à leur juxtaposition les développements les plus profonds (socioculturels, linguistiques, et économiques) qui indiquent ce point tournant de la civilisation médiévale.”¹³⁵ Not only did this literary work show the accumulated knowledge of the learning of medieval scholasticism, but it also showed linguistic developments of the French language, as well

as the use of the “répertoire des motifs et des figures de la rhétorique courtoise, déjà surannés à cette époque tardive,” and exemplified, “la création d’un allégorisme courtois, cadre qui se prête à des spéculations érudites.” This work, like most other extant medieval works, was written for a particular audience: a privileged class. According to Georges Duby, the end of the twelfth century sees the emergence of a public with a more refined taste, for the bourgeois and the rich nobles, as well as in the privileged lay world, which he calls the chivalry world. In the Rose, Jean de Meun portrayed lovesickness, an illness particular to the courtois genre, in the Ovidian tradition of the art of love, as well as love’s physical suffering, and possibly another illness, perhaps melancholy, and its causes, symptoms, and cure.

Presentation of the study

Linguistic and literary Context of the Rose

The word “melancholy” had not been a part of the French vocabulary for long at the moment when the Rose was written. The word mélancolie, or its other two forms mélancholie or mèrencolie, could have first entered the old French vocabulary borrowed from the Latin word melancholia either in 1175 with Chrétien de Troyes, or in 1176, or in 1190, in Jean Bodel’s Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas. According to the Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française, the word entered the courtois vocabulary first, covering states of being and feelings going from deep sadness to worry.

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136 Hult, Société de l’Ecriture, p. 163-64.
137 Hult, Société de l’Ecriture, p. 32.
and even madness and delirium. Around 1190, the connotation of sadness prevailed over the idea of pique, as well as with the idea of irritability and mad daydreaming at the beginning of the thirteenth century: “Ce développement est propre au français et témoigne de l’évolution du goût, la mélancolie faisant l’objet d’une histoire complexe de valorisation-dévalorisation depuis l’Antiquité (Aristote).” When Jean de Meun continued the composition of the *Rose*, melancholy was consequently part of the courtly vocabulary and could designate sadness.

Acedia, on its part, existed in a vernacular form, either accidie or accide and first entered the old French vocabulary around 1260, as found in Brunetto Latini’s *Livre du Trésor*. The word accide designated a carefree attitude, and connoted languidness or lethargy, as well as laziness. According to the *Dictionnaire de l’Ancien Français*, Jean de Meun was familiar with this concept, since the quote given as an example of use of accide as laziness is by him: “Qui se pert par paresce que clers nomment accide.” Jean de Meun knew what acedia was, how it was characterized, and what caused a religious person to suffer from it. By the end of the thirteenth century the concepts of melancholy and acedia had been translated into the vernacular and were used by authors. It seems that the concept of acedia as used and described by Jean de Meun was more associated with laziness than with the original “demon of noontide,” and the concept of melancholy was more that of a courtois sadness.

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Jean de Meun placed himself, within his work, in the tradition of the ancient love poetry: “Gallus, Catillus et Ovides,/ qui bien sorent d’amors trestier,/ nous reüssent or bien mestier.”\textsuperscript{146} Ovid was one of the best-known authors of antiquity in the Middle Ages. In his \textit{Ars Amatoria}, he explained the art of seduction. A few indications are that love should be eloquent,\textsuperscript{147} soft spoken,\textsuperscript{148} and poor.\textsuperscript{149} Also, that love hates the sluggish,\textsuperscript{150} that it is a kind of warfare,\textsuperscript{151} that arrows pierce one’s heart when one falls in love,\textsuperscript{152} and that love is not reached by going through a safe and easy road.\textsuperscript{153} The Amant of the \textit{Rose} will experience all of these aspects of love: as Sarah Kay observes, “Amor does not let [Amant] rest.”\textsuperscript{154}

Ovid also gave the remedies for love or \textit{Remedia amoris}. Some of them are that the lover should cure the wound of love when it is still fresh and new, and should not wait, because being timely is almost a medicine.\textsuperscript{155} A lover should also be busy and avoid idleness and too much sleep.\textsuperscript{156} Going to the country could help as well, but the lover should know that the recovery process will be very painful, especially because he needs to forget about his beloved and think ill of her, and no pills or witchcraft will alleviate that pain.\textsuperscript{157} A lover who wants to recover from the lovesickness should pay attention to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{147} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.123.
\textsuperscript{148} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.153.
\textsuperscript{149} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.165.
\textsuperscript{150} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.229.
\textsuperscript{151} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.233.
\textsuperscript{152} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.195.
\textsuperscript{153} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.243.
\textsuperscript{154} Kay, \textit{Desire}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{155} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.131.
\textsuperscript{156} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.145.
\textsuperscript{157} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.224, 289-90.
\end{flushleft}
his beloved’s faults,\textsuperscript{158} as well as show no grief.\textsuperscript{159} Most importantly, the lover should not avoid intercourse, because if he remains alone he will become sad.\textsuperscript{160} Finally, a certain diet should be followed, where the lover should avoid onions, should eat rue because it sharpens the eyesight, and finally should drink wine, but the perfect amount only, otherwise the lover might feel too drowned by alcohol, or the wine might have prepared his heart for love.\textsuperscript{161}

Ovid’s themes of love as physical suffering recur in a large number of medieval works which were taken either seriously or mocked. A few examples where these themes taken seriously were in \textit{Cligès} by Chrétien de Troyes (l. 567-1044) as well as in \textit{Jehan et Blonde} by Philippe de Rémi (l. 421-1622). The constant suffering of the lover fearing that something will happen to his beloved or to his love is respected in these works. Also, the theme of love among different social classes is approached in these works (i.e. Jehan reproaches himself to love beyond his social condition l. 560-77). The heroes also suffer great illness from the love they feel, consult doctors (Jehan l. 667-80,) and heal (Jehan l. 1427-52). Theses themes were mocked in works such as the \textit{fabliaux} and \textit{nouvelles} of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as discussed below.

André le Chapelain, a writer from the twelfth century, wrote an \textit{Art of Love} in Latin at the court of Champagne, which was also in the Ovidian tradition. He described love as “an inborn suffering which results from the sight of, and uncontrolled thinking about, the beauty of the other sex.”\textsuperscript{162} Love is associated with fear (of gossip, of

\textsuperscript{158} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.418.
\textsuperscript{159} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l.510.
\textsuperscript{160} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l. 587-88.
\textsuperscript{161} Ovid, \textit{Art of Love}, l. 805-6.
\textsuperscript{162} Andreas Capellanus, \textit{Art of Love}, p. 33.
rejection, or loss).\footnote{Andreas Capellanus, \textit{Art of Love}, p. 33.} Also, André le Chapelain used the humors to explain the physiology of love in the context of the progression of the human maturity: “From that time onward [a man’s sixtieth year and a woman’s fiftieth year] our natural heat begins to lose its strength and the body’s humours begin most powerfully to increase. This leads a man into various discomforts, and troubles him with the lurking presence of various illnesses.”\footnote{Andreas Capellanus, \textit{Art of Love}, p. 39.} Melancholy is due to an excess of black bile in the body, an effect which usually happens in older people, according to the diagram which correlates qualities with humors.\footnote{Wack, \textit{Lovesickness}, p. 100.} The melancholy humor is associated with cold and dry, water, winter and old age.\footnote{Wack, \textit{Lovesickness}, p. 100.} Could it be that André le Chapelain had some notion of melancholy as one of the troubles, when he said that the increase of humors in older men and women caused them to suffer discomforts and various illnesses?

The author also gave five ways to win love: “a handsome appearance, honesty of character, fluent and eloquent speech, abundant riches and a readiness to grant what the other seeks.”\footnote{Andreas Capellanus, \textit{Art of Love}, p. 43.} Four stages of love were distinguished: “the first stage lies in allowing the suitor hope, the second in granting a kiss, the third in the enjoyment of an embrace, and the fourth is consummated in the yielding of the whole person.”\footnote{Andreas Capellanus, \textit{Art of Love}, p. 57.} André le Chapelain also gave a list of thirty-one rules of love, such as: “love is known to be always waxing of waning;” “An easy conquest makes love cheaply regarded; a difficult one causes it to be held dear;” “A person in love is always fearful;” “He who is troubled by the thought of love finds it harder to sleep and eat;” “The slightest suspicion forces a
lover to entertain dark thoughts about his beloved.”

In the third book of his *Art of Love*, André le Chapelain gave a few reasons not to pursue love, one of them being that love is associated with sin, and that the sin of love is the only sin which pollutes both soul and body, “and is accordingly to be avoided more than all others.” Another reason, which was stated from the beginning, was that: “Love causes everyone unbearable suffering in this life, and infinitely greater pain after death.” Finally, André le Chapelain stated that love should be avoided all together, because “Clean living and bodily restraints are counted amongst the virtues, and so their opposites, sexual indulgence and the pleasure of the flesh, are necessarily accounted vices.”

According to André le Chapelain, the lover himself should be avoided at all cost, because men only seek a good reputation in society, and if the slightest trace of sin were deciphered in the man’s behavior, his reputation would suffer from it.

Jean de Meun placed himself in this tradition of the art of love, but instead of simply giving his interpretation of what the art of love should be, he chose to present a spectrum of the views on the topic.

Guillaume de Lorris began his work by writing a work in the tradition of the “art of love”:

Et se nule ne nus demande comant je veil que li romanzt soit apelez que je comanz, ce est li Romanz de la Rose

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171 Andreas Capellanus, *Art of Love*, p. 293.
ou l’art d’Amors est tote enclose.\textsuperscript{173}

To describe his work, Jean de Meun uses an expression whose sense is slightly different:

“le Miroir des Amoureux,” or the “Lovers’ Mirror”:

\begin{quote}
Car tant en lira proprement
que tretuit cil qui ont a vivre
devroient apeler ce livre
Le Miroër aus Amoreus.\textsuperscript{174}
\end{quote}

According to Armand Strubel, the mirror designates, just like its Latin equivalent \textit{speculum},

\begin{quote}
une somme, un recueil de l’ensemble du savoir dans un domaine donné. C’est bien une sorte d’encyclopédie des thèses, doctrines et expériences qu’offre la deuxième partie du \textit{Roman}. Le mode d’emploi en est précisé: il sert de remède au ‘mal d’aimer’, dont Guillaume n’a pas trouvé d’issue, et dans lequel l’amoureux n’est guère secouru par le dieu.\textsuperscript{175}
\end{quote}

Jean de Meun showed his familiarity with the art of love, on its tradition and its different deviations through the different allegorical figures of the \textit{Rose} who present their opinions on love, on the art of love, on the way to pursue love. Jean de Meun’s work is a mixture of different genres, such as the \textit{roman chevaleresque}, the lyric poem and the didactic discourse, in Hult’s view, “signalant par cette contamination littéraire la fin de l’âge courtois dans sa première efflorescence.\textsuperscript{176} If indeed Jean de Meun’s work shows the end of the first courtly tradition, his interpretation of what love is and how it should be cured should differ from the original tradition, or at least should show a deviation from it. Jean de Meun could have had access to medical works on love sickness and its association

\textsuperscript{173} Guillaume de Lorris, \textit{Rose}, l.34-38. “Et si quelqu’un—homme ou femme—demande quel titre je veux donner à l’oeuvre que je commence: je réponds que c’est le roman de la rose, qui contient tout l’art d’aimer,” (emphasis mine).
\textsuperscript{174} Jean de Meun, \textit{Rose}, l. 10618-21. “il enseignera tant, avec les termes propres, que toutes les générations à venir devraient appeler ce livre Le Miroir des Amoureux.”
\textsuperscript{175} Strubel, \textit{Rose}, p. 571.
\textsuperscript{176} Hult, \textit{Société de l’Ecriture}, p. 164.
with *acedia*, melancholy and mourning. Moreover, he placed himself in the tradition of the Ovidian art of love, so he knew about the others’ work. Many parallels can be drawn between the causes, symptoms and treatment of melancholy at the time with the art of love as defined by André le Chapelain. Suffering, fear, no wish to eat or drink, dark thoughts are all associated with causes and symptoms of melancholy. The association André le Chapelain made between love and sin came close to John Cassian’s association of *acedia* with sin: both love and acedia are like the “noonday demon,” trying to keep man away from God, and trying to ruin one’s virtuous reputation.

With all this information available to him, Jean de Meun could have made a survey of all the knowledge acquired in the art of love, but also its possible association with melancholy, as well as *acedia*. Jean de Meun chose to end the *Rose* with Amant “getting” the rose, and suggesting intercourse as a remedy for the lover’s ailment. The reason why he decided to opt for this solution and not another will be the subject of the next point.

**Choice of the cure for melancholy in the works studied**

There was confusion between melancholy proper and other diseases with similar symptoms, such as love sickness, *acedia* or mourning. In all of the medieval works studied, sexual intercourse is the cure to the described disease, despite the existence of other cures, such as a light diet, sleep, frequent baths, blood letting, listening to music, distracting conversation or exercise and travel. Coitus was initially used as a cure for the

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love sick,\textsuperscript{179} but it became a cure for all melancholic diseases over time, as suggested by Galen who had recommended active motion as a cure, and was later generalized by Constantinus Africanus.

**Purpose of choosing intercourse for the cure of illnesses**

**Preventive medicine**

The question that can be raised is why would intercourse help so much in a case of melancholy, or diseases likened to it? What are the beliefs about it that made of it such a popular prescription in cases of melancholy? If we believe Timothie Bright, the physician of the Renaissance whose medical knowledge was that transmitted from the Middle Ages, the lover suffers many symptoms. The first is insomnia, which causes an evaporation of the vital humor, and that causes anorexia, accompanied with paleness, sighing, and slowing of the pulse.\textsuperscript{180} The therapies prescribed in a case of serious love sickness, as Bright describes, are the following: light diet, sleep, frequent baths, blood-letting, intercourse and listening to music, distracting conversation, exercise and travel.\textsuperscript{181} Then, Bright explains that if these therapy fail, melancholy will take the place of love sickness: “If these therapies do not succeed in returning the body to the required state of equilibrium, the continuous overheating and overdrying of the organism will produce an excessive quantity of melancholy humors, which will dry the body completely, will turn the skin dark, and will ultimately cause madness and death.”\textsuperscript{182} With Bright’s

\textsuperscript{179} It was believed through the pneumatic theory that melancholy was caused by an excess of air in the body that needed to be evacuated: one solution was coitus. Aristote, *Problème XXX, I*, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{180} Bright, *Treatise*, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{181} Bright, *Treatise*, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{182} Bright, *Treatise*, p. 82.
suggestions, lovesickness seems to have been understood as an early stage of melancholy. If the lovesickness was not treated properly, melancholy might take over.

**Functions of human sexuality in the Middle Ages**

Why would sexual intercourse cure melancholy, as opposed to a good bleeding that would get rid of the black bile known to cause melancholy? First of all, sexuality has a number of functions. The obvious one is that of reproduction, which was made enjoyable “for if animals despised coitus, the race of animals would surely perish,” so that the human race does not disappear from the face of the earth.183 The second function of sexuality is also to keep people healthy. Joan Cadden says that, “many authors regarded sexual release as a necessary excretory function—to expel certain superfluities from the body—and conversely regarded sexual abstinence as at least potentially unhealthy.”184 She goes on by explaining how just like urinating and sneezing, sexual intercourse is necessary in people’s lives in order to get rid of the excess of seeds produced in a human body, male or female.185 Cadden mentions an anonymous thirteenth-century treatise on intercourse that stated the following: “‘We have seen people who, for love of chastity and the admiration of philosophy, did not wish to obey nature, and retained a lot of seed’, whose symptoms include headaches, weight loss, and melancholia.”186 Cadden concludes her explanation of the health purpose of sexuality by mentioning ancient medical authorities like Galen and Avicenna who recommended, “that celibate men masturbate and that widows or virgins have their genitals rubbed by a

183 Cadden, *Western Medicine*, p.55.  
184 Cadden, *Western Medicine*, p. 57.  
185 Cadden, *Western Medicine*, p. 58.  
186 Cadden, *Western Medicine*, p. 58.
mid-wife until the seed is ejected." Cadden observes that unfulfilled desire is not the only source of disease but that practice of venery is also one, although in general, “because of the importance of the expulsion of superfluities for good health, sexual activities per se, whether heterosexual intercourse, homosexual intercourse, or masturbation, did not cause disease.” A possible interpretation of the choice to use intercourse as a cure for illnesses likened to melancholy in literature could be taken as a presentation of preventive medicine. If the audience would know of the positive effects of intercourse on their physical and mental health, they would probably practice it more, and consequently avoid the accumulation of seed believed to cause melancholy.

**Sexuality, humor and comical healing**

Although medieval literature speaks much more openly about sex than later works, in a society mostly dominated by the Church, it is easily understandable that illnesses are a sign of sin, especially a sign of the sin of the flesh. In this context, prescribing intercourse to cure from an illness was contradictory. It is not surprising that writers of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries played with this notion and used this information to turn their work into humorous stories, exaggerating the reasons for the release of the “seed” and the consequences if it was not released.

An accepted fact of ancient time was that a woman had no control over her uterus, which had a life of its own. As Thompson says, “many ancient writers believed that the womb or uterus had a life of its own, and a hysteria (the Greek term) wanted and needed to be filled. In fact, if a woman was not regularly pregnant, she would suffer from

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187 Cadden, *Western Medicine*, p. 58.
188 Cadden, *Western Medicine*, p. 66.
hysteria, a catch-all category for symptoms stimulating almost any kind of physical disease or mental condition” and that many great minds “have shared in the confusion with regard to women, hysteria and normality.”\textsuperscript{189} The most frightening part is that women who were not fulfilling their husband’s or society’s expectations were considered as crazy or sick: “an ‘unstable’ woman could be incarcerated or labeled ‘melancholic,’ ‘insane,’ or ‘nymphomaniac’ if she did not fulfill her husband’s or society’s expectations.” In \textit{Le remède souverain contre la peste} the female protagonist has the plague. She is described as not being able to get satisfied from sexual intercourse with numerous men who then catch the plague, while she progressively gets better. The adjective describing her is “insassiable”, never satisfied. She does not fulfill society’s expectations, she must be melancholic or nymphomaniac or insane. In the fabliau \textit{Le paysan devenu médecin}, the male protagonist thinks that his wife \textit{must} be doing something wrong, so he needs to incarcerate her in their house by beating her so much that she cannot do anything else but cry inside her house all day long.

It was also accepted that women sometimes became sick because they did not have enough male substances in themselves: “the definitive treatment [for the uterus to remain in its place] had to include a male component; if the uterus was unhappy because it had not received enough male substance, only something masculine would cure it.”\textsuperscript{190}

It was also known that virgins and nuns would get sick or suffer from a collapsed uterus if deprived from sexual activity: “it [the uterus] was deprived of sexual activity or was barren for too long, the disgruntled uterus would exit the pelvic basin in search of

\textsuperscript{189} Thompson, \textit{Wandering Womb}, p. 11-12 and p.23.
\textsuperscript{190} Thompson, \textit{Wandering Womb}, p. 33.
satisfaction,” which would cause melancholy, because it would reach the brain.^{191} Hippocrates had a remedy for this disease: “he advised young women to find a sex partner as quickly as possible to keep their uteruses under control.”^{192} The same was true for men who went without sex for too long. It was believed that the accumulation of their “seed” would cause sicknesses. And for men and women not to catch diseases, the remedy was to restore a normal sexual function.

It is interesting how it is specifically the case of celibate women or widows and the diseases caused by their lack of sexual activity that is most discussed in works of the time and critiques of them. Trotula was a famous physician of the School of Salerno in the eleventh century.^{193} Her main interest was to alleviate suffering of women and she was the author of many medical works.^{194} She wrote the treatise known as *The Trotula* to educate male physicians about the female body, because such knowledge was generally lacking.^{195} Trotula also had a section in her book on the *Preservation of Celibate Women and Widows* in which she explained what women had to do in order not to incur severe illnesses. Her solution to the problem was to “take some cotton and musk or penny-royal oil and anoint and put it in the vagina.”^{196} She was the first person who did not recommend sexual intercourse for these women, respecting their vows of celibacy and their religious beliefs. It is also interesting to notice that this piece of advice came from a woman and not a man. The fact that such a remedy was proposed and existed, showing that sexual intercourse was not the only solution known at the time, emphasizes the fact

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^{191} Thompson, *Wandering Womb*, p. 33.  
^{192} Thompson, *Wandering Womb*, p.34.  
^{196} Trotula, *Preservation*, p. 121.
that the fabliaux and nouvelles writers for example wanted to play with the comic of the situation of a nun obliged to have sex for the rest of her life to remain healthy, as in Nouvelle 21. Writers chose to use the most extreme situation to make it more comic and achieve their goal of making people laugh.

Fabliaux and nouvelles are comic and humorous. Humor can be used to talk about topics that frighten or scare people, subjects that are taboo or that people hesitate to talk about. It is a way of relieving the weight of the fear, or the pressure of the taboo. It is known that women, their reproductive system and their diseases were considered as scary, as Thompson states it: “female health problems were considered frightening.”

What better way than to joke about them and make the fear seem a little less important? Diseases and death are a serious concern for people in general. Transforming stories about diseases and death into laughable ones was probably the best way to cope with the sad facts of reality: “the fabliaux themselves would certainly not be the first or the last genre to poke fun at illness, and so attempt to keep at arm’s length a serious matter by transforming it into the risible.”

Considering that medieval people probably also needed some relief from their daily problems, just like we do now, does laughter not still remain the best medicine of all times against all kinds of diseases, physical and mental? It is possible that the fabliaux and nouvelles were not mere entertainment, but some also proposed a kind of comical healing.

Jean de Meun and the authors of fabliaux and nouvelles knew about the accepted facts of their time about sexuality and the consequences of the lack thereof: people could get sick, maybe lovesick, which could turn into melancholy if not healed, then they

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197 Thompson, *Wandering Womb*, p. 25.
would become weak and maybe die. Sexuality is a controversial topic, sometimes taboo among religions, certain families, or certain places where it would probably be inappropriate to talk about it. But it is a subject about which everyone is curious, that everybody fantasizes about and about which everybody makes up stories. The fabliaux and nouvelles authors were simply following an ancient tradition of story-telling, making of sexuality a more banal topic to talk about, to make it more accessible to everybody, but especially to show that it was a natural element that people could not avoid but that they could actually laugh about, perhaps in order to keep themselves healthy in their bodies and spirits. Maybe they were also using the strategy of bringing sexuality into their stories to attract readers and listeners.

Melancholy in the Rose

Jean de Meun’s possible medical knowledge: Hippocrates and humoralism

Jean de Meun had access to Hippocratic theories, or knew about them, because he mentioned this physician and others in Nature’s speech, when she talks about death and its unavoidability: “Et les fisiciens mêmes,/ on nul eschaper n’an veismes,/ pas Ypocras ne Galien, tant fussent bon fisician ; Rasi, Constantin, Avicenne/ li ront lessiee la couenne.” All of these physicians are the ones mentioned earlier, who had an impact on the history of melancholy. It is interesting that those are the ones that Jean de Meun chose to mention in Nature’s speech. Later in the same speech, Nature comes to mention humors and humoral theory. Again, instead of concentrating on any positive aspect of the

199 Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 15927-32. "D’ailleurs parmi les médecins même nous n’en avons jamais vu lui échapper, pas même Hippocrate ou Galien, quel que fût leur talent de médecin; Rhasés, Constantin et Avicenne lui ont eux aussi laissé leur peau!"
humors, Nature concentrates on the fact that an imbalance in the humors can cause someone to commit suicide, fact related to an excess of black bile, which causes melancholy:

Car maint acourcent bien leur vie,
ainz que l’’umeur soit defaillie,
par eus fere naier ou pandre,
ou par quelque peril anprrandre
don, ainz qu’il s’an puisse four,
se font ardoir ou anfouir
ou par quelque meschief destruire
par leur fez folemant conduire ;
(…)
ou par choair an maladies
par maus gouvernemanz de vies,
par trop dormir, par trop veillier,
trop reposer, trop travaillier,
trop angressier et trop sechier
(car ent out ce peut l’an pechier),
par trop longuement jeuner,
par trop de deliz auner,
par trop de mesese voloir,
trop esjoir et trop doloir,
par trop boivre, par trop mangier,
par trop leur qualitez changier,
si comme il pert maesmement
quant il se font soudainement
trop chast avoir, trop froit santir,
don a tart sont au repantir ;
ou par leur coustumes muer,
qui mout de gent refet tuer
quant soudaidement les remuent ;
maint s’an grievent et maint s’en tuent,
car les mutacions soudaines
sunt trop a nature grevaines²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 16961-94. " En effet, nombreux sont ceux qui écourtent bien leur vie avant que l’humeur ne vienne à manquer, en allant se noyer ou en se pendant, ou en allant se livrer à de périlleuses entreprises qui les mènent au bûcher ou dans la tombe avant qu’ils ne puissent prendre la fuite, ou en se faisant tuer accidentellement pour avoir conduit follement leurs affaires…ou bien ils tombent malades parce qu’ils gouvernent mal leur vie, par l’excès de sommeil ou de veilles, de repos ou de travail, de poids ou de maigreur—car dans tous les domaines on peut commettre des fautes—par des jeunes trop prolongés ou par l’abus des plaisirs, pour avoir voulu une vie trop pénible ou avoir connu trop de joies et de peines, par l’excès de boisson, de nourriture, pour avoir trop changé leurs dispositions premières, comme cela se voit quand ils s’exposent subitement à une trop grande chaleur ou à un froid trop vif, chose dont ils se
Nature emphasizes a regimentation of life without excesses, especially without excesses of passions. Since Jean de Meun knew Hippocrates’ and Galen’s ideas, possibly their theories, he also knew that the excess of black bile that causes melancholy, which could lead to suicide or simply death by not taking good care of oneself, was mainly due to a bad diet and life regimen. It was believed that melancholy could be cured by changing the diet and way of life, as well as by avoiding any kind of excess in one’s life.

In addition, Nature continues her presentation on melancholy by mentioning Empedocles, who took bad care of himself, loved books and philosophy, and perhaps because of his melancholy, was not afraid to die, and jumped alive in a fire:

Empédocles mau se garda,
Qui tant es livres regarda
Et tant ama philosophie,
Plains, espoir, de melancolie,
C’onques la mort ne redouta,
Mes tout vif ou feu se bouta
Et joinx piez an Ethna sailli
Por montrer que bien sunt failli
Cil qui mort veulent redouter ;
Por ce s’i voust de gré bouter.202

With Empedocles’ case, when Nature says that he was full of melancholy, she makes the connection between intellectuals, books, and melancholy. First of all, she knows that philosophers who are into books all the time get melancholic, or may be melancholic by nature. By saying that he was “Plains… de melancolie,” she suggests that he was full of

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201 Jean de Meun mentions humoral theories through Wealth (Jean de Meun, Rose, l.10142).
202 Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 17009-17018. “Empédocle prit mal soin de lui-même, lui qui avait tant étudié ses livres et tant aimé la philosophie que, plein peut-être de mélancolie, il n’eût pas du tout peur de mourir, au contraire, il se précipita tout vif dans le feu, sautant à pieds joints dans l’Etna pour démontrer qu’ils sont bien lâches ceux qui acceptant de redouter la mort: voilà pourquoi il a décidé de se jeter dans le feu.”
the black humor. Sadness would not explain Empedocles’ madness. It is understood that he went mad, because only a mad person would run into a volcano to show how coward the others are. His melancholy lead him to madness, and then to death.

Nature does not show Empedocle as an example to follow, as an inspired intellectual, who is a genius thanks to his melancholy. On the contrary, she praises men who, by the quality of their spirit, are wise men, who hold back their natural tendencies, who do not turn their back towards good and justice:

Mes je sai bien tretout de voir,  
conbien que li ciel i travaillent,  
qui les meurs naturex leur baillent  
qui les anclinent a ce fere  
qui les fet a ceste fin trere  
par la matire obeissant  
qui leur queer si va flechissant,  
si peuent il bien par doctrine,  
par nourreture nete et fine,  
par sivre bones companies,  
de sanz et de vertuz garnies,  
ou par aucunes medecines,  
por qu’el soient bones et fines,  
et par bonté d’antandement  
procurer qu’il soit autrement,  
por qu’il aient comme senez  
leur meurs naturex refrenex.²⁰³

With this affirmation, Nature is saying that if the stars predispose a man to moodiness, he has to work against them. If born under Saturn, one would be melancholic. It was consequently necessary, in Nature’s opinion, to fight against that mood. Nature is

²⁰³ Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 17040-17056. “Je sais qu’ils peuvent bien, en toute vérité, que, même si les corps célestes y contribuent, en leur donnant les inclinations naturelles à commettre les actes qui les font aller vers une telle fin—à cause de la matière obéissante qui sans cesse fait céder le cœurs en ce sens--, je sais qu’ils peuvent bien, grâce à l’instruction, grâce à une éducation pure et honnête, par l’imitation de bons compagnons pourvus de sens et de vertus, ou même par certains remèdes—pourvu qu’ils soient efficaces et de bon aloi— et par la qualité de leur esprit, faire en sorte qu’il en aille autrement, à condition d’avoir, en hommes sages, réfréné leurs tendances naturelles."
also condemning, as the Church Fathers did in late antiquity, the figures suffering from
acedia.

**Acedia**

It appears at a few places throughout the *Rose* that Jean de Meun was familiar
with the concept of *acedia*. As seen in the introduction, at that time, the Church assigned
melancholia to the soul and put *acedia* among the nine deadly sins. The Old Lady in the
*Rose* is the first one to allude to this illness:

Ausinc vos di je que li hom
Qui s’an entre en religion,
Et vient après qu’il se repent,
Par po que de deul ne se pent,
Et se complaint et se demente
Si que touz an soi se tourmente,
Tant li sourt grant desir d’ovrer
Comment il porra recovrer
*La franchise* qu’il a perdue,
Car la volenté ne se mue
*Par nul abit qu’il puisse prandre,*
En quelque leu qu’il s’aille randre.\(^{204}\)

It is highly likely that the Old Lady is talking about *acedia* and the sin of sloth in this
passage. *Acedia* was characterized by despondency, and monks were more prone to this
illness. Everything known about *acedia* at that time is verified by what the Old Lady
says. Then, Nature also confirms that *acedia* was considered as a sin in the Middle Ages,
by saying that wise men, in other words, those not tempted by the noonday demon, those
who resist the temptation, do not turn towards evil or sins.

\(^{204}\) Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 13937-13948. “Lorsqu’un homme entre en religion et vient ensuite à s’en
repentir, il manque se pendre de douleur, se plaint et se lamente, au point de s’abandonner entièrement au
désespoir qu’il a en soi, tant lui vient une grande envie d’œuvrer pour recouvrer la liberté qu’il a perdue,
car la volonté ne change pas foncièrement, pour qu’aucun habit qu’il puisse prendre ou en quelque couvent
qu’il aille se retirer.”
Since for Jean de Meun, laziness, “paresce” was the equivalent to the monks’ *acedia*, it is fair to say that when he mentions laziness, it is likened to the monks’ condition, since the description he gave is very similar to the description of the monks’ condition. In other words, if *acedia* is the sin of monks, laziness is a layman’s sin, and both *acedia* and laziness could lead to melancholy. The second instance when Jean de Meun alludes to *acedia* through laziness is with Wealth. She mentions that one can descend into poverty by being lazy and leading an unproductive life.\(^{205}\) Individuals suffering from *acedia* cannot work or concentrate on God and their prayers anymore. This is why working hard is one of the solutions given to fight *acedia*. Men, in order not to reach a stage of idleness which could lead to melancholy needs to avoid idleness and laziness, just as the monks do, by working and keeping busy.

Finally, Nature also mentions laziness as being one of man’s sins.\(^{206}\) I am suggesting that she is referring to how it could lead to *acedia* for monks, or to melancholy for men. *Acedia* is a concept that circulated in the Middle Ages. Keeping busy and avoiding idleness being the way to avoid it, since *acedia* is linked to melancholy, the solutions to avoid *acedia* could work for melancholy as well. Moreover, Ovid described the lover’s remedy as keeping busy and diverting his spirit. Once more, the borderline among the three conditions is very subtle.

A clerk like Jean de Meun could find in the writings of others what to do in order to preserve himself from harm, avoid *acedia*, continue working and avoid idleness, and find out what he could do to help others fight the evils as well, maybe by sharing his

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\(^{206}\) Laziness is mentioned l. 19204.
findings in a work of his own, because: “car li clerc voit en l’écriture,/ avec les sciences prouvées,/ resonables et demontrees,/ touz maus don l’an se doit retrere/ et touz les biens que l’an peut fere.”  

Nature’s melancholy

Nature’s speech is her confession to Genius, who is a priest in the *Rose*. Before her confession, the reader learns that she cannot stop crying. She seems to be very distressed, because she says she has committed a great fault: “Quant ele oï cest serement,/ mout li fu grant alegemant/ du grand deul qu’ele demenoit.” She is also all alone in her forge, secluded from all other beings most of the time, constantly working, probably trying to avoid idleness. Nature “torjorz martele, torjorz forge,/ tourjorz ses pieces renovele.” Also, during her confession, a very long speech of about 2700 lines, her knowledge of all matters such as the cosmos, ancient philosophers, myths, ideas about men and women, religious ideas about determination and free will is exposed. Especially when Nature explains how mirrors and illusions work, she likens the illusion of the senses to a great sickness, that of frenzy: “Si rest bien souvant avenu,/ quant aucuns sunt pris et tenu/ par aucune grant maladie,/ si con il pert en frenesie/ (…) et se lessent illeuc choair.” According to Wetherbee, “There follows a discussion of the tricks of perspective played by mirrors and lenses which leads into the topic of distortions effected by dreams and

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208 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.16119-21. “Quand elle entendit le serment prononcé par Amour et Vénus, cela lui fut un grand soulagement dans le vif chagrin qu’elle manifestait.”

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hallucinations, and a return to the theme of the heaven’s complex influence.”

For Nature, people who let themselves fall is due to an illusion of the senses. She also says that people who get lost in their thoughts, attacked by melancholy, see many strange figures in their imagination:

Ou quant sunt neïs en santé,
Voit l’an de cues a grant planté
Qui maintes foiz, sans ordenance,
Par naturele acoustumance,
De trop panser sunt curieus,
Quand trop sunt melancholieuz,
Ou pooreuz outré mesure,
Qui mainte diverse figure
Se font parair en eus meïsmes
Autrement que nous ne deïsms
Quant des mirouers parlions,
Don si briefmant nous passions,
Et de tout ce leur samble lores
Qu’il saït ainsinc por voir defores.  

People who think too much could be attacked by melancholy, and their imagination could play mirror tricks on them, and make them see things that do not exist, such as the young man seeing his beloved, for example. Being herself in great health, with all the work she does creating beings and making sure no species are extinct, she must be reflecting upon her work a lot, and consequently could suffer an attack of melancholy.

Nature is obviously a very learned character. When she finally admits her fault, which is that of creating man, her desperation about humanity and where it is going is evident: “cist me fet pis que nus louveaus.” She has created an ungrateful creature and

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212 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 18313-26. “Ou bien, même parmi ceux qui sont en bonne santé, on en voit bon nombre qui maintes fois, sans disposition réglée, sont trop plongés dans leurs pensées, quand ils sont sous le coup d’une excessive *mélancolie* ou d’une trop grande peur, et qui évoquent dans leur imagination maintes figures diverses et étranges, autrement que nous l’avons dit en parlant des miroirs sur lesquels nous avons si rapidement passé.”
lists all the vices that this creature has developed. Over all, Nature shows many signs of melancholy herself: she is sad, depressed, she is crying a lot, she is alone. However, she is also prodigiously productive. Could her behavior be likened to that of a manic-depressive person? But there is a sign of hope: maybe those who love and keep away from such vices as laziness and hypocrisy, and reproduce can be forgiven, and if they are, maybe Nature will feel happy again for having created lovable creatures.\textsuperscript{214}

Interestingly, Nature is the only allegorical figure in the poem who uses the actual word “melancholy,” and she does in two instances. In both cases, it does not seem that she only refers to a \textit{courtois} sadness, despite the understanding of this concept at the time as described by the \textit{Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française}. She really seems to refer to a deeper psychological condition, where, in both cases, the senses of the people concerned seem to be altered. Jean de Meun seemed to have had a better understanding of what melancholy was than what is attributed to him. That Nature is the one who mentions that word is also interesting, because as Nature, she knows what is inherent to man, she knows what man is made of, and she knows how the equilibrium can be broken. Out of all the allegorical figures, she would be the one who would know that melancholy is a disturbance unnatural to men, whereas love is not. She would know if a person is melancholic or love sick.

\textbf{Symptoms of the hero}

The story of the \textit{Rose} is that of a young man who has lost his rose, his beloved, and is desperately trying to gain access to her. In the tradition of the Ovidian Art of Love,
Amant has set himself to love a lady too high above him socially, but he is hoping that, as Kay puts it, Merces will “prevail over rank, and incline her to him.” As he walks through the garden in which he first saw his rose, he meets different people who are trying to help him or aggravate his dilemma. He is suffering, physically, from the loss of the rose. Although he never had her, and just sniffed her once, his only thoughts are on the rose, when he will be able to see her again, and be with her. Guillaume de Lorris introduced the concepts that will be examined throughout the work. The first idea is that the Lover’s cause is a lost one: “amant n’avra ja ce qu’i quiert.” The lost cause of the lover who will never obtain what he desires is exposed before the possible cure that would resolve the lover’s problem is stated: “et soi que guerir ne poioe/fors par le bouton ou j’avoie/ tot mon cuer mis et ma beance.” Only finding and being with the rose will cure him.

Through the “loss” of the rose, the protagonist not only lost his honor and wealth, but also his health and joy: “et de la covendra qu’il [Bel Acueil] isse,/ s’Amors veut ja que j’en garisse,/ que ja d’aiilors ne quier que j’oie/ honor ne bien, santé ne joie.” In this passage, the lover refers to his condition as one that needs to heal, “garisse.” This language suggests that he refers to a disease. His health and joy will return once Bel Acceuil is out of jail, meaning when the rose will accept to welcome him near her again. For now, the young man is sick and depressed. His loss of love, or of his beloved rose, is a sickness.

215 Kay, Desire, p. 214.
216 Guillaume de Lorris, Rose, l. 2407 “L’amant n’obtiendra jamais ce qu’il désire.”
217 Guillaume de Lorris, Rose, l. 2755-2757. “Je savais que je ne pouvais trouver ma guérison que par le bouton dans lequel j’avais mis tout mon cœur et mes aspirations.”
218 Guillaume de Lorris, Rose, l. 3971-3974. “Il faudra que [Bel Accueil] sorte de [prison], si Amour veut que je guérisse de ce mal, car de nulle part ailleurs je ne pourrais trouver honneur et bien, santé et joie !”
Referring back to Ovid’s *Remedy for Love*, parallels can be drawn between Amant’s condition and the lover described by Ovid. Ovid stated that the lover would suffer a sudden disease, great pain, that he would lose his health from the wound left by love. He should avoid idleness and sleep, passion must be repelled, and finally, being with the loved one cures everything. Amant’s symptoms are similar to what Ovid described. Also, the final remedy suggested by Ovid works for Amant. Is he simply suffering from love sickness?

**Freud’s theory of loss, mourning and melancholy, applied to the *Rose***

Interestingly, Freud’s theory of loss implies that a melancholic shows five characteristics, as well as some additional symptoms: depression or sadness, loss of interest for the external world, loss of the ability to love, inhibition of activity, and the loss of self-esteem, as well as loss of appetite, insomnia, almost suggesting that the psychological work done by the melancholic takes all the energy necessary for digesting or sleeping.²¹⁹ It seems that the protagonist experiences some of the same symptoms: He is sad and he cries, “Por quoi donc en triste demeures?/ Je voi maintes foiz que tu pleures,”²²⁰ he shows loss of interest in the external world and inhibition of activity, which is seen after Reason’s speech, when he is thoughtful and gloomy: “Quant Reson m’ot, si s’en retorne,/ si me relet pensis et morne.”²²¹ But this man does not show a loss of ability to love, to the contrary, each time he realizes that he will not be able to get the rose, his desire for her grows stronger: “Or Sachiez bien de verité/ que se j’avoie avant

²²¹ Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 2199-2200. “Quand Raison m’entendent parler ainsi, elle s’en retourna et me laissa à nouveau pensif et morne.”
The hero’s condition shares common symptoms with melancholy, as described by Freud, but not all of them.

When different people have the flu, not all of them share the same symptoms, although all of their illnesses are characterized as being “the flu.” When people are depressed, not all of them share the same symptoms, although they are all defined as “depressed.” The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition, is the current reference on mental illnesses. In this manual, it is stated that depression exists when a person shows five or more symptoms in a list of nine. According to Andrew Solomon, there is no particular reason to qualify a number of particular symptoms to qualify depression, because he says it is arbitrary: a person who shows four symptoms has a case of mild depression, and a person with six has a more severe case than the person who has five. He says that even one symptom is unpleasant and that “having slight versions of all the symptoms may be less of a problem than having severe versions of two symptoms.” Consequently, although the young man of the Rose does not show all the symptoms listed by Freud for a case of melancholy, his condition may not be the most severe, but it is possible to interpret it as a milder manifestation of it, or maybe, as suggested by Timothie Bright, as a first stage of it, and if it is not healed in time, it might worsen into melancholy.

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222 Guillaume de Loris, Rose, l. 1747-1754. “Sachez bien, en vérité, que si auparavant j’avais une grande envie du bouton, le désir en fut maintenant plus vif, et plus le mal me faisait souffrir, plus augmentait le désir constamment d’aller vers la petite rose dont le parfum surpassait celui de la violette.”

223 First, Tasman, DSM IV, p. 744-745.

224 Solomon, Noonday Demon, p. 20.
Reason’s definition of love

When Reason, specifically, talks about love, it is a sickness, expressly, a sickness of the mind. It also is a wise folly, “c’est sage folie,” a sickly health, “c’est santé toute maladive,” “douz mal, douceur malicieuse;/ douce saveur mal savoreuse;/ entechiez de pardon pechiez,/ de pechiez pardon entechiez;/ c’est peine qui trop est joieuse.” Reason continues with a list of oxymorons describing love for many verses. Most of the adjectives used to describe love are also related to the adjectives describing melancholy: folly, sin, sickness, pain, cruelty, and especially a disease of the mind. With Reason’s speech, one can see the similarities between the stigma associated with melancholy and love sickness. The borderline between the two conditions is very narrow: where does love sickness end and where does melancholy start? It is not very clear, especially since the young man chooses the path of madness rather than reason after Reason’s speech: “Et se je sui fols, ce nos chaille:/ je veil amer, conment qu’il aille,/ la rose ou je me sui voez.” Moreover, Amant “after rejecting the argument of Raison against the waste and folly of love, he approached the Rose only to fall back at the hint of difficulty, despite the encouragements...”

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225 “Raison l’avait déjà dit: l’amour ainsi conçu est une maladie mentale, une espèce de folie causée par une ‘vision désordonnée’ (4352).” Nykrog, L’Amour et la Rose, p. 62.
226 Jean de Meun, Rose, l.4347-8. “L’amour, après mûre reflexion, c’est une maladie de la pensée.”
227 Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 4293.
228 Jean de Meun, Rose, l.4276.
229 Jean de Meun, Rose, l.4283-87. “C’est un mal bien doux, une douceur où se trouve le mal, c’est une douce saveur au gout désagréable, un péché entaché de pardon, un pardon entaché de péché; c’est une peine très joyeuse.”
230 Jean de Meun, Rose, l.4263-4328.
231 Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 7181-83. “Et si je suis fou, que vous importe? Je veux aimer, quel que soit le résultat, la rose à laquelle je me suis voué.”
of Bel Accueil.” In other words, the path he chose, that of the madness, does not help him with his condition. Persisting in his madness only makes his condition worse.

With his condition, likened to melancholy, the young hero is drifting to madness, which is the logical sequence of events in a case of melancholy, with the next step being death. After looking at the young man’s symptoms, comparing them to those of mourning or melancholia, considering he is deriving to a certain level of madness, it is probably fair to say that his condition fits into the mold of melancholy.

**The cure to the illness: love and entertainment**

Throughout Jean de Meun’s encyclopedia on the art of love, the author alludes to two illnesses closely related to love sickness: melancholy and *acedia*. Knowing that all three conditions (love sickness, *acedia* and melancholy), their causes, cures and symptoms, were mixed through translations, compiling and summarizing, it is plausible that Jean de Meun would have also noticed the common elements among the three and, to expose his encyclopedic knowledge of them all, would address each of them in his work.

Interestingly, it is Genius who is Nature’s confessor, a character who will be linked to melancholy soon after by writers. Genius is a supernatural being in the *Rose*: he has wings, and he appears and disappears suddenly. The beginning of his speech, which is a reiteration of what Nature wants to tell the barons, is a metaphor of procreation. His words are very graphic: he tells the barons that if man do not use their tools, they rust:

“Quant san cop de martel ferir/ lessent les anclumes perir, or s’i peut la rouelle anbatre,/  

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Also, thinking back at the explanation of using sexual intercourse to cure melancholy: it was believed to be a necessary action to evacuate the accumulation of seeds in one’s body. For Genius, if the tools rust, there would not be procreation and human beings would slowly disappear from the planet. In the medical definition, not evacuating the seeds would lead to melancholy, which would lead to death: either way, sexual interaction is a necessary thing for human beings to live. This idea is reinforced when Genius says: “N’aiez pas les braz anmouflez:/ martelez, forgez et souflez.” Going back to the idea of wind that needs to be evacuated from one’s body so it does not accumulate and create an accumulation of black bile, which could cause melancholy.

Jean de Meun wrote his part of the *Rose* in the tradition of *De planctu Naturae* by Alain de Lille, where “Nature a destiné Vénus à la propagation de l’espèce,” and Genius’ defense of procreation in an “evidence of a conscious departure from the more ‘orthodox’ naturalism of the Chartriains.” Moreover, “Jean’s poem presents mankind as deeply alienated from nature, and we become increasingly aware that the false and dissipating environment in which the Lover is suspended is the product of human sin.” However, with Genius arrives the final sentence of the story, bringing sexuality to the forefront. He talks about a healthy kind of love which is defined by sexual desire and

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233 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.19538-42. “Puisqu’aussi bien ils laissent périr les enclumes, en refusant d’y donner un coup de marteau, la rouille peut alors s’y mettre si on ne les entend pas marteler et frapper.”
238 “la définitive sentence” Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 19474.
239 “Non, Jean de Meun n’est pas devenu fou. C’est le lecteur qui n’a rien compris au Roman de la Rose s’il n’a pas vu qu’ici on touche au cœur du poème : le discours de Génius en est la « définitive sentence »
the physical union of the two lovers. This sort of love gives bodily and mental health. In Genius’ speech one could possibly recognize the idea that sexual intercourse is necessary as a preventive medicine to avoid melancholy, to keep a healthy mind and live a healthy life. All the characters (Reason, Friend, Old Lady, and others) gave the young man their different and contradictory theories on love, which ultimately, all put together, give the complete definition of what each of them was trying to define. Those previous speeches are a criticism of human behavior that compares the scandalous contemporary behavior to that of the Golden Age. It seems that this Golden Age would return if everybody would follow Nature’s will, mentioned by Genius, that everyone should make love happily. When the young rose is deflowered, the Golden Age can come back on Earth.
Most of Genius’ speech is an apology of sexuality: “Arez, por Dieu, baron, arez.”

At the same time, ploughing could possibly be understood as a certain work ethic: keep ploughing your land, do not become idle, as a good priest of the time would recommend to his fellow brothers, so they would not be subject to the “noonday demon.” Ploughing can also be understood in continuation with the bawdy imagery of sexuality. Either way, Genius’ suggestion could be understood as an advice to keep away from melancholy and keep alive. When Genius finally says: “Mes trop froit ne trop chaut n’aiez,” he could possibly make a direct reference to the perfect mixture of sanguine (hot) and melancholic (cold) humors which are found in the body of melancholic geniuses as described by Aristotle.

Genius also delivers Saturn’s story, linking his figure to Saturn, the planet related to the melancholic genius temperament. Saturn was the ruling god of the Golden Age, and was then castrated by Jupiter, his own son:

[Saturn's] castration by Jupiter and the casting of his genitals into the sea represent both the destruction of the primitive harmony of human society and the beginning of temporal generation, the transference of cosmic plenitude into natural channels. Thence arise the assignment of a fixed term to all earthly existence and the birth of Venus, under whose influence man fulfils the responsibility of procreation which is his portion of the burden of physical necessity imposed upon all temporal existence.

Because the castration was an action against Nature, Saturn not being able to reproduce anymore, and not being able to satisfy his spouse or lover, everything deteriorated and the Golden Age was lost. According to Thomas Dill who interpreted Augustine, “one of the most immediate results of the fall is the alienation of sexuality from reason, ”because

\[245\] Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.19671. “Labourez, au nom de Dieu, labourez, barons.”
\[246\] Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.19678. “mais n’aiez ni trop froid ni trop chaud.”
even a man who is attempting to procreate cannot remain rational at the same time.\textsuperscript{248} But Reason seems to allow that lovers come together, as long as they avoid \textit{fol amor}.\textsuperscript{249}

This passage also explains why Saturn and melancholy are linked: once the Golden Age was lost, there was nostalgia for it, and longing for the past that was lost, a time when everything was happy: wine came from rivers, fire appeared naturally, as well as other things which made life easy. Once this was lost, seasons appeared, Jupiter divided the lands, people had to work on their property, and fire and everything else needed to be made.

Over all, Genius’ speech contributes to the understanding of what is needed to survive and not fall into a degradation of man, or a disappearance of men. Also, it is said that his speech entertains and makes his audience happy: they are rejoicing. “Genyus ainsinc leur preesche/ et les resbaudist et solace.”\textsuperscript{250} The words used by Jean de Meun have a double meaning: not only is Genius entertaining his audience, but through him, Jean de Meun is also entertaining. These words can also be understood in a sexual way, continuing the intercourse metaphor started earlier. Entertaining the audience with bawdy images or humor to transmit a message was a part of the medieval Christian culture, as Horowitz observes: “De nombreuses recherches ont établi dans l’intervalle l’évidence que le rire et l’humour s’intégraient parfaitement dans la culture chrétienne médiévale et qu’une partie du clergé, plus particulièrement autour de la predication, ne craignait pas trop d’enrichir

\textsuperscript{248} Dill, \textit{Narcissus}, p. 420.
\textsuperscript{249} Dill, \textit{Narcissus}, p. 421.
son discours à l’aide d’anecdotes divertissantes, voire de plaisanteries.”

Genius being a priest, his entertaining function with such images is not too surprising.

Finally, Genius gives the barons a list of advice on how to live a good life. This list could be compared to the *Three Books of Life* written by Marsilio Ficino, just a few centuries later. Realizing the side-effects of melancholy on his own life, Ficino recommended that all melancholics exercise, change their diets and listen to music. Genius advises to fight against one’s vices, to live a good life, to kiss your lover and give her pleasure, to love loyally, to make confession to avoid evil, and to invoke God. It is noteworthy that Marsilio Ficino was a proud melancholic and revived the idea of the melancholic genius in the Italian Renaissance, and that Jean de Meun used the allegory of Genius to transmit some of the same ideas as Ficino will a few centuries later.

**Pygmalion**

Ovid and Jean de Meun dealt with the topic of Pygmalion in different ways. According to Dill, although both authors stated that love seized Pygmalion, they both called him a fool, and they both said that Pygmalion claimed his statue as his espouse before her transformation, Jean de Meun, “deliberately exploit[ed] the comic potential of Pygmalion’s *fol amor.*” After Genius’ speech, the author mentions the story of Pygmalion (a myth which should be interpreted allegorically according to Raison and Thomas D. Hill), who has a lot in common with the young lover. In Pygmalion’s story, Love takes reason away from him, which makes him fall into the greatest despair:

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254 Dill, *Narcissus*, p. 405
255 “The Pygmalion story (20817-21214), … is a clear reflection, in miniature, of the structure of the whole of the poem, with its three stages; for Pygmalion goes through essentially the same process as does the Lover,” Dahlberg, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 20-21.
N’il n’an reset son queur avoir,/ car Amors tost sans et savoir,/si que tretouz s’an desconforte.”

This is the same situation in which the young lover finds himself. But the difference is that Pygmalion did not find a remedy to his despair and destroys himself because of his folly, due to his lack of reason, and consequently dies:

Ainsint s’ocit, ainsint s’afole,
Seurpris en sa pansee fole,
Pygmalion li deceüz,
Por sa sourde ymage esmeüz.

Little by little, the rose, just like Pygmalion’s statue, becomes more and more human-like, thanks to Venus, and represents in a more definite manner the young rose that will be deflowered. Suddenly, after so many verses about the lamentation of the young lover, his pain, the long speeches from the different characters who try to share their accumulated wisdom and knowledge with him, he finally reaches the young rose and the reader witnesses her falling of blossoms: “the lover, like Pygmalion, is irrational and yet at the same time he achieves what Raison defines as the rational end of sexuality.”

This relates to the idea that the lover reproduces at the end, as needed for procreation of the human race. In his irrationality, he arrived at a “good” end, compared to Pygmalion who died. Probably, if Timothie Bright’s theory worked with Amant, his love sickness

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256 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 20893-95 "Amour lui enlève la raison et le savoir au point de le plonger dans le plus total désespoir."

257 “Like the Lover, who falls in love when he sees the rosebush reflected in the fountain of Narcissus, Pygmalion is the victim of a manifestation of self-love when he falls in love with the statue of his own creation. His folly develops quickly into a very clear loss of reason with comic, pathetic, and tragic consequences,” Dahlberg, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 21.

258 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.21035-38. "C’est ainsi qu’il se meurt et qu’il se détruit sous le coup de sa folle pensée, Pygmalion, victime de son illusion, séduit par sa statue qui reste sourde." (Trsl. Armand Strubel)


was caught before it was too late and turned into melancholy, whereas Pygmalion’s case
was already a lost cause.

**Sexual healing and entertainment: Nature of Fabliaux and Nouvelles**

*Fabliaux* and *Nouvelles* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are a great source
of information about the ways of life, the thoughts and mentality of the time. Not only do
they describe, in a comic way, the habits of the middle class, but also those of the
“vilains.” Indeed, the characters usually represented are clerks, peasants, women and
cuckolds of all social classes, as well as knights. The *nouvelles* expand this list to all
possible characters, while still keeping the traditional *fabliaux* ones. Marie-Claude de
Crécy indicates that *fabliaux* are “histoires brèves empruntées à la vie quotidienne, ou
perce une observation de la réalité.”\(^{261}\) *Fabliaux* usually give a moral at the end of the
story in order to “revendiquer une valeur exemplaire.”\(^{262}\) Their purpose is consequently
didactic. *Nouvelles* are the descendents, chronologically, historically and stylistically of
the *fabliaux*. Not only are the characters represented in the *nouvelles* similar to those in
the *fabliaux*, but also do we see actual *fabliaux* rewritten in prose in the style of the
nouvelle. The difference between the two, *fabliaux* and *nouvelles*, being that the nouvelle
“ne se définit pas par son sujet mais pas sa technique d’écriture. La plupart des *nouvelles*
sont des nouvelles moutures de *fabliaux* bien connus.”\(^{263}\)

It is also very interesting to note that both *fabliaux* and *nouvelles* were written for
all audiences, and were not reserved for a particular group: “on imagine facilement les

\(^{263}\) Dubuis, *Cent Nouvelles*, p. 20.
jongleurs récitants des fabliaux devant toutes sortes de publics.” 264 This is important in the understanding of the information presented in the fabliaux and nouvelles about sicknesses that are presented in numerous works: “We find [illness] in one form or another in some fifty fabliaux.” 265 Indeed, a few fabliaux and nouvelles present a character, male or female, that suffers suddenly from a disease, real or not, that will be cured later on by an act related to a sexual healing. The different types of characters that “suffer from a disease” will be studied, to see if this so-called disease could be melancholy or a form of it. Then the prescriptions used to cure this disease will be analyzed, as well as the origin of the idea of cure through “sexual healing.” After this medical study, the information given will be put into the perspective that these texts are comic and this information could change the perspective taken on the treatment of diseases in the Middle Ages. In order to accomplish this study, the fabliaux “Le paysan devenu médecin” and “Guillaume au faucon”, as well as the nouvelles 2, 20, 21, 55, 79, 90 and 95 from the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles will be used.

In the case of nouvelles and fabliaux from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they were written with the goal of entertaining. They were often parodies of daily events and were didactic. 266 They were mostly anti-clerical and humorous, and sometimes were titillatory tales which might now be termed a “locker room” type of humor. If the authors of fabliaux and nouvelles followed their goal of parody, and knowing that over time one cure for one particular disease became the cure for more illnesses, it could be possible

264 Crécy, Vocabulaire, p. 102.
265 Levy, p. 198
266 The Rose also had a didactic purpose: “The Art of Courtly Love [by Andreas Capellanus in the twelfth century] was part of the tendency toward didacticism that marks parts of the Rose.” Arden, The Romance of the Rose, p. 25.
that they generalized in their work that particular cure to all the ailments that exist. With such doing, they would keep their promise of making people laugh, and they would keep the interest of their audience by mentioning a little “excitement” like that of sex in their stories. The Middle Ages did not reserve a favorable place for diseases likened to melancholy, especially in religious teachings. They were dreaded and tainted with sin and damnation. By presenting these dreadful illnesses in a comic text was probably a way to belittle them, make them less impressive and fearful. One of the causes of melancholy being fear, to be afraid of catching the disease probably did not decrease the chances of catching it.

**Melancholy and entertainment in two fabliaux**

In the fabliau “Guillaume au Faucon”, the young knight is introduced as “a handsome, bright young man”\(^{267}\), who is in love with his master’s wife. The day he is asked to go to the battlefield, far away from the lady he loves, he gets sick. He starts moaning and sighing, and he does it many times throughout the fabliau. He doesn’t know what to do and feels inappropriate, says he is sick, suffers great pain and agony. He says that only the lady can cure him and clearly tells her that only a sexual encounter with her would cure him. When she refuses, he tells her that he will die because of her, and because he will stop eating and drinking. After a while of this diet, he is described as follows: “The sickness in him would not rest. It nagged him and worried him night and day. He lost his color, pined away. No wonder he was losing weight!”\(^{268}\) He then

\(^{267}\) *Guillaume au Faucon*, p. 90.  
\(^{268}\) *Guillaume au Faucon*, p. 98.
describes his sickness as follows: “The sickness runs from head to toes. In sudden fits it comes and goes. Every limb is racked with pain. I don’t think I’ll get up again.”

Then, as soon as he hears that his master agrees to give him his “falcon” (play on words coming from the lady, meaning the bird and herself), Guillaume recovers in a moment, and the lady, who had, of course, fallen in love with him and apparently suffered from the same illness as Guillaume, gives him “joy more sweet than pear or plum is good to eat.” It is understood that their encounter has cured the disease from which Guillaume and then the Lady suffered.

In the case of the fabliau Le paysan devenu médecin, where Hippocrates is mentioned, melancholy also appears. In this story, the wife of the hero (a peasant) was in a desperate and frustrated situation: her husband would beat her for no apparent reason but suspicion and jealousy. Her symptoms at the beginning of the story are those of melancholy. The peasant was then thought to be a famous physician by curing a young lady who had a fish bone stuck in her throat by making her laugh. This reversal of situation contributes to the relief of peasant’s wife’s frustration and changes her husband to a better man. Those feelings seem to disappear with the strikes he gets to admit he is a doctor that he really is not. Indeed, at the end “il ne battit plus sa femme; au contraire, il l’aime tendrement,” with everything that is implied with this statement as far as their sexual relationship is concerned. Consequently, this man who used to live a monotonous life comes back home and has a better relationship with his wife. Healing occurs also in this story, and the frustration disappears.

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269 Guillaume au Faucon, p.101.
270 Guillaume au Faucon, p.104.
271 Le paysan devenu médecin, p. 95.
In these particular example, two cases of “mild” melancholy were cured: one thanks to distraction of the mind (for the peasant), one thanks to coitus (for his wife), which are two recommended cures for melancholy in the Middle Ages.

**Melancholy and entertainment in a few Nouvelles**

In the second nouvelle of *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, a religious man is being punished for having approached a young lady a little too closely, and probably having taken a little too much pleasure in examining her. In this example, there are two contradictory ideas: on the one hand, the religious man is trying to avoid melancholy since “moderate indulgence in venery is healthful, for the seed should occasionally be evacuated,” because an accumulation of seeds rots in the body and causes melancholy; and on the other hand, the man is being punished for his sin, going back to the idea of *acedia*, maybe comparing the young lady as the “noonday demon” who tempts religious men out of their vows. It does not matter what he chooses to do, a religious man has no way of avoiding melancholy: he will be punished one way or another.

In the twentieth nouvelle *Médecin malgré lui*, a young wife whose husband neglects her in bed is told by her mother to feign a terrible disease whose only cure, as the physician will tell the husband, is sexual intercourse. In this case, the woman does not really suffer from melancholy, but considering the known causes of melancholy, she might become melancholic if her sexual life does not improve: she is consequently applying preventive medicine concepts, with the help of her mother and the physician.

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272 The man’s “good eye” is hurt and he becomes completely blind.
The twenty-first nouvelle *Le remède de Mme l’Abbesse*, is probably the one which exemplifies the best the medical knowledge of the time, as well as the author’s wish to be humorous/ironic. In this story, a young abbess suddenly suffers from a terrible illness. All her symptoms are those of melancholy: she is sad, she cannot eat or sleep, and if she does not find a cure, she will die soon. Her doctor tells her that the only cure to her problem is intercourse. Of course, the abbess refuses this idea and would rather die than break her chastity vows. After a debate with the other nuns, she finally agrees to undergo the prescribed cure, and consequently gets better. It is fair to say that the abbess was probably suffering from melancholy, or its religious manifestation *acedia*.

In the Nineteenth nouvelle, *Le remède infaillible*, is probably presented the only “real” case of melancholy. A man has a very sick wife, with all the required symptoms of melancholy, who will probably die. After finally talking to her, he realizes that she wants to do the “joute amoureuse!” She tells him: “Vous imaginez-vous donc qu’il puisse y avoir en ce monde ici-bas un remède qui puisse nous aider, nous les femmes, à lutter contre la maladie et à retrouver la santé autre que la douce et amoureuse compagnie des hommes?” In this nouvelle, there is a mixture of medical evidence about melancholy, an illness that progressively makes you die, and its cure, sexual intercourse. The author could have made the man try other remedies that were available at the time to cure his wife’s disease, but he chose the one mentioned in order to fulfill his obligation as the entertainer of his readers.

In *Le remède souverain contre la peste*, there is an overgeneralization by the author of the medical knowledge he had in his possession. In this story, the plague is cured with

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274 *Le remède infaillible*, p. 321.
sexual intercourse. A cure that was expressly reserved for melancholy and its related illnesses is now used to cure a disease of epidemic value, which has nothing to do with melancholy. With this *nouvelle*, we are not dealing with any kind of transparency of the available sources of the time, but rather a use of fiction inadequate to history, with a definite purpose of entertainment.

**Entertainment in the *Rose***

Just as with the *fabliaux* and *nouvelles* studied, the end of the story demonstrates a relief of a deadly illness thanks to sexual intercourse. It could be reasonable to say that Jean de Meun was also an entertainer and wanted to keep his readers’ attention until the end. This entertaining value is also witnessed among the barons who are listening to Genius, impatient to listen to him: “Et cil, qui ses paroles plesent,/ s’antreguignent et s’antreboutent.” It is clear that they are looking forward to what is coming up: they know it will be an interesting and entertaining story. It would be fair to say that the barons represent the attentive audience Jean de Meun is planning to have for his work.

Jean de Meun was very aware of his audience. Sometimes the author himself, and not the lover anymore, appears in the narrative to address the reader directly, respecting the conventions of medieval composition. During these instances, Jean de Meun mentioned a few times that he knew that an audience needed to be kept in alert, and that story tellers are ranked good or bad due to their ability to keep an audience’s attention:

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275 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 19470-71 “Les auditeurs, réjouis de ces paroles, se font des clins d’oeil et se poussent du coude.”
276 “De toute évidence ils savent que ce qui va venir sera leste et réjouissant.” Nykrog, *L’Amour et la Rose*, p. 56.
Jean de Meun knew that his audience was looking for something exciting to keep reading his poem. Interestingly, the readers are kept in alert until the abrupt ending. There was probably no other way to finish the Lover’s long agony.

If the *Rose* portrays a subjective development of love, in Sarah Kay’s opinion, “The more the lover gives himself over to this transcendence, this passionate aspiration to union with a Supreme Being, the more his desire is coloured with what Lacan calls the ‘imaginary.’” Since the *Rose* is a work in which allegorical figures are portrayed, everything in it is metaphorical, including desire. Is Amant’s desire real or not? Is it springing from language, or springing from the self, as Key wonders? Jean de Meun also portrayed “real” characters, such as La Vieille, which remind the reader of the existence of a literal meaning “que la parfaite continuité de l’allégorie dissimulatorait.” In other words, there could be two worlds intertwined in this work: that of the metaphorical and that of the literal. In which category does Amant’s desire fall? In the case of this study, even if the lover’s desire for the rose is imaginary, and especially if it is springing from his imagination, it relates even more to the idea that the illness caused by this desire is an illness of the imagination. Kay also argues that the troubadours welcomed desire as fair, as a support and comfort through which they “show how the

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278 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 19441-46 “je préfère abréger mon propos pour ménager vos oreilles, car il n’est pas rare que celui qui prêche, quand il n’est pas bref et rapide, fait partir les auditeurs par sa trop grande prolixité.”
279 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l. 19971 “J’ajoute encore, mais sans vouloir vous ennuyer.”
281 Kay, *Desire*, p. 213.
symptom can also be a solution: they certainly intended to enjoy it." This idea parallels the concept developed that enjoyment and entertainment are related to Amant’s desire and his goal reached at the end.

The ending is actually quite abrupt and ironic in the way that the rose suddenly lets all her defenses down and agrees to be approached. Even though it is usual practice in the Middle Ages to end such a poem abruptly, it is quite a surprise. The vocabulary, imagery and metaphors used to describe the moment of intimacy between the young lover and the rose are quite humoristic as well. Compared to the first part of the *Rose*, the second one has been described as being a parody, distanced ironically from the first part by Guillaume de Lorris, belonging to the comical register. Using the ending Jean de Meun used is to perform a parody of courtly love. Ultimately, it is clear that irony (used by Jean de Meun) is the radical form of allegory, (mastered by Guillaume de Lorris), and that the two parts are linked by a manipulation by the second one of the first. Also, Jean de Meun knew about the causes and cures of melancholy and lovesickness, and coitus is the remedy of choice, to evacuate the excess wind/seeds/and

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284 “La rupture abrupte du songe est traditionnelle dans ce genre de poèmes, mais Jean manifeste ici une désinvolture toute particulière devant la fiction mise en place par Guillaume.” Strubel, *Rose*, p. 1121
286 “Avec son recul, la distanciation ironique qu’il introduit dans la trame de Guillaume, l’esprit parodique qui lui fait prendre la métaphore matrice du Roman dans un sens grivois, Jean de Meun fait basculer, par moments, le mystère poétique de son prédécesseur et les prestiges de son propre savoir dans le registre comique, qui, dans le système littéraire médiéval, constitue un contrepoint permanent. Principales sources de renouvellements d’une écriture aux technique et topiques contraignantes, la satire, la parodie, le rire constituent la subversion des genres dominants.” Strubel, *Rose*, p. 23
287 “L’affinité entre allégorie et ironie est donc établie par les théoriciens; l’ironie est la forme radicale de l’allégorie. En écrivant son poème, Jean dit ‘autrement’ ce que son prédécesseur voulait faire entendre.” Strubel, *Rose*, p. 105
288 “Far apart as were Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun in their views of life and love, there was yet enough affinity between them so that the later poet was able to manipulate without embarrassment the forms and the materials provided by his predecessor.” Gunn, *Mirror*, p. 416.
probably “dark energy” that surrounds melancholics, especially when a comical effect is sought after. Moreover, Jean de Meun was a clerk, and he probably knew that “il importait à une prédication à vocation populaire de se concentrer sur le familier, le quotidien de l’homme moyen en se pençant sur les modes de pensée et les préoccupations des divers états sociaux auxquelles elle pouvait avoir à s’adresser.” Jean de Meun made a few references throughout this work, making it possible that he was writing for a very wide public, even for non-intellectuals: “s’il iert qui le seüst aprandre/ a genz lais especiaument/ qui nou diroit generaument.” Since Jean de Meun’s work is drifting away from the typical roman courtois which was aimed at a particular social class, maybe he is also considering a wider audience for his work.

That the young lover suffered from love-sickness is certain. That he might have suffered a mild case of melancholy is possible. Over all, he has shown symptoms that were common to both conditions in the Middle Ages, and Jean de Meun was probably aware of this, considering all the knowledge he displayed in his work. Moreover, the instant when Jean de Meun told the reader that some definitions are so close that we cannot really differentiate if we are talking about one thing or three is great tactic for him to illustrate his understanding of what has happened to the concept of melancholy over time, up until his epoch. What is common to the works studied in this chapter, is that melancholy and love-sickness are not treated seriously, but rather, in a humorous way. Treating such a dreadful disease as melancholy, or fearful illness as acedia, or depressing ailment as love-sickness is probably best done with some humor.

289 Horowitz, Menache, Humour, p. 141.
290 Jean de Meun, Rose, l. 18246-48. “S’il existe quelqu’un capable de l’enseigner, pour les profanes surtout, pour peu qu’on sorte des généralités.”
Different takes on Montagne’s melancholy

Montaigne and his melancholy have been studied thoroughly by numerous writers. The subject has been understood and interpreted in many different ways. Since I do not want to repeat what has been said already, I would like to summarize some of the most influential ideas which have been written on Montaigne and his melancholy, as well as some other interpretations, not as well known, but insightful.

Influential works on Montaigne and his melancholy: Montaigne’s sanguine melancholy

With Montaigne en Mouvement (1982), Jean Starobinski analyzed the logic of the Essays and was the first scholar who devoted some attention to the subject of Montaigne and his melancholy. Starobinski, as the title of his work indicates, studied the movement in the Essays, which other scholars had noted as well due to the large imagery of movement in Montaigne’s work. Starobinski’s approach added the idea that there was also movement within Montaigne himself. With this context in mind, it is possible to see Starobinski’s idea that Montaigne’s mind and body resist a reduction to unity.

Montaigne, Essays, III, 2, p. 31.
First, Montaigne realized when he retired that he did not find the calm discovery of the self. Instead, in his chosen solitude and retreat, he experienced worries, transport, and saw monsters and unreal creatures within his spirit. Moreover, Montaigne’s complexion oscillates from sanguine to melancholic, rather than being a good mixture of the two at all times. According to Starobinski, Montaigne did not find what he thought he would in his mind, and his physiology seemed to be contrary to what he had imagined: this provoked Montaigne’s realization that he would not be able to attain his goal of finding his identity, or, finding out what identity is would have to be done differently.

For Starobinski, Montaigne started writing during an infidelity to his own physical norm, which meant that the search for identity had started the wrong way and was destined to be subverted by the variability of his temperament. Starobinski concludes by saying that the search and find of Montaigne’s identity would be possible when Montaigne accepts the paradox, the coexistence of opposites, when he accepts the reconciliation of identity and alterity.\(^{292}\)

Starobinski’s study contributes to this study in understanding the duality of Montaigne’s temperament (sanguine and melancholic), and how this temperament helps him discover his identity.

**Montaigne’s discovery of human nature**

In *Montaigne and Melancholy. The Wisdom of the Essays* (1983), Michael A. Screech put the emphasis on the origin of the *Essays*: an attack of melancholy, which he argued was also the root of Montaigne’s ideas. Screech described how Montaigne tried to find a

way to control enthusiasm, inspiration, ecstasy and exaltation of the soul, in order to seek the balance between body and soul, and to avoid madness, the “dark” side of melancholy.

Screech argued that Montaigne wanted to know who and what man is. During his study, he discovered that Man is matter and form and that they need to be kept together in order to know what Man is. Montaigne noticed that in a few instances, his study of man was disrupted by elements, which temporarily separated body and soul. Ecstasies, a temporary severance of the soul and body, could be caused by illnesses (like melancholy or madness), or by inspiration, and consequently, Montaigne distrusted them. Friendship and/or love isolate the soul from the body, as it did with Montaigne and La Boétie, and so created ecstasy. Montaigne’s complexion was, as defined by Aristotle, that of a genius, as seen in the sixteenth century. But according to Montaigne, souls detach from the body when geniuses are inspired or find themselves in a melancholic or manic phase, which made Montaigne suspicious of the fact that he was associated with genius.

Screech also argued that usually melancholics seek revelation and ecstasy rather than look at them critically, but that Montaigne was brought to be critical by his melancholy. Montaigne came to realize that the wise man binds his soul to the body, which is the opposite of ecstasy, and that Man is at home when his soul is in the body and not separated from it. By taking himself as the subject of his study and consequently going against the taboo of the time, Montaigne discovered himself as well as the nature of man: being made of matter and spirit, and that it was not possible to detach one from the other.

293 Until Montaigne’s time, it was believed that self-love, which would be represented in self-portraits, was the prime source of human error. Screech, Montaigne and Melancholy, p. 7.
294 Screech, Montaigne and Melancholy, p. 142-145.
Screech’s major contribution is the analysis of Montaigne’s different steps to the discovery of the self. This study treats Montaigne’s discoveries chronologically, and it emphasized a more religious side of Montaigne’s work. This work leads to the point of Montaigne’s discovery of what he is made of, so that a possibility of going beyond that conclusion will be possible.

**Montaigne and madness**

The author of “Montaigne, la mélancolie et la folie” in *Etudes montaignistes en hommage à Pierre Michel* (1984) presented yet another interpretation of Montaigne’s melancholy. Géralde Nakam believed that Montaigne, as an anthropologist, a humanist and creator, was intrigued by the problematics of mental illness, and that madness was in Montaigne’s mind an organic, even natural, process of self-destruction. Nakam argued that Montaigne was a melancholic in the depressed sense of the word, that this mental pathology troubled him greatly, and that it became a life or death situation for him. She also concluded that Montaigne had been depressed since childhood and that La Boétie’s death was not the event that triggered this state in him.

Nakam insists that Montaigne was scared of madness, and of becoming mad: he was afraid of the mind’s equilibrium being disturbed by an “accident” (such as lesions caused by physical or affective traumatisms,) which symbolized that even geniuses (in the definition of the Renaissance) were not safe from madness since people such as Le

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Tasse had gotten mad.\textsuperscript{298} He consequently, according to Nakam, dreaded madness because of its consequence of the degradation of intelligence and the loss of self it implied.\textsuperscript{299}

Since, according to Nakam, Montaigne was afraid of losing his intelligence and self because of madness, and since he recognized in him all the signs of melancholy (such as anxiety, instability, waves of despair, and lack of memory,) this illness could lead to a degradation of the self, and consequently to madness. Montaigne started writing as a therapeutic of diversion (with words as a remedy being the meaning of the \textit{Essays}, without which Montaigne would get lost in melancholy)\textsuperscript{300} to fill a void, master his apprehensions, measure his strength of character, and deliver his mind from idleness, and is consequently safe from the contagion of the century: melancholy.\textsuperscript{301}

Finally Nakam concluded by saying that Montaigne considered the human spirit as something with considerable powers which could also be disturbed the easiest, and that for Montaigne nothing was ever guaranteed: old age for example could bring a weakness of the body and the mind, which could make him fall into madness.\textsuperscript{302}

This article points out the relationship Montaigne saw between melancholy and madness, as well as that he clearly saw them as natural, physical illnesses, rather than supernatural. According to Nakam, while writing the \textit{Essays}, Montaigne was not only curing himself, but was also giving others an example on how to fight melancholy and madness, with a collective will to resist to the spread of these two illnesses.
Deconstructing Montaigne’s melancholy

Following the works of Starobinski, Screech and Nakam, Olivier Pot, a deconstructionist, argued that Montaigne’s melancholy existed before the loss of his friend (as Nakam explained), and that it is this particular humor which gave him the will to write. Aristotelian’s psychology and Renaissance humor theory about melancholy helped Montaigne conceive his process of artistic creation (as Screech noticed), which, Pot argues, is an erotic or generative process governed by the melancholic humor.303

In *L’Inquiétante Etrangeté. Montaigne : la Pierre, le Cannibale, la Mélancolie* (1993) Pot saw the *Essays* as a journey, which served to heal Montaigne.304 First he argued that Montaigne interpreted Aristotelian ideas on melancholy as defining a good and a bad melancholy, the good one being the creative one, and the bad one being the one which leads to madness.305 Then, Pot made a parallel between cannibalism and melancholy as a cannibal humor, a humor which devours (good melancholy being associated with a small appetite, a reasonable appetite, and bad melancholy being associated with cravings that are unreasonable.)306 Finally, Pot made the argument that during Montaigne’s trip to Italy where he was searching for a cure for his kidney stones, the trip itself became a metaphor for the mobility of spirit, and where the stones themselves become the transportation for melancholy.307

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303 Pot, *Etrangeté*, p. 22.
304 The journey Pot mentions could be put in parallel with Starobinski’s idea of Montaigne’s movement.
306 Pot *Etrangeté*, p. 159.
This work shows Montaigne’s work in a more metaphorical rather than literary way. For Pot, Montaigne’s melancholy is almost a metaphor in itself, representing his wondering spirit in movement, as well as his religiosity, and finally, himself.

**Other informative interpretations of Montaigne’s melancholy: Montaigne’s new humor**

In “Humeur Nouvelle de Montaigne” in *Mélanges à la mémoire de Franco Simone, IV: Tradition et originalité dans la Création Littéraire* (1983) Shegemi Sasaki is interested how Montaigne insists on the contradiction between the "new humor" which overtook him (the melancholic humor) and his hereditary complexion (sanguine), which is the consequence of his sedentary life and his solitude.\(^{308}\) This work espouses the idea that Pot refutes, since he believes, like Nakam, that Montaigne suffered from Melancholy before the death of La Boétie.

The author of this article argues that Montaigne, through his definition of himself, found the reason which determined the writing of the *Essays*: the fact that he experienced a melancholic humor. Although Montaigne showed a diversity of humors, the one which won was the melancholic or meditative one, and through the confusion he discovered in the melancholic humor he realized that he was physical and metaphysical, and that both were part of the *Essays*, and so part of himself, and part of every human being.\(^{309}\)

Sasaki also questions whether Montaigne was the first Romantic, and if his melancholy could have been the far-away advent of a poetical movement, since semantically the word spleen used in English goes back to a French word from the

thirteenth century “splen” which designated the spleen, an organ very much linked to the atrabilious hypochondria.\textsuperscript{310}

Sasaki makes a parallel between Montaigne’s new humor and “sweet melancholy”, a notion mostly associated with poets and novelists, which Montaigne originally experienced when he first felt the signs of his melancholy.

Sasaki primarily tries to establish Montaigne as the one who transformed a type of melancholy which refused all kinds of compromises and mixtures into an impure melancholy. Also, the author argued that Montaigne was responsible for making the word melancholy one that defined a momentary and modern ability or disposition.\textsuperscript{311}

This article touched on all subjects related to Montaigne and melancholy, offering radical insights into topics other critics had not discussed, such as speaking of Montaigne as an early Romantic, or emphasizing that it was a “new” humor that overtook him. In this way, Sasaki is being controversial, because others had discussed Montaigne’s humor but not as a new concept. I think that Sasaki’s ideas are interesting and should be developed further, especially in the connection with the Romantics.

**Psychoanalytical approaches to Montaigne’s melancholy**

Patricia Teefy published “Montaigne: Mask and Melancholy” in \textit{Ça parle} (1985.) In this article, the author examined the melancholic disposition of Montaigne’s essay on friendship and showed that the structure of Montaigne’s monument to La Boëtie was not only determined by the black humor but that it also reflected the symptomatic

nature of writing. She argued that melancholy and writing became analogous, because they both produced *l’étrangeté* of divided plenitude, which Montaigne mourned.\textsuperscript{312}

Teefy argued that Montaigne found plenitude in his friend: he had found completeness in the other. Then, the loss of the friend left Montaigne with the task of recuperating the lost self-image and this put him in a state of melancholy. Finally, the essay filled the void produced by La Boétie’s death, because it took the form, the body, and consequently, the essay was the representation of loss discussed by Freud and Burton, seen as the symptomatic result of melancholy, where Montaigne experienced both pleasure and sadness (typical of a melancholic state.)\textsuperscript{313}

Teefy observed that the essay as representation and reflection could be seen as a *mise-en-scène* not of friendship, but of death, of loss, of absence and that the phenomenological representation of the other became a melancholic gesture since there was no possibility of identification in this production of alterity. She also stated that writing is a melancholy act of alienation, because it produces and perpetuates the “strangeness,” the redoubled regret of an absent signifier.\textsuperscript{314}

Despite a few errors of interpretation, such as saying that Robert Burton was a sixteenth century writer, and that for Montaigne body and soul could be separated, this essay is interesting in its use of Freud’s theory of melancholy and mourning to prove that the essay on friendship takes the form of the lost friend, and also that writing to ease Montaigne’s pain is not the solution to his melancholy, which goes against all the

\textsuperscript{312} Teefy, *Montaigne*, p. 22  
\textsuperscript{313} Teefy, *Montaigne*, p. 26  
\textsuperscript{314} Teefy, *Montaigne*, p. 30
theories of sixteenth and seventeenth century writers who claimed that melancholy could be cured by writing.

Carla Frecceroni in “Early Modern Psychoanalytics: Montaigne and the Melancholic Subject of Humanism” in Qui Parle: Literature, Philosophy, Visual Arts, History (1999) argued, like Teefy, that it is possible to analyze a work of the Renaissance psychoanalytically, despite the fact that psychoanalysis did not exist at the time. By using references to the theories of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, Juliana Schiesari and other analysts, she argued that Montaigne’s exploration of lameness in one of his essays could be the suggestion of an early modern textual genealogy for (post)Freudian psychoanalysis.  

More specifically, Frecceroni argued that Montaigne’s text seemed to perform the simultaneous disavowal of homoerotic desire and sublimation into friendship, and that he co-articulates cannibalism, friendships, politics and loss at the site of melancholic subject, and that the figure of the cannibal continues to haunt the masculine melancholic subject of Humanism in the West.  

This work is important for this study because it is a psychoanalytical approach of a work that was written before all psychoanalytical terms existed, and so opens the door to other such studies. Also, it uses modern analysts’ interpretation of Montaigne’s works which show that psychoanalytical studies of his work are possible. Some studies of Montaigne have also argued that the relationship between Montaigne and La Boëtie was a homosexual one, and this article is part of this trend of thought.

315 Freccero, Psychoanalytics, p. 98-99
316 Freccero, Psychoanalytics, p. 109
Problematic: Why another study on Montaigne’s melancholy?

So many thorough studies on Montaigne and his melancholy have been done, as seen above. Whether destructionist or psychoanalytical, their authors emphasized a particular side of Montaigne’s illness that others has not developed before. My approach to Montaigne’s melancholy is different in the way that I can benefit from all the research that has been done, so that I am able to identify melancholy as the mould for his personality, his way of writing. Montaigne’s melancholy is the reason of his discovery of who and what Man really is, as well as how men should live their lives. I intend to discover what truly links Montaigne’s melancholy and his writing, in my opinion. First, Montaigne and his *Essays* must be examined in the context of the sixteenth century French Renaissance to understand the ideas, concepts, and misconceptions about melancholy current in his lifetime. Montaigne’s ideas deviated from the accepted notion of the sixteenth century, established primarily by Marcilio Ficino, responsible for the revival of melancholy as a sign of genius, that all geniuses, especially intellectuals of the time, were melancholic. Montaigne tried to prove that he was not “melancholic,” as defined by his colleagues. Then, by studying selected essays from Montaigne’s work, I will show some instances in which Montaigne proved to be a melancholic, and how he emphasized through his writing, the significance melancholy has had in his life and line of work, especially in his discovery of the nature of man and how men should live their lives. Finally, as discovered in Chapter One, poetry and diversion, maybe humor, will be proven to be indispensable in the good life of melancholics and men in general.
Philosophical and Medical context of melancholy

The sixteenth century is the century of melancholy, inscribed between two moments in art: the painting of Melencolia I by Albrecht Dürer in 1514, and the publication of the Anatomy of Melancholy by Robert Burton in 1621. Minois explains that the melancholy of this particular century is due to the five following factors: 1) the humanist of the sixteenth century feels more and more alone in a world that seems to constantly become larger. According to Minois, progress and the enlargement of the world, which lead to modernism, also direct the mind to a different view of the world and mankind. The realization of the immensity of the world, as well as the smallness of men lead to a general pessimism, to a depressed mind, and possibly to a depressed or melancholic generation. It is rather dangerous to categorize the mindset of a whole population over a century. In effect, Montaigne and Rabelais, for example, were considered the symbols of the optimistic Renaissance, carrying the hope of a whole generation. But these two authors also represented the pessimistic Renaissance, with the disillusionment of the same generation. It is the juxtaposition of these two realities that offers the wisdom sought by humanists. Montaigne especially questioned the knowledge accumulated for over a century. Most accepted ideas of the Middle Ages, like the position of the universe center, or the religion of Europe, or even the topics writers use to compose, were being challenged.

The second factor that causes melancholy in the sixteenth century, according to Minois, is that not only the humanists and intellectuals realized that the quest for universal knowledge was impossible, but also, according to them, the excess of

317 Minois, Mal de Vivre, 103
Intellectual work also caused despair. The third cause is that a progression of individualism shows a growth of narcissism that is itself a source of melancholy. The fourth is that the theme of death and time as a destructor came back constantly in the works of this time period. And finally, the fifth cause of melancholy in the Renaissance according to Minois is that the link between genius and melancholy was so fashionable that even artists or intellectuals who were known to be happy were qualified as “melancholics.” Minois also indicates that this disease was so widespread in that century that all sixteenth century authors talked about it as a virus that came from Italy. Even Montaigne mentions the contagion of his century by this illness. How can we know, then, if an author of the sixteenth century was truly melancholic, or if he was simply playing with the notion of that time?

Doctors of the sixteenth century did not see melancholy as writers and artists did. They saw it as due to very physical causes, as a disease that could be contagious and that needed to be evacuated from the body. It was still seen as being provoked by the black bile. Supposedly, the excess of black bile was caused by a malfunction of the hypochondria (organs found in the abdomen, especially the spleen). When the spleen

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318 Minois, Mal de Vivre, p. 108.
319 “Mais le mélancolique ne peut parler que de lui-même, même quand il parle des autres, car sa mélancolie imprègne sa vision du monde. Montaigne le fait ouvertement, et Burton indirectement ; lorsqu’il semble parler d’autre chose, c’est toujours lui qui est en scène. Ce n’est pas un hasard si l’autobiographie apparaît au XVIe siècle. Comme beaucoup d’autres, Burton cherche à se rassurer en reconstruisant sa vie, en se l’expliquant à lui-même—façon de se convaincre qu’elle n’a pas été totalement vaine.” Minois, Mal de Vivre, p. 154.
320 "Le lien entre génie artistique et mélancolie s’impose rapidement au point de devenir un cliché que l’on n’hésite pas à plaquer d’office sur des personnages qui ont laissé une réputation d’hommes sereins, équilibrés et heureux de vivre, comme Raphaël" Minois, Mal de Vivre, p. 121
321 "Si les auteurs [du XVIe siècle] distinguent des variétés de mélancolie—religieuse, amoureuse, furieuse, cynique, misanthrope et autres--, ils sont unanimes pour dire qu’elle vient d’Italie. L’Angleterre est elle-même gagnée par le virus Melancholia" Minois, Mal de Vivre, p. 122
322 Montaigne, Essais, III, 2, p. 807
malfonctionned, the excess bile spreaded over the whole body, and caused hypochondriac melancholy: “Doncques la cause conjointe de ceste fièvre est l’humeur mélancolique naturel, qui se pourrit hors des grands vaisseaux, dans les petits qui sont dans la première région du corps.” Ambroise Paré had also a more psychological explanation of melancholy, with cures that resemble those that Descartes would mention a century later. Besides a different diet and very mild medications, Paré also recommended exercising, playing games, listening to musical instruments and pleasing speeches, as well as doing anything that would rejoice the patient. For him, melancholy had psychical causes due to the worries of the mind. But he also recommended bleedings, even for two hours in a row, purgatives, and white wine every morning to win over the cold humor with a warmer body.

Another doctor of the time, André Du Laurens also had his take on melancholy, and emphasized the fact that one’s way of living influenced one’s psyche, especially when one studied too much, but he still related the whole disease to a physical condition of the black bile that emanated vapors which made melancholics see everything in black.

Melancholy as a fashionable disease remained a part of the intellectual world. Among the less educated people, melancholy had negative connotations and was mainly associated with madness:

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323 Paré, Œuvres, p. 148
324 Paré, Œuvres, p. 151
325 A. Paré Œuvres Complètes, p. 148 : “Ceste fièvre s’engendre si principalement à cela est conjointe une façon et condition de vivre triste, penible et fascheuse, pleine de crainte et d’anxiété.”
326 Paré, Œuvres, p. 152-3
327 Du Laurens, Discours, p. 90
Dans la culture populaire, la mélancolie conserve une connotation négative, quand elle n’est pas purement et simplement assimilée à la folie. (...) Intellectuels et artistes, eux, sont fascinés par la mélancolie, qui reste malgré tout mystérieuse : ils l’étudient, la dissèquent, la traitent comme une véritable personne.  

Montaigne resisted being considered a genius but recognized all the symptoms of the definition of melancholy as a sign of genius in himself, and worked hard to prevent his melancholy from becoming madness, the illness he feared the most. It is probable that Montaigne’s opinion was influenced by both his reluctance to believe in melancholy as a sign of genius and the accepted belief that melancholy was a sign of genius, or maybe, as Nakam stated: “Probablement parce qu’il la [la folie] redoute pour lui-même, et que cette perspective l’épouvante, Montaigne en a une conception totalement pessimiste, et la tient pour une catastrophe irréversible.”

**Montaigne in this context**

Montaigne and his essays fit in the frame of the melancholic sixteenth century: he demonstrated the worries of an individual centered upon himself, looking with anxiety at a world that was dangerously deriving. He was writing his self-portrait, which was considered as narcissistic at that time. Additionally, he was working intellectually, working constantly with books and words, rewriting and revising his essays, as we know from the three editions he published of his work.

Until the end of the Middle Ages, melancholy was interpreted in two different ways. Although the pejorative connotation of sin in the concept of *acedia* gained popularity thanks to the Church, the original concept of illness due to a humoral

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328 Minois, *Mal de Vivre*, 140
329 Nakam, *Montaigne*, p. 211
imbalance also prevailed. While sixteenth century doctors treated melancholy as a physiological disease, with a thought that it might be psychological as well, the definition of genius by Aristotle came back into fashion, among intellectuals.\textsuperscript{330} During this period, it was commonly believed that all geniuses were melancholic, and that they were born with all the necessary dispositions in order to become melancholic. According to Minois, “Jusque dans son rire, le XVIe siècle se montre éminemment favorable à la mélancolie. L’évolution économique, religieuse et culturelle favorise le développement de cette forme de mal de vivre qui envahit les élites intellectuelles et sociales.”\textsuperscript{331} Although this statement is generalizing the thoughts of a time period, some truth can be found in it.

**A Renaissance melancholic: Marsilio Ficino and his influence**

The event that triggered the revival of melancholy as a sign of genius was the rediscovery and interpretation by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) of Aristotle’s text, *Problemata XXX, I*, that originally gave positive attributes to the disease. On top of being due to an imbalance in the four humors that compose the human body (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic), Aristotle associated it with Plato’s frenzy or divine frenzy.

*The Three Books of Life* by Marsilio Ficino (1482) was a very popular work during Ficino’s life, and was even read by Robert Burton a century later, who mentioned him many times in his work on melancholy. Ficino represented himself as a genius offering a self-portrait of himself, suffering from melancholy. His work was consequently

\textsuperscript{330} “Pour quelle raison tous ceux qui ont été des homes d’exception, en ce qui regarde la philosophie, la science de l’Etat, la poésie ou les arts, sont-ils manifestement mélancoliques, et certains au point même d’être saisis par des maux dont la bile noire est l’origine” Aristotle, *Problemata XXX, I*, p.83.

\textsuperscript{331} Minois, *Mal de Vivre*, p. 116
Ficino believed that the attainment of wisdom was possible through the health of body, and the health of mind. It dealt with the art of living for intellectuals, showing them how to take advantage of their temperament and its effects and how to escape from its dangers. Ficino’s work is important because it was not until then that the Aristotelian link between brilliance and melancholy was truly revived, became the theme of the Renaissance, and was used and exploited in later centuries. Marsilio Ficino belonged to the well-known Platonic Academy of Florence, which was the center of his cult in Italy. The prestige of this Italian circle constituted of proud melancholics contributed to the rehabilitation of melancholy, even making it the indispensable temperament of the sixteenth century intellectual. His work, Three Books on Life, written in Latin and translated, was a great success in Italy and in the rest of Europe. There were twenty six editions of it in Latin in one century, and multiple translations diffuse throughout Europe the image of the melancholic intellectual. This is how we know that Ficino’s work was read by intellectuals in other parts of Europe, France included, as well as through the correspondence he entertained with numerous intellectuals around Europe.

Ficino was a brilliant man and was a depressed man. Moreover, he was, proudly, by his own admission, born under the sign of Saturn, thus making him even more prone to the melancholic disposition, as believed at that time: “A dominant Saturn was a source of...

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332 Ficino, *Three Books*, p. 113 “How many things cause learned people either to be melancholy or to eventually become so.”
333 Ficino, *Three Books*, p. 107
334 Minois, *Mal de Vivre*, p.118
335 Minois, *Mal de Vivre*, p. 119
of pride among the intellectuals of the Renaissance". Ficino says that there are three causes to the “perfect” mixture of sanguine and melancholic temperaments which makes of learned people geniuses. The first one is celestial, the second natural and the third is human. The celestial has to do with astrology and the influence of Saturn and Mercury who invite men to investigate doctrines and make them persevere in investigating them. The natural cause, according to Ficino, is the pursuit of science, and the human cause is physiological.

Because of his natural predisposition, and his knowledge of Aristotle’s ideas on geniuses, Ficino brought all the ideas related to melancholy together: the Aristotelian idea of melancholic genius and the link between Saturn and the contemplative life of intellectuals. His work was distinctive, as Radden observes, in “developing the astrological significance of melancholy, particularly its relation to the planet Saturn.”

Ficino was the first translator and commentator of the works of Plato, and had a tremendous influence in his lifetime on his contemporaries, as seen through the impressive correspondence he entertained with contemporaries from all over the world. Also, he “was one of the first in the context of Christianity to emphasize belief in the immortality of the soul, a doctrine which, curiously, had been neglected during the Middle Ages.” Like Descartes, as discussed in Chapter Three, Ficino was a sick child

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336 Raffini, Marsilio Ficino, p. 11.
337 Ficino, Three Books, p. 113.
338 Ficino, Three Books, p. 113-115.
341 Raffini, Marsilio Ficino, p. 11.
and as he himself mentioned repeatedly, was subject to gloom: “Saturn seems to have impressed the seal of melancholy on me from the beginning.” Ficino was depressed, although his melancholy, instead of making him lethargic as described in the symptoms of melancholy or *acedia* in the Middle Ages, made him constantly move, agitated without a goal. The novelty with Ficino is that he was proud of being melancholic and the definition he gave of it was very flattering, where he does the synthesis of the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and Christianism, as well as astrology. According to Minois, Ficino believed that:

> On peut être mélancolique de naissance, comme lui-même [Ficino], né dans la phase ascendante de Saturne, et l’on est alors poussé naturellement vers l’étude des choses de l’esprit ; ou bien mélancolique par déformation, par adoption en quelque sorte, en se vouant au travail intellectuel.  

It is noteworthy that one did not have to be born with melancholy in order to be melancholic. According to this view, one could become melancholic by devoting oneself to intellectual activities. Would this mean that the predisposition to become melancholic (born under the sign of Saturn, an imbalance in the humors with a more sanguine and melancholic temperament) was not necessary for an intellectual to “catch” the disease? Ficino emphasized that he had all these predispositions, and prided himself in them. But with this new definition, any person who began intellectual work could become a melancholic.

It is during Ficino’s schooling with Niccolo Tignosi da Foligno in Pisa that he learned about Peripathetic philosophy and medicine, which was also known and important to Montaigne in his study of man:

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342 Ficino, *Letters*, 1:33  
343 Minois, *Mal de Vivre*, p. 118
La secte Péripatétique, de toutes les sectes la plus civilisée, attribue à la sagesse ce seul soin de pourvoir et procurer en commun le bien de ces deux parties associées [the soul and the body]: et montre les autres sectes, pour n’estre assez attachées à la consideration de ce meslange, s’estre partialisées, cette-cy pour le corps, cette autre pour l’ame, d’une pareille erreur, et avoir escarté leur subject, qui est l’homme, et leur guide, qu’ils advouent en general estre nature. 344

For Montaigne’s study of man, as mentioned below, body and soul needed to be kept together.

It is also when studying with Tignosi that Ficino discovered one of the ideas he was going to develop throughout his life: the reconciliation of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophies. “[Tignosi] taught that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were irreconcilable, thus opposing what was to become one of the most cherished ideas of his pupil, the notion of the Great Concord, a tradition of thought which attempts to stress the essential harmony underlying Platonic and Aristotelian views.” 345 His favorite topics about which to write were divine beings, human passions, and abstractions. A letter written to Pellegrino degli Agli called On Divine Frenzy, is based on Plato’s concept, and it reveals “both Ficino’s impassioned nature and his clear understanding of an aspect of Platonic doctrine which would again find expression in his book On Love”. 346 In this letter he explains that the soul

Filled with God… strives with all its might to reach the heavens, and thither it is drawn. Plato calls this drawing away and striving ‘divine frenzy’, and divides it into four parts’ [the frenzy of love, the frenzy of poetry, the frenzy of mysteries and the frenzy of prophecy and divination which occurs ‘when the mind, withdrawn from the body, is moved by divine rapture’]. 347

344 Montaigne, Essais II, 17, p. 303.
345 Raffini, Marsilio Ficino, p. 15.
346 Raffini, Marsilio Ficino, p. 18.
347 Raffini, Marsilio Ficino, p. 19.
This state of frenzy can be compared to a state of ecstasy, which, as defined by Montaigne, is the severance of the body and the soul.

Ficino was a Platonist in a world totally dominated by Aristotelianism and he believed he had been chosen to revive Platonism in his time. Moreover, what Ficino really wanted to do, optimistically, was to reconcile Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Christianity, exemplified by his work *Platonic Theology*. Marsilio Ficino’s idea to reconcile these three schools of thought was exemplified in his definition of melancholy. Within the illness of melancholy, the three theories could co-exist without problems: Aristotelianism indicated that all geniuses were melancholic, Christianity described how to fill his soul with God, which would lead him to divine frenzy, a Platonic concept.

**A different kind of Renaissance melancholic: Montaigne**

When Montaigne started writing his essays, the relationship between genius and melancholy surrounded him and was an accepted fact. It is also, as we have seen, a very fashionable disease that was widely cherished. Sadness and imagination are the two symptoms associated with melancholy. As for sadness, Montaigne said that he was exempt from that feeling or state of mind: “Je suis des plus exempts de cette passion, et ne l’ayme ny l’estime”. But he knew how fashionable melancholy and its symptoms were in his time: “quoy que le monde ayt prins, comme à prix faict, de l’honorer de faveur particulière. Ils en habillent la sagesse, la vertu, la conscience : sot et monstrueux

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ornement". Sadness and melancholy are used as a part of the appearance people give themselves in society.

At the same time, Montaigne told the stories of very heroic men who did not cry, did not show any sign of sadness when they heard of or saw a dear relative (son, daughter) deceased. What they felt inside was beyond words, and beyond any physical reaction, but mutism or death. Montaigne was a stoic, and stoicism defended such a feeling as sadness to its disciples. Consequently, Montaigne admired the men who did not cry or react outrageously to the misfortune that fell upon them. He despised violent passions, as he said, and believed that we should not react in the instant of the moment when something, good or bad, happens. On the contrary, one should always wait before reacting, because, as when people are in love: “l’ame est lors aggravée de profondes pensées, et le corps abbatu et languissant s’amour”.

Also,

l’effort d’un desplaisir, pour estre extreme, doit estonner toute l’ame, et lui empescher la liberté de ses actions : comme il nous advient à la chaude alarme d’une bien mauvaise nouvelle, de nous sentir saisis, transis, et comme perclus de tous mouvements, de façon que l’ame se relaschant après aux larmes et aux plaintes, semble se desprendre, se demesler et se mettre plus au large, et à son aise.

In this section, Montaigne contradicted himself. He mentioned that “Je suis peu en prise de ces violentes passions” while a few paragraphs beforehand, he included himself in his description of how one feels when hearing bad news. He wrote “nous”, he did not exclude himself from the group of people who actually have a physical reaction like crying when they hear that something bad has happened. He also admitted that by having

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349 Montaigne, Essais I, 2, p. 43.
350 Montaigne, Essais, I, 2, p. 45.
351 Montaigne, Essais I, 2 p.44, emphasis mine.
352 Montaigne, Essais I, 2 p. 46.
this physical reaction, people felt better ("à son aise"), as if the soul expelled the sad feeling through tears or lamentations. Montaigne wanted to be able to control his reactions, his passions, but he had just as many difficulties as others to do so. He did not give an example of himself not reacting to bad news, but did give examples of other people.

**Montaigne’s rejection of Ficino’s ideas**

Montaigne differed from Marsilio Ficino because he rejected Platonic melancholy and Ficino’s ideas for two reasons. The first one was that for him the soul and the body needed to be kept together to be studied, as shown through the evidence from scholastic tradition: a wise man binds soul and body together (the body and soul are a happily married couple.) The second one is that Montaigne distrusted ecstasies (which are the severance of body and soul), caused by illnesses (madness) or inspiration\(^3\). In other words, Montaigne did not believe ecstasies, the severance of body and soul, to be a sign of genius.

Montaigne also differed from Ficino in that he was not a proud melancholic. Montaigne knew that he had all the dispositions (sanguine and melancholic temperament) necessary to be a melancholic genius. Montaigne said of himself: “J’ai au demeurant la taille forte et ramassée; le visage, non pas gras, mais plein; la complexion, entre le jovial et le mélancholique, moiennement sanguine et chaude”.\(^4\) Montaigne described his physical attributes and his temperament. The mixture of sanguine and melancholic was

\(^3\) "Primitive man as Montaigne conceived him did not wrench his soul from his body in the name of some false higher wisdom; for Montaigne, admiration for simple men went together with a distrust of philosophical ecstasy" Screech, *Montaigne*, p. 125.

\(^4\) Montaigne, *Essais* II, 17, p. 304.
the perfect combination, as described by Aristotle and later Ficino, of melancholics. But Montaigne did not trust what surrounded him. He did not want to be associated with melancholy or genius, because, according to Nakam, he was afraid of its consequences. He took care to differentiate himself from the melancholic humor and said he was “songecreux,” a daydreamer. Also, he believed that the complexion that defined him was of no use: “les qualitez mesmes qui sont en moy non reprochables, je les trouvois inutiles en ce siecle”, and that he was just lucky to have been born in a century when the melancholic complexion, temperament, or simply when melancholy was fashionable. In other words, if Montaigne had been born in any other century, probably a few centuries earlier, his complexion would have been associated with pejorative, negative connotations, and he would not have been associated with a genius. Because he saw it as something negative, probably as the most fearful thing that could have happened to him, he was so critical of his melancholy and of what surrounded him at the time. He had learned that everything was relative and depended on circumstances, although he knew that the work he was writing, presenting himself as the subject of his essays, in order to study mankind, was a rather grand entreprise and was the first of its kind: “C’est le seul livre au monde de son espece, d’un dessein farouche et extravagant”. 355 Montaigne knew that writing such a work in the sixteenth century could have been taken as the undertaking of a lunatic, as Screech has pointed out. 356

355 Montaigne, Essais II, 8, p. 56.
356 “Any author may play down his work: Montaigne went well beyond convention. His terms mean that people might judge his undertaking to be insane. His self-imposed task was farouche et extravagant, ‘wild and abnormal.’” Screech, Montaigne, p. 66.
The origin of the Essays: An attack of melancholy

If Montaigne had been born with melancholy, why did it take the death of his friend, Etienne de la Boétie, to make him realize that he had to fight it? Sometimes melancholics need an event to trigger their illness: the death of La Boétie seemed to have been Montaigne’s.

An attack of melancholy due to Montaigne’s natural complexion?

The origin of Montaigne’s idea to write the essays, as he stated it himself, was an attack of melancholy:

C’est une humeur melancholique, et une humeur par consequent très ennemie de ma complexion naturelle, produit par le chagrin de la solitude en laquelle il y a quelques années que je m’estoy jetté, qui m’a mis premierement en teste cette resverie de me mesler d’écrire.

Montaigne rejected all the implications related to melancholy as understood by his contemporaries. In fact, knowing that his complexion was sanguine-melancholic, he knew through the vast literature available all the consequences of such a complexion on his mental well-being. Consequently, with his essays, he was trying to find a certain balance, a way of finding an exit out of the predicted effects of the disease on him: a remedy to idleness as well. Since this condition, as seen earlier, made its sufferers demanding and never satisfied, Montaigne’s state of mind and way of working fitted with that model.

357 “many an author noted that one of the possible precipitating causes of melancholia was the grief and sadness occasioned by the loss of a loved one.” Jackson, Melancholia, p. 312.
358 Montaigne, Essais, II, 8, p.56
An attack of melancholy due to the death of La Boétie

Montaigne said that his attack of melancholy was provoked by the death of his dear friend La Boétie, after which he retired from the world into his library. Considering the strength of the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie, it is not a surprise that the death of the latter created a shock in Montaigne that would cause an access of sadness, depression or melancholy, especially considering his “natural disposition”. In order to fight this affliction, Montaigne needed to find order or unity in his life. The unity of his life became the unity of his writing, which involved discovering and explaining the knitting up of body and soul and how it was done, which is also what Descartes would undertake in his *Passions de l’âme*. Montaigne did not deny that he was sanguine melancholic, but he denied that his complexion made of him a genius. Knowing he was melancholic, he decided to face it through writing.

Since the death of La Boétie had such an impact on Montaigne and caused him to explore his melancholy, their relationship needs to be examined in order to understand the origins of Montaigne’s feelings. There has been a lot of controversy about the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie. Montaigne described it in terms that could be interpreted in many different ways, although it is necessary to keep in mind that Montaigne wrote about La Boétie some twenty years after the death of the latter. The description of their first meeting could be understood as love at first sight: “Et à notre première rencontre, qui fut par hazard en une grande feste et compagnie de ville, nous nous trouvâmes si prins, si cognus, si obligez entre nous, que rien dès lors ne nous fut si
The description of the compatibility of their souls resembles the definition of Platonic love:

Nos ames ont charrié si unient ensemble, elles se sont considérées d’une si ardante affection, et de pareille affection descouvertes jusques au fin fond des entrailles l’une à l’autre, que non seulement je connoissoy la sienne comme la mienne, mais je me fusse certainement plus volontiers fié à luy de moy qu’à moy.\textsuperscript{360}

Platonic love is a form of \textit{eros}, not of \textit{philia}, which means that it is exclusive, because one can only exchange souls with one other being.

Montaigne, who believed that a wise man binds his soul and body together, separated his soul from his body in the case of La Boétie, by describing their union through their souls, which also proves that in Montaigne’s mind their relationship was spiritual only, and not physical. If melancholy was a disease of the soul, it can be understood that the loss of La Boétie triggered it, since the link between the two men was exclusively through the soul, and the disappearance of one could definitely cause the other one’s soul to suffer from it.

\textbf{An attack of melancholy or mourning? Freud’s theory}

The concepts of loss and mourning associated with melancholy have been studied and associated for numerous centuries, since Constantinus Africanus, as seen in the Introduction, revealed that one of the sources of the sadness of melancholy was a scholar’s loss of his books. Since then, other writers such as Robert Burton, linked melancholy and mourning, without making a clear distinction between the time when a

\textsuperscript{359} Montaigne, \textit{Essais}, p. 236
\textsuperscript{360} Montaigne, \textit{Essais}, p. 237
mourning person is mourning and the time this person falls into an excess of sadness that becomes melancholy.

Freud wrote an essay on mourning and melancholy. For him, the feelings one feels after the loss of a beloved one can be compared to a melancholic state: it is a pathological reaction of an individual confronted by an affective lost. He lists all the symptoms associated with melancholy (depression or sadness, loss of interest for the outside world, loss of the ability to love, inhibition of activity) and establishes the equation which is the key to his demonstration: melancholy = mourning + x. According to Freud, there is a fifth symptom, which appears with melancholy: loss of self-esteem. Freud also noticed that there are secondary symptoms which appear in a case of melancholy: insomnia, and loss of appetite, as if the work which absorbs the melancholic subject took all the energy necessary for sleeping or eating. Montaigne has lost a dear friend. This loss supposedly triggered his writing of the *Essays*. Were Montaigne’s symptoms those of mourning for his friend? Or did he have the five symptoms which appear with melancholy? Freud’s theory can help answer this question.

**Montaigne’s symptoms**

The essay I. 26, *De l’institution des enfants*, exemplifies Montaigne’s theories and ideas on melancholy and ecstasy, as well as his numerous contradictions. In this particular essay, Montaigne mentioned his earliest hint of melancholy (before La Boétie’s death.) His main goal was to show that it was better for a child to have “la teste bien faicte” than “bien pleine”.361 His main idea was especially for a pupil not to be

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361 Montaigne *Essais* I, 26, p. 198.
traumatized by his instructor and to learn about the subjects that really matter in life, like being able to express oneself in society, resisting changes in the weather without getting ill, and knowing philosophy as his main lesson, since it could be applied to all other subjects in life. He also added that games, running, fighting, music, dance, hunting, and other physical activities also ought to be a part of the child’s education, in order to fashion him as a man made of matter and soul, as well as being the traditional parts of higher-class education. Interestingly, all these activities sound like the remedies against melancholy which the physician Paré described above. Most importantly, Montaigne described his temperament and behavior as a child with the following adjectives: *poisant, mol, endormi, oisif, lent, nonchalant, froid aux offices d’amitié et de parenté et aux offices publiques*.\(^{362}\) Additionally, he qualified his complexion as *lourde*, with its vices being *langueur* and *paresse*, which all referred to his melancholic temperament. In the same essay, Montaigne said that a pupil should never be abandoned “à l’humeur melancholique d’un furieux maistre d’escole”.\(^{363}\) He also continued by showing how a pupil can become melancholic if he is forced into intellectual work at such a young age, or if naturally he is inclined to such a study:

> Je ne veux pas corrompre son esprit à le tenir à la gehene et au travail, à la mode des autres, quatorze ou quinze heures par jour, comme un portefaix. Ny ne trouvois bon, quand par quelque complexion solitaire et melancholique on le verroit adonné d’une application trop indiscrete à l’estude des livres, qu’on la luy nourrist : ceci les rend ineptes à la conversation civile et les destourne de meilleures occupations.\(^{364}\)

\(^{362}\) Montaigne, *Essais* I, 26, p.222-223  
\(^{363}\) Montaigne, *Essais* I, 26, p.211  
\(^{364}\) Montaigne, *Essais* I, 26, p. 211
When a few pages later he says that he was himself such a student, who was inclined to such a study of books, even if at that time he was only reading them, in Latin, his “mother tongue”, nonetheless:

j’enfilay tout d’un train Vergile en l’Aeneide, et puis Terence, et puis Plaute, et des comedies Italiennes, lurré toujours par la douceur du subject. S’il eut été si fol de rompre ce train, j’estime que je n’eusse raporté du college que la haine des livres, comme fait quasi toute nostre noblesse… Faisant semblant de n’en voir rien, il aiguisoit ma fain, ne me laissant que à la desrobée gourmander ces livres, et me tenant doucement en office pour les autres estudes de la regle. 365

Montaigne admitted his melancholy. He was inclined to read books, and his instructor was “nourishing” this passion, as noted with the food-related lexical field that he uses when describing his reading of books: *j’enfilay tout d’un train, aiguiser ma faim, gourmander, doucement, douceur*. Not only did he contradict himself by saying that instructors should not push students to be solitary and read books, and then saying that his instructor did well by helping him read what he wanted, but also, he admitted that reading was almost a reward, a sweet drug for his mind, a relief perhaps, for his melancholy, or at least for his melancholic complexion, explicitly expressed in this particular essay. There is no doubt that Montaigne knew about the received ideas on melancholy that surrounded him at the time. He knew that it was believed that intellectual work increases the chances of becoming melancholic. This is why he recommended that children be educated in a way that would prevent what happened to him. But how can one not read when it is described as sweet food for the body and the mind? Montaigne made it very difficult for his reader to follow his advice, because everyone would like to share this way of learning that elevates “mon ame en toute douceur et liberté, sans rigueur

365 Montaigne, *Essais*, p. 223
et contrainte.” With this statement, Montaigne also contradicted his opinion on ecstasies. Once the soul is elevated, it is out of the body: this separation goes against Montaigne’s certainty that body and soul should be kept together at all times, and if a separation occurs, it should not be trusted. Of course, he ended this essay by saying that “il n’y a tel que d’allécher l’appétit et l’affection, autrement on ne faict que des asnes chargez de livres”. Montaigne told the readers something that was meant to push them away from melancholy. He was not happy with his complexion, and he did not recommend anyone to fall into the study of books, so others do not become melancholic. It does not seem to work on the reader who is more and more attracted into the depth of the illness that Montaigne is trying to demystify.

Montaigne showed all the signs of mourning as defined by Freud: he showed signs of sadness, a loss of interest for the outside world, as realized when he retreated into his library, he said he would never find such a connection with anyone else as he did with La Boétie, and he refrained from the study or reading of books, since this activity was known to draw people into a state of melancholy. The fifth element that differentiates melancholy from mourning is the loss of self-esteem. Montaigne shows some signs of feeling inferior, probably due to his belonging to a sixteenth century when intellectuals were discovering how small their knowledge was compared to what was to be known in the world: “la raison qui se tire de l’experience est toujours defaillante et imparfaicte.” which is also a Socratic sentiment related to the traditional rhetoric of modesty and humility.

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Consequently, there are two elements in Montaigne’s writing that prove that he really was melancholic, although he might not have had a sad temperament, as he defended himself. The first one is that he conceived the idea of writing the essays in order to chase melancholy away, to keep his mind busy and maybe make his melancholy come out of him through his writing. The second one is that he retired to his country house, away from the world and public life, into his library in order to write and contemplate the world around him.

**Montaigne’s melancholy at the source of his reasoning and being**

Montaigne felt susceptible to melancholy, and he did not deny it. What makes this illness important with this author is that it opened a whole new way of looking at the disease in a sixteenth century dominated by medical misconceptions about it, believing it mainly was a physical disease. In Montaigne’s case, his search on Man, and what Man is, made him draw the connections between his temperament and what he wanted answered. In *Du Repentir*, III 2, Montaigne’s thesis was that Man bears the form of Mankind: “Chaque homme porte la forme entière de l’humaine condition”.\(^{369}\) Montaigne came to this conclusion after having studied himself, a subject that nobody knew better than he did: “jamais homme ne traicta subject qu’il entendit ne cogneust mieux que je fay celuy que j’ay entrepris, et qu’en celuy-là je suis le plus sçavant homme qui vive.”\(^{370}\) For Montaigne, it was important to keep his mind and body, his reason and movement together, so he could discover what linked them, how they were knit together. In this essay, Montaigne realized that:

Je fay coutumierement entier ce que je fay et marche tout d’une piece; je n’ay guere de mouvement qui se cache et desrobe à ma raison, et qui ne se conduise à peu près par le consentement de toutes les parties, sans division, sans sedition intestine; mon jugement en a la coulpe ou la louange entiere ; et la coulpe qu’il a une fois, il l’a tousjours, car quasi dès sa naissance il est un : mesme inclination, mesme route, mesme force. Et en matiere d’opinions universelles, dès l’enfance je me logeay au poinct où j’avais à me tenir.371

Consequently, his melancholy was part of him, part of the whole, part of what made him who he is. His reason and movement were linked, and so was his melancholy: “Mes actions sont réglées et conformes à ce que je suis et à ma condition.”372 His condition, his melancholy, made his actions to be what they were, and they were themselves a reflection of his melancholy. “Miserable sorte de remede, devoir à la maladie sa santé.”373

Montaigne was who he was because of his melancholy, and his physical health depended on his mental health. Once melancholic, his only solution was to fight it through intellectual work. According to his statement, he was the healthiest when sick with melancholy: he felt the best, the most productive in his writing when melancholic?

Although Montaigne said, “je n’ayme point à guarir le mal par le mal ; je hay les remedes qui importunent plus que la maladie”374, with the case of melancholy, he had no other choice but cure his evil with the evil, since this disease linked his body and mind. Of course, he had a distrust of doctors and believed that they could only cure a disease if they had had it themselves. He did not mention his melancholy as a disease to fight in *De l’Experience*. Among all the illnesses he mentioned in this last essay, all of them are strictly body-related. Maybe his psychological being was too affected after a while, especially since melancholy progressed with time, and was associated with old age, and

even though he mentioned a few times in earlier essays that his health was great and that he was rarely sick, passed the fifties, his health started to deteriorate. This could have been linked to old age alone, of course, but melancholy could also provoke other illnesses, or was believed to appear differently if different parts of the body were affected, as seen earlier.

Montaigne’s philosophy of life or the goal of the Essays: finding balance

Montaigne escaped from the world and from the madness that melancholy could bring him with writing. Melancholics are known to want to escape from the world when they suffer from an attack of the disease. Montaigne was trying to find balance in his life in order not to give in to the melancholic passion that comes over him after the death of La Boétie. In order to find out how to deal with his problem, he first wanted to know who and what man is. After studying the scholastic tradition, he discovered that Man was matter and form and that they needed to be kept together in order to know what Man was: “Ce n’est pas une ame, ce n’est pas un corps qu’on dresse, c’est un homme; il ne faut pas les dresser l’un sans l’autre, mais les conduire également, comme un couple de chevaux atteliez à mesme timon”.375 This was a recurring theme in Montaigne’s Essais. Montaigne explained this union in a more detailed way in his Essay II, 17 De la Présomption:

Le corps a une grand’ part à nostre estre, il y tient un grand rang; ainsin sa structure et composition sont de bien juste consideration. Ceus qui veulent desprendre nos deux pieces principales et les sequestrer l’une de l’autre, ils ont tort. Au rebours, il les faut r’accoupler et rejoindre. Il faut ordonner à l’ame non de se tirer à quartier, de s’entretenir à part, de mespriser et abandonner le corps (aussi ne le scaurait elle faire que par quelque singerie contrefaictc), mais de se

375 Montaigne, Essais I, 26 p. 213.
r’allier à luy, de l’embrasser, le chérir, luy assister, le contreroller, le conseiller, le redresser et ramener quand il fourvoye, l’espouser en somme et luy servir de mary ; à ce que leurs effects ne paroissent pas divers et contraires, ains accordans et uniformes.  

Montaigne discovers that a wise man binds his soul to the body, and that wise melancholics learn to distrust the power of imagination and follow the opposite example of ecstasies. Since ecstasies are a temporary severance of body and soul, Montaigne developed a distrust of them, especially because they would disrupt his study of Man. Moreover, if Man is body and soul, what is a Man without a soul or without a body? In the above-quoted passage, Montaigne not only mentioned the necessary union of the body and the soul to make a wise man, but by “singerie contrefaicte” he probably referred to ecstasies, believing that they were a simple act, and once again showing his distrust of them.

For Montaigne, body and soul are like a happily married couple, making a reference to the union of Christ and the Church:

Les Chrestiens ont une particuliére instruction de cette liaison; car ils sçavent que la justice divine embrasse cette société et jointure du corps et de l’ame, jusques à render le corps capable des recompenses eternelles; et que dieu regarde agir tout l’homme, et veut qu’entier il recoive le chastiement, ou le loyer, selon les merites.  

With Socrates’ help, Montaigne saw the wisdom of avoiding ecstasy and keeping the pleasurable marriage of body and soul in full by continuously being active until the moment of death, and he followed that example, also following the tradition of moderation.

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Health of the body and the soul

Montaigne was more able to describe his gravele or goutiere (kidney stones) in his last essay, because they were illnesses that one could locate on the body, they were easily recognizable, more or less curable, their symptoms and cures were clear. With melancholy, nobody really knew its exact symptoms and cures since they appeared differently on different people.

Montaigne emphasized that there was a close link between the soul and the body, and that the health of one depended on the health of the other, that one could be infected/affected by the other.

Qui veut escarter son ame le face hardiment, s’il peut, lors que le corps se portera mal, pour la descharger de cette contagion; ailleurs au contraire, qu’elle assiste et favorise et ne refuse point de participer à ses naturels plaisirs et de s’y complaire conjugalement, y apportant, si elle est plus sage, la moderation, de peur que par indiscretion ils ne se confondent avec le desplaisir.\(^\text{378}\)

Once again, body and soul should not be separated, because the soul could help overcome a contagion of the body, and vice versa, as seen with Montaigne’s melancholy, even if overcoming problems required a lot of energy “[Ma raison] est bien plus distraitte et occupée à digérer les maux que les plaisirs. Je voy bien plus clair en temps serain”.\(^\text{379}\) Montaigne meant that in order to keep melancholy out of his mental preoccupation, he needed to reason more than if melancholy were not present in his mind. The energy to keep a healthy mind and to keep melancholy away also came from the body. This statement by Montaigne reflected his knowledge of the medical texts of the time: Du Laurens, as seen in the introduction, had mentioned that melancholics have

\(^\text{378}\) Montaigne, Essais III, 13, p. 322.  
\(^\text{379}\) Montaigne, Essais III, 2, p. 31.
troubles perceiving things because of the vapors of the melancholic humors present in one’s brain.

**Diversion with poetry**

Montaigne did not see the use of the separation of body and soul, spirit and movement, for there were so many things to enjoy about one’s being:

>c’est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de sçavoir jouyr loiallement de son estre. Nous cherchons d’autres conditions, pour n’entendre l’usage des nostres, et sortons hors de nous, pour ne sçavoir quel il y fait.\(^{380}\)

Montaigne realized that had it not been for his melancholy, he would not have been able to discover all he did about Mankind, by having himself as a subject. Had he not kept his soul and body together, he would not have understood how important it was not to give into the promises of ecstasy. Also, Montaigne realized, as he became older, that his illness was to be taken seriously:

>C’est une puissante maladie et qui se coule naturellement et imperceptiblement. Il y faut grande provision d’estude et grande precaution pour eviter les imperfections qu’elle nous charge, ou au moins affoiblir leurs progrrets. Je sens que, nonobstant tous les retranchemens, elle gaigne pied à pied sur moy.\(^{381}\)

For him, his melancholy was not a sign of genius or wisdom: “Nous appelons sagesse la difficulté de nos humeurs, le desgoust des choses presentes.”\(^{382}\) In fact, it might not have been so for other writers or artists of the sixteenth century who had “humoral problems”, but the result of his wish to fight this illness by writing certainly made of him one of the most important writers of the sixteenth century, since he discovered what man was made of life (physical) and enjoying life (spiritual.)

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\(^{380}\) Montaigne, *Essais* III, 13, p. 327.

\(^{381}\) Montaigne, *Essais* III, 2, p. 33.

\(^{382}\) Montaigne, *Essais* III, 2, p. 32.
Enjoying life and being spiritual is emphasized throughout the Essays, but especially in the last one, where all of Montaigne’s accumulated knowledge through his study of man lead him. Among many pieces of advice about the right diet, exercise, schedule of life Montaigne gave in his last essay, one of them was to always keep young and sometimes go against one’s schedule or one’s rules: “Un jeune homme doit troubler ses regles pour esveiller sa vigueur, la garder de moisir et s’apoltronir. Et n’est train de vie si sot et si debile que celuy qui se conduict par ordonnance et discipline.”\(^383\) Improvisation and creativity are important in keeping one’s health.

Montaigne also stated that one needed to enjoy one’s being on one’s life: "C’est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de sçavoyr jouyr loiallement de son estre."\(^384\) Keeping away sad thoughts, not thinking about illness or death, enjoying the present moment as in *Carpe Diem*, Montaigne had to apply this theory to his life since he had to divert his mind away from melancholy and all the sad, even scary thoughts it brought into his life. In other words, diversion of the spirit is also important to keep healthy.

Most importantly, Montaigne ended this last essay with a piece of poetry from Horace, emphasizing that life should probably end with some poetry as well as music:

\[ \text{Frui paratis et valido mihi} \\
\text{Latoe, dones, et, precor, integra} \\
\text{Cum mente, nec turpem senecatam} \\
\text{Degere, nec cithara carentem.} \]

This could be interpreted as very symbolic: Montaigne ended his Essays with poetry. He ended his discovery of himself and of man with words asking for music in his old age, for

\(^{383}\) Montaigne, *Essais*, III, 13, p. 294
\(^{384}\) Montaigne, *Essais*, III, 13, p. 327
\(^{385}\) “De jouir des biens que j’ai acquis, avec une santé robuste, voilà ce que je te demande de m’accorder, fils de Latone, et je t’en prie, que mes facultés restent entières; fais que ma vieillesse ne soit pas ridicule et puisse encore toucher la lyre.” Horace, *Odes*, I, XXXI, 17. Translation by Alexandre Micha.
an entertainment away from his condition, so his intellect would keep busy, and he would not get mad.

A progression in Montaigne’s work which leads to the understanding of his melancholy is clear in the progression of the *Essays*. It is easier to deal with depression when presenting it in a light way, not taking it as seriously in his work, diverting from it as Montaigne did about his illness. But his complexion, which lead him to write, made him fully realize that he was made of body and soul, and that the wisdom of the essays lays in Montaigne’s own acceptance of his condition and living in harmony with it. He could not get rid of it, and he consequently had to find a way to owe his health to his sickness, “devoir à la maladie sa santé.” The path melancholy followed in Montaigne’s life is very clear in the organization of the three books: the person that triggered melancholy in Montaigne’s life (book I), his concentration on himself, retiring from the world, his escape from reality (book II), and finally the wisdom that emerged: the realization that he could not change who he was but could try to live in harmony with his body and soul (book III.) The way to find harmony was to enjoy the little pleasures of life and make of everything he saw and studied something that would keep him away from his illness, something that would divert his mind away from it: writing was a solution, but also the poetry of life.

With this chapter, the discovery of the second element that melancholy brings to man is the inseparability of body and soul, the necessity to keep them together at all times to be a human being, and the necessity to keep the brain occupied and not idle to defeat melancholy, as a preventive medicine.

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386 Montaigne, *Essais* III, 2 p. 31
CHAPTER 4
A TRIALISM DISCOVERED THROUGH MELANCHOly

A la question de savoir si la mélancolie est une maladie de l’âme ou du corps, nous devons répondre qu’elle est maladie de la relation de l’âme et du corps; et c’est encore ce qui contribue à son histoire exceptionnelle.387

Body, Soul and Melancholy

In his Essays, Montaigne arrived at the conclusion that he should try to harmonize his body and soul in order to live a good life. He realized that humans were composed of both a body and a mind, which needed to be kept together at all times in order to study human nature properly. The relationship between body and soul is not just a modern problem, as we have seen in the preceding chapters. It was also at the heart of the new science proposed by Descartes to replace Aristotelianism, in which the mind would be free of any external influence, including an individual’s own emotions.

Melancholy has been defined as a sickness of the soul. This is an analogy, which supposes that in cases of melancholy the soul alone suffers from illnesses just as in other ailments the body alone. This analogy implies a separation of body and soul, at least at the language level, and that the soul can suffer from specific illnesses.388 This analogy also implies a notion of what is the soul, what is the body and what is their union.

The location of the union of body and soul is also very disputed. It requires the use of the imaginary, very much related to the melancholic temperament. Most dualisms

387 Pigeaud, Maladie, p. 125.
388 Pigeaud, Maladie, p. 16.
are two primary irreducible principles, such as wet and dry or hot and cold found outside of each other, like an element (air, water, earth, fire) and Man. The dualism with soul and body is found within man, and the two elements are supposedly internal to man. Consequently, the union implies a third principle, and would cancel the notion of dualism.

The idea of passions as diseases of the soul comes from the Stoics.\(^{389}\) For them, there are some illnesses which concern the soul alone (desires, worries, anger), others which concern the body alone (fever, cold), others which have nothing to do with the soul but touch it anyway (lethargy, melancholy, illusion), and still others which are somatic but influence the state of one’s body (shaking, being pale, changes in appearance due to sadness or terror.)\(^{390}\) These ideas lead towards the line of inquiry of this chapter, which is understanding how melancholy touches the soul, how the soul affects the body in cases of melancholy, as well as how this illness figures in the development of Descartes’ theory.

The first part of the study will concentrate on Descartes’ dualism and what it meant in his theory. Then the influence of melancholy on Descartes’ reasoning will be studied, as influenced by his letters with Elisabeth of Bohemia, to see if and how it influenced his possible deviation from a dualist to a more trialist view of human nature. A third element which will be studied is melancholy as defined by Descartes, compared to medical definitions of the seventeenth century, in order to see if and how Descartes departed from his contemporaries in his definition, cause, and cures of the illness. Another part of the study will concentrate on Descartes’ word choice when dealing with melancholy. Sometimes, Descartes refers to melancholy, and sometimes he refers to

\(^{389}\) Pigeaud, *Maladie*, p.46.
\(^{390}\) Pigeaud, *Maladie*, p. 46.
languor or tristesse. His word choice offers insight into his conception as melancholy as due to an excess of passions, which should not be followed. It will be interesting to see in which works Descartes uses the actual term of melancholy and when he uses the others and why.

**Cartesian dualism or Descartes’ dualism?**

Understanding Descartes’ dualism is important to this chapter, because the interpretation of this theory is the key to understanding his view of melancholy. Cartesian scholars, when talking about dualism, have to state whether they are studying the standard account of Cartesian dualism, or if they are talking about Descartes’ dualism. The idea of dualism in Descartes originated as a rejection of the Platonic view that human beings are souls using bodies.\(^{391}\) Descartes often stated that his conception of human beings was dualist, meaning that for him humans were made of two finite substances: the mind and the body.\(^{392}\) The first theory used by scholars, consists in believing that the mind can exist without body and vice versa, and is a theory of mind crystallized by Louis de La Forge (1666) in a attempt to fulfill Descartes’ theory, which was in its turn simplified and caricatured by Gilbert Ryle (1949), who omitted natural philosophy.\(^{393}\) This theory has been put in two sentences: “Man is a thinking mind; matter is extension in motion.”\(^{394}\) The second theory states that Descartes was really making a claim of distinction between mind and body, meaning that the mind was, for him, an incorporeal

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\(^{391}\) Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. 172.

\(^{392}\) In Descartes’ theory, a substance is a thing that, in order to exist, needs to be created by God. Clarke, *Descartes’ Theory of Mind*, p. 209.

\(^{393}\) Clarke, *Descartes’ Theory of Mind*, p.13.

substance, really distinct from the body.\textsuperscript{395} This dualism makes a difference between the properties of both substances, but apparently does not separate them “physically” as Cartesian Dualism does. Cartesian Dualism is consequently a conception which the “Cartesian Legend attributes to Descartes,”\textsuperscript{396} according to Gordon Baker and Catherine Morris. This theory does not exactly represent the original distinction which Descartes had made.

**Interactionism or trialism?**

Cartesian dualism is a concept that blurs readers of Descartes’ dualism understanding once they read about the union of body and soul. Indeed, since, according to Cartesian dualism, matter and mind have nothing in common and could not influence each other, the concept of their union and interaction does not fit into the concept of Cartesian dualism. However, Descartes mentioned in many of his works a certain union between body and soul, for instance in the *Passions de l’âme*, his *Letters* to Elizabeth and Arnauld, as well as *Méditation VI*. When Descartes noted that the soul could inform the body in cases of sensations when one wills to move one’s arm, and one’s arm consequently moves, for example, he could not help but think that mind and body were united, and that there could be a certain connection between mental states and bodily states. This idea of union of body and soul is the center of numerous debates among scholars and gives room for two types of interpretations, which also prove that Cartesian dualism is not the theory which Descartes originally described, but is a simplified

\textsuperscript{395} Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. 2

\textsuperscript{396} Baker& Morris, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. 11
variation of it. In cases of dualism which pertain to Descartes’ thinking, it would be more accurate to talk about Descartes’ dualism, as does Marleen Rozemond.\textsuperscript{397}

One common interpretation of the connection between body and soul consists of the interaction between body and soul, referred to as “interactionism” by Rozemond.\textsuperscript{398} This interpretation, in her view, is “entirely in line with Descartes’ dualism, according to which there are two types of modes, modes of body and modes of mind.”\textsuperscript{399} Others believe that when Descartes described sensations he made references to modes, which were of both body and mind, or that could be interpreted as modes of a third kind, their union: “These scholars have argued that sensations constitute a third type of mode, and that the union results in a new ontological category.”\textsuperscript{400} They believe that while describing sensations and the action of the mind on the body and vice versa, Descartes described their union, a third type of substance, entirely different from the mind or the body. They are referred to as “trialists,” or as believing that Descartes departed from his dualism to reach a concept of the human being which included three substance instead of two: trialism instead of dualism.

**Impossibility of trialism?**

Scholars such as David Yandell (1999) dismantle the idea of a possible trialism, stating that there is not sufficient warrant to conclude that Descartes was a trialist, but that he was a very consistent dualist.\textsuperscript{401} Yandell’s ideas are very representative of the

\textsuperscript{397} Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. xi
\textsuperscript{398} Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. 173
\textsuperscript{399} Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. 173
\textsuperscript{400} Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, p. 173
\textsuperscript{401} Yandell, *Descartes*, p. 199
radical dualism of the Cartesian movement, this is why a summary of these ideas is given below.

For Yandell, there are no obstacles in Descartes’ theory of dualism indicating a third kind of finite substance, especially since dualism was explained and proved in Descartes’ main metaphysical works *Méditations* and *Principles*. Yandell believes, however, that the idea of trialism arose from modern scholars or philosophers who wanted to “remake Descartes in our image,” because they found dualism unappealing, and that the protomaterialist or protofunctionalist Descartes would be more respectable had he been trialist.

The three reasons Yandell states for modern readers not to change Descartes so he would correspond more to the current image of the philosopher are the following: First, there is sufficient evidence which supports a dualist reading of Descartes’ work; second, the presence of an unreconstructed dualist is a salutary reminder that materialism has not been universally accepted yet by people of philosophical ability as a presupposition or a conclusion; and third, a third, mixed, substance would seem to contradict or violate Descartes’ warning that we must be careful to keep the notions of substances distinct.

Although Yandell recognizes that Descartes knew that human beings have a complex range of mental and physical properties, and that according to Descartes, what makes human mind-body combinations a real kind rather than merely an accident is that a mind and a body must each be of a particular sort. Yandell also states that for Descartes, their relation is truly accidental, since when we consider the body alone, according to

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402 Yandell, *Descartes*, p. 199
403 Yandell, *Descartes*, p. 200
404 Yandell, *Descartes*, p. 200 & 203.
Descartes, we see noting in it asking for a union with the soul and vice versa.\textsuperscript{405} Over all, Yandell suggests that Descartes believed that the awareness which sensations give us is not a non-mental, non-physical aspect of our existence: it is not a third aspect of this existence.\textsuperscript{406} He then argues that Descartes described the union of mind and body as essential to human beings, otherwise there would not be human beings; however, Descartes described it as substantial in only three places in his work, always as a response to theologians’ criticisms of his dualism. When he described the substantial union, he said that they were united by a mode of union and not into one unified substance, seeing union as a relation and not an actual substance, constantly repeating that there are only two kinds of substances, the \textit{res extensa} and the \textit{res cogitans}.\textsuperscript{407} Since nothing is a substance, according to Descartes, if its existence depends on anything else, since the union of body and mind depends on the existence of the body and the mind, it is consequently not a substance, which counters the argument for trialism. Finally, Yandell argues that the evidence for a possible move away from radical dualism found in Descartes’ work far exceeds the evidence of the texts themselves.\textsuperscript{408}

\textbf{Trialist scholars and their arguments: A substantial union}

Martial Gueroult (1953) believes that the mind-body union is a substantial union, and not an accidental one.\textsuperscript{409} While Yandell stated that the substantiality of the union did not make of it a substance in itself, Guéroutl believes that this substantiality is like the

\textsuperscript{406} Yandell, \textit{Descartes}, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{407} Yandell, \textit{Descartes}, p. 211 & 214.
\textsuperscript{408} Yandell, \textit{Descartes}, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{409} Guéroult, \textit{Descartes}, p.134.
exterior aspect of an internal, primordial and deeper conclusion, which leads to the analysis of the content of our soul.\textsuperscript{410} Yandell also stated that the union could not be a substance, because it depended on two other substances to exist. In Guéroult’s analysis, the union becomes a substance at a different level. For him, if the substantial union can be said to be a simple or primitive notion, at the same level as the mind or the matter, it is because in its sphere it assumes for science, as a substance, the role given to any substance, that of a first truth which does not depend on any other, and which, by making all others possible, is sufficient to itself.\textsuperscript{411} For Guéroult, this substance is a composed one, but it is indecomposable in itself, since God can disunite the natures he united into substances, and if He does it, the substance disappears.\textsuperscript{412}

What this third element brings to Descartes’ theory, according to Guéroult, is that the union between mind and body excludes the distinction between the objective reality and the formal reality, since there is no longer a distinction between a subject and an object, but a fusion of the two in one and only same subjective-objective being, where the reciprocal penetration of the soul and the body is felt.\textsuperscript{413} This idea will be very important and relevant to the study of melancholy, because I believe that melancholy lays at the union between body and soul since it is an illness which shows the reciprocal penetration of the soul and the body in the way the illness manifests itself.

\textsuperscript{410} Guéroult, \textit{Descartes}, p. 134.  
\textsuperscript{411} Guéroult, \textit{Descartes}, p. 136.  
\textsuperscript{412} Guéroult, \textit{Descartes}, p. 136.  
\textsuperscript{413} Guéroult, \textit{Descartes}, p. 149.
“Intermingling” of mind and body

Ruth Mattern (1978) argues that there was a shift in Descartes’ conception of mind-body union, especially when Descartes wrote that our concept of mind-body interaction depends on the concept of their union.\textsuperscript{414} Mattern believes that Descartes wrote this because he might have felt impelled to develop an interpretation of the union of body and mind which would permit the true “intermingling” of mind and body, “in order to do justice to the substantial union of these two things,” and that he had emphasized the distinctness of the two rather than their union because he had assumed it would please theologians.\textsuperscript{415}

Interestingly, Mattern argues that Descartes did not think that the human mind could simultaneously conceive of the distinctiveness of body and mind and their union, and that this idea lead him to emphasize one side rather than the other, although he believed that both concepts coexisted, which he explained in great details in his letters to Elisabeth.\textsuperscript{416} Mattern’s thoughts give a lot of room for interpretation, and will especially be helpful in the reading of the correspondence between Descartes and the Princess.

Trialism

John Cottingham (1986) is the scholar who used the term “trialism” in his description of the Cartesian Man. Cottingham believes that due to the account of sensation and imagination, Descartes put his own dualism under a lot of pressure, and because of this, his writings on psychology show an emergence of three notions (the

\textsuperscript{414} Mattern, \textit{Descartes}, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{415} Mattern, \textit{Descartes}, p. 218 & 219.
\textsuperscript{416} Mattern, \textit{Descartes}, p. 221.
mind, the body and their union), as opposed to two, although Cottingham understood the irritation of some readers who questioned the primitiveness of the third notion, since it depended on the union of two other substances.\textsuperscript{417} Cottingham believes that Descartes dealt with this third notion whenever he had to confront the phenomenon of sensory experience, where the “confused sensations” such as hunger or melancholy, are not assignable to the body alone or the mind alone, but they arise from the union of the two.\textsuperscript{418}

Cottingham believes, just as Yandell, that Descartes always adhered very firmly to a dualistic account, as far as the mind and the body are two substances, but Cottingham departs from Yandell in that he believes that Descartes described three attributes to the human being, which means that, “at least one of the categories or notions involved in the triallistic schema is to be construed attributively rather than substantively.”\textsuperscript{419} This assertion, according to Cottingham, is one of the steps which lead Descartes closer to his understanding of human nature, but that “the dualistic framework that continued to dominate so much of his thought meant that he was unable to do full justice to the complexities involved here,” and that a major part of our human life remains a mystery.\textsuperscript{420}

Cottingham’s interpretation could be considered as partially triallistic, since he could not prove that Descartes dealt with triallism in all his writings, especially in his continued work. But Cottingham’s thoughts seem to be that had Descartes known more about the functioning of the brain, or about feelings, imaginings and sensory perceptions,

\textsuperscript{417} Cottingham, Descartes, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{418} Cottingham, Descartes, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{419} Cottingham, Descartes, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{420} Cottingham, Descartes, p. 132.
perhaps he would have reached a point where trialism would have been necessary to explain human nature. Had Descartes had more time, he might have arrived at a trialistic account of human nature.

**A Combination of substances**

Desmond Clarke (2003), while giving an explanation of the way in which Descartes combined substances, argues that there are two forms that the combination of substances could take. The first one would be “a combination in which each substance maintains its original identity, and the result is a mere joining-together of two separate entities that remain separable.”\(^{421}\) This form seems to be the one related to Cartesian dualism. The second form would be “a combination in which the original identity of the substances is lost and the result is a new substance with, usually, new attributes that were not present in wither of the former substances. To the extent that two substances are incompatible, a combination of both would have to be of the first type.”\(^{422}\) According to Clarke, Descartes repeatedly argued against the first form, but frequently defended the second one.

With this in mind, it is possible to see how the union, as described in the second form by Clarke, would be a third substance which could be placed at the same level as the mind and the body, consequently giving human beings three primitive substances and not two, as originally stated. But Clarke’s argument is that Descartes was a property dualist, not a substance dualist, by the fact that according to Clarke, substances are non-explanatory for Descartes, and that the mind-body union is non-explanatory for

\(^{421}\) Clarke, *Descartes’ Theory of Mind*, p. 223
\(^{422}\) Clarke, *Descartes’ Theory of Mind*, p. 223
Descartes. Consequently, for Clarke, Descartes was a dualist, but not in the sense believed until present times, and Descartes’ dualism “is not a theory of human beings but a provisional acknowledgment of failure, an index of the work that remains to be done before a viable theory of the human mind becomes available.” Like among others, this scholar believed that due to the complexity of defining the interaction which happens between mind and body in such cases as sensations or feelings, Descartes failed to arrive at a true theory of human nature.

The trialist, or near-trialist scholars all generally accept the failure of Descartes’ dualism as a theory of the mind. They believe that Descartes was on his way to discover the functioning of the human psyche, but failed because he was not able to go further in his experiments or theories, due to a lack of knowledge. This is exemplified by the fact that Descartes clearly points to God’s role in the combination of mind and body, in the forming of the substantial union. Descartes’ lack of knowledge, for these scholars, explains the inconsistencies that the dualist notion offers to the understanding of the human mind, especially when it comes to imagination, sensations, and feelings.

What the trialist scholars mentioned here neglected to do was to look at the impact of melancholy on Descartes’ intellectual development and on the development of his dualistic theory. Most mention the texts where he talks about their union, but none (to my knowledge), make the connection between melancholy, its role and impact as an illness of the mind and the body, and Descartes’ theories. This is why the following texts have been chosen in this study.

423 Clarke, Descartes’ Theory of Mind, p. 258.
Choice of Descartes’ works

In order to see where melancholy played a role in Descartes’ elaboration of his theory of mind, just as it did for Montaigne as seen in chapter two, it will be important to look at specific works in which Descartes alludes to or mentions melancholy, as well as his choice of words when talking about the illness. The works chosen for this study are the *Discours de la méthode*, the *Passions de l’âme*, and the *Letters* he wrote to Elisabeth of Bohemia, as well as her answers to him. The first work was chosen because it is the work in which Descartes not only exposes his scientific method, but also gives the reader his intellectual biography, in a language accessible to everyone, French, at a time when Latin was still used for scientific treatises, being the *lingua franca* of all European scientists.

In this work, after the first step (1) of systematic doubt and getting rid of acquired opinions (which one may have acquired as early as with one’s first caretaker), one arrives at a point (2) when one realizes that one is doubting everything and that there is only one thing that one can be sure of: that one is doubting. But, if one doubts, it means that one thinks, and if one thinks, (3) that means that one exists (“Je pense donc je suis”): which is the first truth one attains after the systematic doubt. Consequently, for Descartes, this truth proves the existence of a soul in which our doubt is found. However, doubting is an imperfection, which means that the notion of perfection is not familiar to the soul: (4) consequently a perfect being (God) exists who put inside of us the idea of perfection or perfectibility towards which we always lean intuitively. This leads to the following step: since God is perfect, He cannot deceive Man, and His veracity, finally, guarantees the truthfulness of the perception of knowledge that one can and must have of beings and
things that one is studying. The rewards of this method are enormous, according to Descartes, because one can know nature for what it really is and not just its appearances. This idea was revolutionary at Descartes’ time. With this method in mind, Descartes believed he could only find the truth about anything he was studying, such as melancholy, for example.

At the historical moment when Descartes wrote the *Passions de l’âme*, which was greatly influenced by his *Letters* to Elisabeth of Bohemia, who is believed to be the most accomplished female Cartesian\(^4^{25}\) and who brought and spread Descartes’ new scientific method to Germany, the electrical circuiting in the brain had not yet been discovered. Descartes, throughout his career, had tried to replace the philosophy or scholastics of the Ancients (Aristotle, Plato), which he believed were outdated, with his new scientific method, explained in the *Discours de la méthode*. It is in this very influential work that the concepts of Cartesianism were exposed and where the first elements of Descartes’ thoughts on the mind, body and their union were discussed.

The idea of the interaction between mind and body had been brought up in several of Descartes’ correspondences with pupils, just as with Elisabeth of Bohemia. But no other student was able to make Descartes question and revise his work as much as the Princess did.\(^4^{26}\) Descartes’ correspondence with the princess started with a question from her. She was very familiar with the *Discours* and the *Méditations*, and was, for the most part, satisfied with this new and intriguing philosophy, except on the union of body and soul. She was apparently wondering, in looking for an explanation of her melancholic condition, unconsciously perhaps, how a thinking substance like the soul could determine

\(^{425}\) De Careil, *Descartes et la Princesse Palatine*, p. 6.

\(^{426}\) De Careil *Descartes et la Princesse Palatine*, p. 8
spirits of the body to make voluntary movements,\textsuperscript{427} especially since Descartes had explained so thoroughly that the soul and the body were in such isolation from each other that it was an absolute independence. He had abolished all interaction between the body and the soul, all natural influence of the spirit on matter. In her opinion, being able to touch the spirits seemed inconsistent with the fact that the soul was only a thinking substance.\textsuperscript{428}

The three works chosen exemplify the train of thought which Descartes followed throughout his career, trying to understand the concepts of body, soul, and their union in order to define human nature, in the steps of Montaigne. The first work, the \textit{Discours}, exemplified Cartesian theories of dualism and total isolation of body and soul, and also alludes to Descartes’ first symptoms or troubles with melancholy, while in the second work, his \textit{Letters}, Descartes realized that the Princess was touching on a delicate subject which made him realize that his dualist theory might not have been as sure as he thought it was. Also, the letters give Descartes’ and the Princess’ take on the impact melancholy had on their understanding of human nature, by experiencing their own humanity through the illness. Finally, in the \textit{Passions}, being at the “point de convergence de ces préoccupations scientifiques et pratiques,”\textsuperscript{429} Descartes showed the progress of his reasoning, as far as the influence of the mind on the body and vice versa is concerned, as well as some of the limitations his dualistic theories offered, especially with subjects suffering from melancholy.

\textsuperscript{427} Descartes, \textit{Lettres}, Letter from Elizabeth May 16, 1643, p. 95-96.
\textsuperscript{428} Descartes, \textit{Lettres}, Letter from Elizabeth May 16, 1643, p.95-96.
\textsuperscript{429} Rodis-Lewis, \textit{Passions}, p. 6
Influence of Melancholy on Descartes’ reasoning

Seventeenth century medicine in France, and in other European countries, such as England, was a mixture of folklore, superstition, Galenic theory, herbal tradition, astrology and chemical medicine. Humoralism was still in use, and the equilibrium of the four humors, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, is still believed to bring health, and consequently their imbalance brings illnesses. Although some great medical advances were made during the seventeenth century, like the discovery of circulation of blood (William Harvey), and some challenges to the Galenic medical dogma, for the most part, the population at large was still relying on ancient remedies to cure illnesses. The second half of the seventeenth century is when most changes in medical practice occurred, associated with the waning of humoral theory.

In the seventeenth century, there were recipe books available for the general public that described diseases and their symptoms, as well as a list of possible remedies and their recipe, dietary directions, and instructions on other procedures such as blood-letting. An example of such a book in England is *The Skilful Physician*, published for the first time in 1656. This work combines herbalism with folklore and common sense, which means that the recommendations would have been accepted by educated people who would read the book, as well as by the general public who would hear about the remedies from word of mouth. It is clear from the Preface of *The Skilful Physician* that it was not written for professionals, but was directed towards laymen.

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431 Influence of Sixteenth century Paracelsus, who openly challenged the Galenic dogma
432 Jackson, *Melancholia*, p. 104
In seventeenth century France and England, it was believed that diseases could be avoided with a certain regimentation of life, by following certain rules to keep healthy. It was a very preventive type of medicine. Most people did not want to have to deal with doctors and medicine, and believed that illnesses could be avoided by the use of reason, and by following simple rules, described in books such as *The Skilful Physician*. Therefore, the directions for the preservation of health include indications concerning diet, sleep, exercise, and bowel movement, as well as advice about the kind of air to breathe. Notably, there were also warnings against excessive passions, such as extreme joy, fear, and anger, because they were believed to weaken the body and cause illnesses, and even death. Avoiding passions would bring health and a long life. Did Descartes espouse the same thoughts about passions?

**Origin of the passions for Descartes**

In the *Discours de la Méthode*, Descartes stated that the soul is entirely distinct from the body: “l’âme par laquelle je suis ce que je suis, est entièrement distincte du corps,” and due to its independence from the body, the soul does not die with the body. But Descartes also said that the soul is within the body, and that it interacts with the body:

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435 “if men in the government of their Health would use Reason more, they would need the Physician lesse.” Balaban, *Skilful Physician*, p. 2.
436 “Therefore those who rightly prize their Health, which is indeed a great Treasure, let them live temperately, observe diligently their own Natures, and follow exactly these rules for the preservation of Health, which have been found out by the great industry, judicious enquiry, and long experience of Learned Men.” Baladan, *Skilful Physician*, p. 2.
437 “for they oftentimes cause weakness of the body and Swounings, and oft times sickness, and sometimes sudden death. Likewise envy, extreme cares, continual fear and continual sadness, are great enemies to health and shorten life; but a quiet contented, cheerful mond, free from all the Passions, is a great supporter of Health and prolonger of life.” Baladan, *Skilful Physician*, p. 12.
438 Descartes *Discours de la méthode*, p. 50.
il ne suffit pas qu’elle soit logée dans le corps humain ainsi qu’un pilote en son navire, sinon peut-être pour mouvoir ses membres, mais qu’il est besoin qu’elle soit **jointe et unie plus étroitement avec lui** pour avoir, outre cela, des sentiments et des appétits semblables aux nôtres, et ainsi composer un vrai homme.\(^{439}\)

Interestingly, this concern resembles that of Montaigne who realized at the end of his work that soul and body needed to be kept together in order to study what makes human beings what they are. Descartes also realized that both the soul and the mind experience passions, but they are distinct passions. There are passions attributed to the body alone, and there are passions attributed to the soul alone:

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\text{tout ce que nous expérimentons estre en nous, et que nous voyons aussi pouvoir estre en des corps tout à fait inanimés, ne doit estre attribué qu’à notre corps; Et au contraire, que tout ce qui est en nous, et que nous ne concevons en aucune façon pouvoir appartenir à un corps, doit estre attribué à nostre ame.} \quad \text{\textsuperscript{440}}
\]

Once Descartes explained all the functions related to the body, it was easy for him to see that there was only one component exclusively reserved for the soul: thoughts, which were divided in two kinds: the actions of the soul and the passions of the soul. Descartes continued his theory by defining the passions of the soul as, “des perceptions, ou des sentiments, ou des émotions de l’âme, qu’on rapporte particulièrement à elle, et qui sont causées, entretenues et fortifiées par quelque mouvement des esprits.”\(^{441}\) These movements, according to Descartes, move the pineal gland, which cause a passion, such as love, hate, admiration, joy, sadness, or desire, which are the same passions mentioned in the *Skilful Physician*. Interestingly, these passions have effects on the body, for instance, a heart beating faster when in love or scared, tears rolling down when sad. How could such distinct parts interact with each other? The answer lies in their union. Passions

\(^{439}\) Descartes, *Discours*, p. 75 (*emphasis mine*).
\(^{440}\) Descartes, *Passions*, p. 67.
\(^{441}\) Descartes, *Passions*, p. 86.
are an effect of the mind-body union which translate into the action of the mind on the body.

The pineal gland, center of the union between body and soul

Since the seat of the soul was believed to be the brain, Descartes did not doubt that all passions (emotions) were induced by the pineal gland, the only part in the brain believed not to exist in double.\footnote{Descartes, \textit{Passions}, p. 90.} In other words, for Descartes, all passions could be explained physiologically as related to the functioning of this particular gland. Mind and body belonging to two different realms, Descartes was trying to elucidate two problems: first, the fact that \textit{res cogitans} and \textit{res extensa} could both be found in Man, unified in the human body, and then, how they acted on each other. Descartes and princess Elisabeth of Bohemia started questioning the union of these two components of the human organism: how could such distinct elements be united in the body, how were they linked or connected, and what were the consequences of this union on the human body?

Method, melancholy, symptoms and cures as seen by Descartes

The argument that man is compounded of two distinct substances has a controversial feature: the insistence on the “non-corporeality of the mind,”\footnote{Cottingham, \textit{Descartes}, p. 119} which is now considered ridiculous by neurophysiologists, as Cottingham says.\footnote{Cottingham, \textit{Descartes}, p. 119} The only corporeal location mentioned in Descartes where an interaction between the mind and the body could take place is the brain, as stated in \textit{The Passions of the Soul}. Although the soul is not attached
to the body, it seems that it has a great influence on one particular place in the body, the only part that is not doubled in the brain: the pineal gland. Descartes realized that there are some actions that involve brain activity, such as imagination, feelings and sensory experience. However, he also said that doubting, willing and understanding are non-corporeal. What could have convinced him that sensory experiences and imagination could be the result of an interaction between the body and the mind, whereas, there should not be any interaction between the two parallel features?

Elisabeth’s ailment

From the tone of Elisabeth’s letters, especially starting in 1645, her unhappiness in life became evident. She was suffering from a moral crisis, due to personal problems within her family and with her family’s affairs, which had terrible effects on her health. Most of the illnesses that affected her and which she described in her letters to Descartes were physical (problems with the liver and lungs.) She was complaining about being sad most of the time. Descartes knew immediately that her health would only be brought back by the aid of two sciences: philosophy and medicine. Although Descartes was not a physician, he had studied medicine and had medical friends.\footnote{Lindeboom, Descartes and Medicine, p. 15-35.} He obviously lacked elements of medicine which are currently known on the human body and on psychology. However, he responded by writing about happiness, and this is what brought him to think about passions.\footnote{De Careil, Descartes et la Princesse Palatine, p. 39} These letters and the treatise on passions are what are left of his moral philosophy.\footnote{De Careil, Descartes et la Princesse Palatine, p. 44}
The first reason Elisabeth started writing to Descartes was her questioning of his position on the union of body and soul. The other reason was that she had heard that he could help her in solving her problem with sadness, which people referred to as melancholy at the time. Indeed, she was wondering how a very reasonable soul “peut perdre tout cela par quelques vapeurs, et que, pouvant subsister dans le corps et n’ayant rien de commun avec luy, elle en soit tellement régie.”\textsuperscript{448} From her correspondence with Descartes, Elisabeth hoped he would be a guide in her life, a consolation in her misfortune, and she expected him to explain to her what was this happiness that he had mentioned so many times, which she did not seem to have found. She was looking for beatitude, a tranquility of the soul, which, according to Descartes, is induced by our knowledge of God and of our role in the universe. Her condition was making her miserable, and sometimes unable to continue her duties as a Princess.

In Descartes’ letters to Elisabeth of Bohemia between 1643 to 1647, he showed great care and consideration for her, sharing intimate details with her, like a mention of his own mother, and of his childhood sick condition. Not only did he sustain a voluminous correspondence with her, but he also dedicated the \textit{Principia Philosophiae} as well as the \textit{Passions of the Soul} to her. As Gaukroger says:

\begin{quote}
The second [work dedication] is not surprising, since much of the material in the later part of the \textit{Passions} was worked out in the correspondence with Elisabeth from 1643 onwards. But to dedicate the major systematic exposition of his natural philosophy to a 25-year-old woman whom he had known for not much over a year, and apparently had not met on very many occasion, does require some explanation.\textsuperscript{449}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{448} Descartes, \textit{Lettres sur la Morale}, Letter to Descartes 20 juin 1643, p.12.
\textsuperscript{449} Gaukroger, \textit{Descartes}, p. 385 (emphasis mine.)
\end{footnotes}
It is interesting to see that this older man was writing to a much younger person, of royal blood, who also had different religious beliefs: She was a Protestant and he was a Catholic. Some specialists have debated this topic and have decided that Descartes was in love with the princess. It is possible to see an allusion to this affection in the letters he wrote her: “Je pourrais manquer d’être extrêmement triste si je pensais que l’indisposition de Votre Altesse durât encore; j’aime mieux espérer qu’elle est toute passée; et toutefois le désir d’en être certain me fait avoir des passions extrêmes de retourner en Hollande.”\(^{450}\) It seemed, however, that the differences in age and social situation prevented him from developing any physical attachment to her.\(^ {451}\) This affection seemed to be reciprocal, considering the tone Elisabeth used in her letters to him, the compliments she made and eagerness she seemed to manifest at receiving letters from him. She said that she knew him to be the best doctor for her soul. Consequently, he became the doctor for her soul: he recommended fleeing sadness and recommended joy and contentment. He also mentioned that beatitude is not inseparable from happiness and health of the body. He gave himself as an example of suffering, as a boy, from a lethal sickness, from which he was healed by keeping happy, avoiding black humor and bad dreams.\(^ {452}\)

Descartes was a very sick child, as was Marsilio Ficino as seen in chapter two, and he overcame this gloomy childhood, despite the doctor’s prediction that he would not live up to adulthood. What kind of consequences could this have had on his mental state? Interestingly, when Descartes reflected on his childhood, he realized that events which

\(^{450}\) Descartes, *Lettres*, Letter from Descartes July 1647, p. 185.
\(^{451}\) Gaukroger, *Descartes*, p. 385.
\(^{452}\) Descartes, *Lettres*, Letter from Descartes, May 1646, p. 149-151.
happened then had long-term consequences on his mental state as an adult. When taking the example of sadness, he stated that a child who received harmful foods as a child could associate food with sadness, while an other did not get enough nourishment and would consequently associate hunger with sadness for the rest of his life. This seems to be the beginning of psychology as it is studied in present times.

Descartes’ childhood is when he started his habit of thinking positively, according to him, of not letting himself get carried away by his passions, which were his solutions to melancholy as a boy. In one letter to Elisabeth, he avowed that he knew how real life examples are more believable than theories, so he gave himself as an example of success for his theory concerning the passions. He says:

> Je sais bien que je n’écris rien ici que Votre Altesse ne sache mieux que moi, et que ce n’est pas tant la théorie, que la pratique, qui est difficile en ceci; mais la faveur extrême qu’elle me fait de témoigner qu’elle n’a pas désagréable d’entendre mes sentiments, me fait prendre la liberté de les écrire tels qu’ils sont, et me donne encore celle d’ajouter ici, que j’ai expérimenté en moi-même, qu’un mal presque semblable, et même plus dangereux, s’est guéri par le remède que je viens de dire…et cette indisposition, qui m’était comme naturelle, s’est peu à peu entièrement passée.

He probably managed to overcome some of the depression he experienced, but his mind must have been affected by his constant fear of possibly dying, as he noted himself that traumas from childhood affect one’s adult life as well. Also, he suffered some blows in his adult life, like the death of his five-year-old daughter, as well as that of his father soon after. Gaukroger mentions that Descartes was looking for peace towards the end of his life, a respite from his problems, as well as his condition, perhaps. Towards the end of his correspondence with Elisabeth, he is gardening, taking care of his health and staying at

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454 Descartes, *Lettres*, Letter from Descartes, June 1645, p. 119-120.
home when he realized that he could not travel. It is then possible that Descartes could relate so well to Elisabeth because he knew first-hand what she was experiencing. This could also explain why he felt so close to her.

**Descartes’ solution**

Descartes said that sadness was caused by “L’opinion …qu’on a d’avoir quelque mal ou quelque défaut,” \(^{455}\) and a feeling that everything is a subject of anger, which would make of this condition a psychological one. Sadness is a symptom of melancholy, sometimes even its cause. So, for Descartes, since melancholy was mostly psychological, the best way to cure it was to work on one’s soul: “l’exercice de la vertu est un souverain remède contre les Passions.” \(^{456}\) By this, he recommended not to get carried away by the passions: “éviter leurs mauvais usages, leurs excès,” \(^{457}\) to think positive thoughts, and divert oneself: “Descartes connait la technique du divertissement et il en use remarquablement dans sa correspondance avec la princesse Elisabeth pour combattre la tristesse, nous dirions la mélancolie.” \(^{458}\) He mentioned himself in his letters to her that he would write about topics that would divert her from her daily worries at the court, with her family. Daily routines and hygiene are other practical advice that Descartes gave to melancholy sufferers: “la diète et l’exercice sont, à mon avis, les meilleurs [remèdes] de tous, après toutefois ceux de l’âme, qui a sans doute beaucoup de force sur le corps.” \(^{459}\) For Descartes, if one works on one’s soul, the healing of the body will follow. It is

\(^{455}\) Descartes, *Passions*, p. 132.


\(^{458}\) Mesnard, *Descartes*, p. 76.

\(^{459}\) Descartes, *Passions*, p. 184.
important to comprehend the passions because “la connaissance des passions permet de
les maîtriser.” Meditation and directing the imagination are both used to conquer
melancholy. They both go back to the idea of working on one’s soul, of emotional
neutralization and self-control. The general remedy Descartes prescribed was that a
person suffering from melancholy, or any excess of a particular passion, should control
him/herself, or rather, should use of control against the passions and redirect one’s
thoughts on other things. This idea was mainly developed by Montaigne in the sixteenth
century. When Montaigne realized that he was suffering from an attack of melancholy, he
decided to retire to his country home, to go to his library and to concentrate his energy
and thoughts on his writing so he would forget about his melancholic complexion and
divert himself from it.

By telling Elisabeth about his way of dealing with melancholy as a child, Descartes
overlooked that he and the Princess had very different temperaments, which
also needed to be taken into consideration in the healing process. Apparently, when
Descartes was sad, he would eat more and sleep better than when he was happy. In his
case, joy would take his strength away. In the case of the princess, it was the opposite:
joy would bring her strength and sadness was disabling her. She apparently was of a sad
or melancholic composition. The Princess’ description of her condition in her letters to
Descartes sounds like she could have been definitely melancholic, but it seems that
Descartes’ remedies were not appropriate for her complexion. What made her feel better
in her melancholic ailment were Descartes’ letters and concern, not the remedies he
prescribed:

\footnote{Mesnard, Descartes, p. 76.}
Vos lettres me servent toujours d’antidote contre la mélancolie, quand elles ne m’enseigneraient pas, détournant mon esprit des objets désagréables qui lui surviennent tous les jours, pour lui faire contempler le bonheur que je possède dans l’amitié d’une personne de votre mérite, au conseil duquel je puis commettre la conduite de ma vie. Si je la pouvais encore conformer à vos derniers préceptes, il n’y a point de doute que je me guérirais promptement des maladies du corps et des faiblesses de l’esprit. Mais j’avoue que je trouve de la difficulté à séparer des sens et de l’imagination des choses qui y sont continuellement représentées par discours et par lettres, que je ne saurais éviter sans pécher contre mon devoir. 461

Elisabeth’s refusal to take Descartes’ advice into consideration is not a lack of will, but rather the fact that she cannot separate herself from her duties as a princess, considering her difficult family situation. She simply could not avoid intellectual stimulation, nor royal duties. Elisabeth, saw herself as the embodiment of body and mind, and also represented their union to Descartes, being rational in her thinking as well as emotional, and the proof that they cannot be separated. This is why Descartes’ theories would not work for her, but his care, support and attention would. Also, as their correspondence evolved, their relationship evolved, and they seemed to work and think together in order to find the nature of a happy life. As Andrea Nye mentions, there is a new rapport in these letters, a sympathetic intimacy not of bodies but of minds that are different, able to disagree, and also able to reason together and enjoy thinking together about the nature of happiness. 462 It is evident that Elisabeth and Descartes show differences in interpretations of the body, the mind and their union. Descartes put all bodily feelings at a distance and thought that our bodies could be controlled by mathematical science. Elisabeth thought that mind and body could be integrated, when

461 Descartes, Lettres sur la morale, Letter from Elisabeth 22 June 1645, p. 52 (emphasis mine).
“emotions become intelligent and the mind sensitive.”\textsuperscript{463} This is why Descartes, thanks to his correspondence with Elisabeth, progressively changed his mind and realized that it was not possible to keep body and mind separated, and that their union was important in the well-being of Man.

Most importantly, melancholy has different aspect in different people, and the remedies chose to cure it would consequently have to be different. Descartes must have forgotten that different bodies react differently to events that happen in life. Although he stated himself that sadness could be associated or caused by different events, such as harmful foods or not enough food as a child. Considering that there were different causes, Descartes should have realized that there should be different cures as well, and that the ones which worked for him, might not work for the princess.

\textbf{Descartes and seventeenth-century physicians on melancholy}

In the seventeenth century, the concept of melancholy was still not defined as one particular illness, and its causes, symptoms and cures were still numerous and influenced by earlier medical traditions. The condition described by Descartes and Elisabeth in the \textit{Letters} is caused by a random movement of the spirits in the brain, and is largely the result of an irregular break in the motions caused by external bodies in the nerves. Descartes did not mention an imbalance of humors, which would cause the illness, as most of the physicians of the seventeenth century would. For Descartes, this illness is psychological and physical, but it is not the physical which causes the psychological as it

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{463} Nye, \textit{The Princess and the Philosopher}, p. 57.}
was believed until then. For him, the psychological influenced the physical nature of the illness.

According to Michel Foucault, the first half of the seventeenth century was a time of a great debate about the origin of melancholy, in the effort to determine if possessed people could be assimilated to melancholics. Two protagonists of this debate in France were Duncan and La Mesnardière. The debate’s questioning was the following:

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faut-il nécessairement avoir un tempérament mélancolique pour être atteint de mélancolie? L’humeur mélancolique est-elle toujours froide et sèche; n’arrive-t-il jamais qu’elle soit chaude, ou humide? Est-ce plutôt la substance qui agit ou les qualités qui se communiquent?\]

As a result, the proof that the “melancholic juice” provokes melancholy lays in the fact that it presents the same qualities as the illness, there is a dynamic which analyses in each of the qualities of melancholy the strength found in it, but sometimes it is within a quality itself that the conflict can appear, because a quality can be altered in its development and become its own opposite, and finally the qualities can be altered by accidents, circumstances, conditions of life, which meant that a person whose natural complexion was not cold and dry could become so. According to Foucault, this change in the way of perceiving melancholy would create two sides of the notion of melancholy: a first one where the symptoms would define the profile of sadness, of blackness, of slowness and immobility, and on the other, a notion where the pathology of an idea, a fear, a terror

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466 Foucault, *Folie*, p. 320-321.
would grow. In this context the following physicians gave the following definition of melancholy:

Peter Lowe (1654) said that melancholy is a humor “cold and drye, thick in consistence, sour tasted, proper to nourish the parts that are cold and drye, and it is compared to the earth or Winter.” It was consequently a very physical constitution for Lowe. Descartes, in contrast did not associate melancholy with a physical humor at all.

For La Mesnardière (1664), melancholy is a humor and an illness. He said that the illness has taken its name from the humor because, “la maladie a pris le nom de l’humeur qui lui sert de matière & n’est autre chose qu’un délire sans fièvre, accompagné le plus souvent de crainte et de tristesse.” If considered as a humor, melancholy connotes two bodily fluids: the melancholic juice, which is cold and dry, or the atrabilious humor, which is a burnt version of the first one. When it is a sickness, according to La Mesnardière, it is caused by “l’adustion de la bile jaune, du sang, ou du suc mélancolique.” The coldness and dryness of the melancholic juice are important because the coldness diminishes the spirits, and the dryness makes them able to remember an impression on the imagination for a long time, and the blackness, which is the result of the burning of the juice, deprives them of their natural clarity and subtlety. Coldness deprives sufferers of courage from courage and “donne de la timidité, surtout

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467 Foucault, Folie, p. 321.
469 Baladan, Skilful Physician, p. 215.
470 La Mesnardière, Apologie, p. 49.
471 La Mesnardière, Apologie, p. 50.
472 La Mesnardière, Apologie, p. 52.
473 La Mesnardière, Apologie, p. 63.
A patient suffering from melancholy would consequently have heated up melancholic juice. Such a warming up happens in cases of old age, in young people, because of solitary life, of meditation, eating warm meats, anger, sadness, love, and fear. Another cause could be the idleness of spirits. This is why the melancholy illness manifests itself in many different ways, and sometimes has such rare effects that it is not easy to distinguish it from madness.

For La Mesnardière, melancholy impacts the ability of the soul: “L’intempérie froide et sèche affaiblit tellement le cerveau qu’au lieu de faire profit de la nourriture qui lui est ordonnée, il la tourne en un mauvais suc qui altère les esprits et les rend inhabiles aux operations de l’âme,” and the patient could suffer from furious and reckless deliriums. La Mesnardière made the distinction between the three kinds of melancholy known at the time: the one located in the brain (idiopathic melancholy), the one caused when all the blood is infected with melancholic juice, and the one located in the hypochondria (hypochondriacal melancholy), which, although very different, affected the animal ability. Once a patient is taken by melancholy, this illness could degenerate into other illnesses, which could result in death in rare cases. La Mesnardière noticed that
the remedies that have cured melancholy were those that rejoice the spirits, purify blood and dissipate melancholy.\textsuperscript{482}

Over all, for La Mesnardière, the cause of the illness is first psychological (sadness or fear) which cause a physiological reaction (the warming up of the melancholic juice), which in turn creates physical symptoms, which impact the brain and its ability to think clearly and to think happy thoughts. Everything becomes dark and gloomy. This description of melancholy is probably the most complete for the period of time, and is the closest to what Descartes described. Moreover, La Mesnardière’s definition exemplified the close relationship between the body and the mind, and consequently exemplified the union between mind and body.

The physician François Du Port (1694), who worked for thirty years as a country doctor, recorded all the symptoms and causes of different diseases he witnessed over the years in a work entitled \textit{The Decade Of Medicine or The Physician of the Rich and the Poor in which all the Signs, Causes and Remedies of Disease are Clearly Expounded}. He wrote this work in Latin, and in 1694, Du Four, the adviser and official physician to Louis XIV, acquired the rights to this work, translated it into French, and published it for the first time.\textsuperscript{483}

François Du Port differentiated between three kinds of melancholy, just as La Mesnardière had done: the overpowering melancholy (blood full of melancholic juice), the melancholic illness (idiopathic), and the melancholic hypochondria. Du Port’s triadic classification goes back to Rufus of Ephesus, who seemed to have been the originator of

\textsuperscript{482} La Mesnardière, \textit{Apologie}, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{483} Preface by Georg Hartmann of \textit{The Decade of Medicine}.
this classification, as seen in the introduction. First, the overpowering melancholy comes to those

who drink coarse red wine, who cram themselves with meat preserved in salt, who are without piles or varicosities, whose womb is without menses but has foul discharge, especially those desperate from this: or if the year is cold, or hot and dry, or the autumn capricious. 484

The overpowering melancholy is similar to the melancholy mood. As Du Port described it, a man suffering from this overpowering melancholy has a mind which wanders, he says little, his spirit is gloomy with sorrows, anxiety and horror that come at dead of night with ideas that disturb his mournful mind. 485

The melancholy illness patient has obvious physical signs, according to Du Port, as well as mental ones:

redness and pallor and the skin is rough and dry, with the black vitiligo, and there is wasting. But the two true morbid features of this obscure humour reside within the brain, causing perpetual fear and horror. Then the patient’s mind is fixed awry, and his voice utters delirious words. The cause is in the brain, in that it is dry and cold. 486

The melancholy illness that Du Port describes is the one that would now be considered manic-depression. Du Port still describes it in physiological terms, although placing it in the brain.

Finally, melancholic hyponchondria is caused by a distemper of morbid obstruction that comes when the vessels of the mesentry 487 are filled with malignant humor which the heated liver corrupts, as does the fire of the spleen: the black fumes fill

484 Du Port, Decade of Medicine, p. 10-11.
485 Du Port, Decade of Medicine, p. 10.
486 Du Port, Decade of Medicine, p. 26-27.
487 Membrane that attaches the intestines to the abdominal wall.
the brain, and the rumbling hypochondria resounds so much as barely to admit of any healing, unless by skilful use of potent herbs. This illness’ physiological causes attack the brain.

The three illnesses, although showing in each case that melancholy is caused by a deterioration of a different organ (the whole body for the first, the brain for the second and the spleen for the third) have something in common. They ultimately attack the brain and make the patients suffering from these illnesses gloomy, fearful, causing a disturbed mind. This is also what La Mesnardière had observed and recorded.

As for the remedies, Du Port recommends the purging out of melancholy in general. The one concoction prescribed by Du Port is composed of the following ingredients:

- bugloss, borage, capers, tamarind, polypodium, dodder, blam that expels care and troubling dreams; and fiery apple valued for its fragrance, cuscata, violet, hop, hart’s-tongue, senna, with prunus, whey and sweet raisins: and that herb whose fumes excite tears like those of love, used by Melampus to purge and cure the daughters of Proetus, commonly called the black hellebore, of whose root’s rind a drachm, not more, is pounded and cooked in fat broth or taken in barley water, mixed with syrup of violet or mallow, jujube or such like, beaten up together for fear of provoking convulsive ills: and this concoction is known as harmech, a noble liquor full of savour: or else there are pills of Armenian earth or lapis lazuli.

This remedy sounds similar to the one used by Rufus to cure melancholy, as described in the introduction. Although there are more ingredients in the one proposed by Du Port, the main ingredient, hellebore, is used in most medical remedies to cure melancholy, and is still a part of the recipe. Interestingly, both recipes require for a liquor to be added to the concoction. Since Hippocrates, wine had been considered an excellent remedy for many

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488 Du port, Decade of Medicine, p. 49.
489 Du Port, Decade of Medicine, p. 86-87.
illnesses, and the use of liquor in such a concoction probably comes from this tradition. Alcohol also preserves ingredients, makes them drinkable or palatable.

After describing this remedy to purge melancholy, Du Port gave a specific remedy for melancholic hypochondria, as well as one for the melancholic illness. The prescribed treatment for melancholic hypochondria is to force the dark humor downwards, either with frequent enemas, by often bleeding if the veins are swollen, the liver hot, or the menses absent; or warm bathing for the “most furious anxiety” and if the skin is dry. The remedy for the melancholic illness is not totally dissimilar to the ones just mentioned. Du Port said that the black humor, since it has settled in the brain, needs to be expelled with an enema, or gently purged with lenitives like senna and whey, cooked with apples, and seeds of horehound, lemon and bugloss:

Open the cephalic or the median vein, or the main cubital if the spleen or liver is the main cause of the disease; and if the periods have stopped, continue purging and open the veins around the ankle. If none of this assuages the disease, for a stronger purge give hyeris, or so-called hamech or diaprune; and, if this too does not work, try hellebore, or the Armenian pill is excellent in power, and lapis lazuli, and certainly the plant called fumitory. Open a vein in the head and obtain sleep by means of violets and lettuce and water-lily flowers. Immerse the patient well in a warm bath; the stream will rejoice his heart. Make a drink from gemstones and chermes mixed, and theriac and bugloss water, or water drunk with wine. The flesh of calf, roebuck or fowl are sound sustenance, available in every country home: and give white bread and water mixed with wine.

This series of remedies shows a progression from milder to harsher solutions to cure melancholy. One can easily imagine a physician prescribing the first one of the list, and then going on to the next, and again to the next in the case of the previous remedy’s failure to cure the illness. Once again, the directive to treat a physical illness emerges.

490 Du Port, *Decade of Medicine*, p. 150-151.
491 A remedy that eases pain and discomfort.
492 Du Port, *Decade of Medicine*, p. 112-113 (emphasis mine).
with this remedy: the goal of purging melancholy out of the body shows its understanding as something physical that infiltrated the body and needs to be taken out, just like any other physical illness. There is a suggestion of construing melancholy as a mood-oriented illness when Du Port stated that “the stream will rejoice his heart.” Also, Du Port located the illness in the brain, as Hippocrates did in the fifth century BC. But Du Port went far away from La Mesnardière’s cyclical understanding of melancholy. For him, the treatment had nothing to do with curing the soul, all emphasis was placed on curing the body.

Consequently, it is possible to say that La Mesnardière is one physician of the seventeenth century who had a better understanding, just like Descartes, of the role melancholy plays on the mind and on the body, being at the siege of their union, because it is an illness which is mental and physical, attacking both substances of the body.

**From Dualism to Trialism through melancholy**

The realization that there is a union between the body and the soul, due to the human reactions that did not respect the scheme “mind alone” and “body alone” without interaction between the two, was probably the reason that Descartes became convinced that sensory experiences could be the result of an interaction between body and soul. This gap in his first conception could have come from the fact that at first he was solely theorizing. Then, he had to turn his theories into practice for Elisabeth. By doing this he got caught in his own abstraction and saw that a third element needed to be considered in his primitive dualism, the union of the body and the soul, although he never accepted it fully, never mentioned a *trialism*, and always kept sensory sensations and imagination as
belonging to either categories. After having undone the relationship between body and soul, Descartes could not put it back together. Descartes’ difficulty reconciling body and soul contrasts with Montaigne’s emphasis on the importance of keeping body and soul unified in order to study human nature.

Through his treatise *Les Passions de L’Ame* and letters to princess Elisabeth, Descartes was trying to transform his theories of the human machine model into practical examples. Its purpose was to explain in detail the attitudes and practices which can help a man overcome weakness and achieve happiness.\(^{493}\) At first, for Descartes, melancholy, sadness, and worry seemed to be defects of the human machine that could not have come from the mind, which is guided by reason. For Descartes, the body’s defects impact the good functioning of the mind, having for consequence sad or worried humors.\(^{494}\) Originally, it seemed that Descartes was attributing melancholy to a bodily defect only. But, although Georges Minois says that “ce pur cérébral regarde avec commisération les mélancoliques qui l’entourent; à ses yeux, ils souffrent d’une maladie dont l’origine est purement physiologique;”\(^{495}\) Descartes was fascinated by this condition, that afflicted not only him, but also Elisabeth. It is also noticeable that in Descartes’ thoughts, passions, which can be progressively mastered by examining the action of the soul on the body, are at the point of junction between the body and the soul: consequently, melancholy is at the junction between the body and the soul, since it is a disease of the soul which has an impact on the body. Melancholy is the answer to the questioning of the union between

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\(^{493}\) Nye, *The Princess and the Philosopher*, p.90.


body and soul. If one understands melancholy, one will understand why the union between body and soul is possible and exists.

The role of melancholy in Descartes’ theorizing is extremely important. Elisabeth’s condition shows that the ailment which touched her soul had physical consequences on her body. Because of the initial strict separation between body and soul, this illness defied Descartes’ theory. It showed that there was interaction between the two, and that they were linked and could interact on one another. Since body and soul are not enough anymore to define Descartes’ theory, a third element needs to be added in order for this theory: their union. Two elements are not enough to understand melancholy, and this is why the study of melancholy by Descartes and Elisabeth is such an important and decisive point in the progression of Descartes’ dualism.

In a recent article, Grant Duncan agrees that Cartesian dualism is not enough to explain all human reactions. He mentions that Descartes’ theory of dualism has been misunderstood by many and that Descartes should not be associated with mechanistic theories that ignore the effect of the mind on the body, but that the real questioning should be about what kind of interplay he intended between the two.496 Duncan also argues that the Cartesian dualism which medical critics use has little to do with the dualism which Descartes actually proposed, because his theory was elaborated for human beings afflicted by a condition that occurs without conscious intent.497 Duncan goes on to say that one of the subtleties of Cartesian dualism is that it maintains that body and soul are completely different kinds of substances, but that they are nonetheless closely joined.

496 Duncan, Mind-Body, p. 490.
497 Duncan, Mind-Body, p. 496.
and that Descartes tried to explain *physiologically* how they are united.\(^{498}\) In that respect, Duncan also says that, “one can at least say with certainty that the mind-body relationship conceived by Descartes does not totally rule out psychosomatic theories of health and illness,” and he claims that Descartes theories for Princess Elisabeth were psychosomatic theories of disease.\(^{499}\) This would mean that the Princess’ disease was psychosomatic only and that she did not suffer from depression or melancholy. Or, this could mean that for Duncan, depression is a psychosomatic disease. One key point that Duncan makes is that for Descartes, the maintenance of health and the treatment of illness comes from the knowledge of the whole person, body and soul, and that “Descartes seems to be intent on the somatopsychic issue of how passions of the material body affect the immaterial soul.”\(^{500}\) Finally, Duncan observes that Descartes, although he considered the whole range of behaviors and passions which the union of body and soul could produce, he did not investigate how such a union may lead to disease.\(^{501}\) Duncan’s argument reinforces the idea that if Descartes’ theory is understood as it has been by theorists who describe it as Cartesian dualism, this theory lacks a third element, although it is the perception that Duncan lists this element as an integral part of dualism. In my opinion Descartes talks about the separation of the body and the soul throughout his theories, up until the moment when he realizes that this theory lacks an element that would explain diseases such as melancholy that clearly show an influence of the soul on the body and vice versa. I agree with Duncan that Descartes does not exclude such an influence, but not that he knows from the beginning that this influence exists. Once again, he separated the body and the

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soul, and later found out that he could not tie them back together very easily. I disagree with Duncan that Descartes did not investigate how a union between body and soul could lead to diseases, particularly in the letters to Elisabeth. I think that melancholy is a key to understanding Descartes’ theory, when theorizing and investigation about the mind-body union. What is really interesting, however, is that such literature, the possibility of a trialism in Descartes’ theory has become an open topic of debate.

**How to conceive the union**

Descartes had the idea of presenting an apology at the beginning of his treaty, saying that he was talking as a “physicien” and not as a philosopher. It is possible that this was an effort to explain the gap in his reasoning as far as a third element necessary to Man’s life.

After many letters and interrogations from the Princess, Descartes finally arrived at an answer, a doctrine, related to Man’s three states of knowledge, relative to three properties of the soul and the processes through which they function. The first one is pure entendement or understanding, which gives us the knowledge of God and of ourselves; the second gives us the knowledge of our bodies; and the third one leads us to the state of common sense, to practical life, to common science, and the notion of the union of body and soul is part of this third category:

> Les connaissances de ce degré n’ont point de rapport aux premières. Ce sont des vérités d’expérience qui ne se connaissent qu’obscurément par l’entendement seul, ni même par l’entendement aide de l’imagination. Et il faut bien convenir que nous les devons à une autre source de nos connaissances, à savoir les sens. C’est dans cette troisième classe que doivent être rangées les choses qui appartiennent à l’union de l’âme et du corps. 502

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Descartes had to admit at that point, that the senses were, after all, also a source of knowledge, while he had criticized them in earlier works. Consequently, the impact that the soul has on the body and vice versa is due to the nature of the soul: we cannot see it with our own eyes, we cannot touch it from the outside: only our inner body has a connection with it and creates movement and passions. For Descartes, finally, understanding the union of body and soul is only possible without meditating and studying abstract topics. Descartes actually advised Elisabeth to avoid metaphysics in order to understand the union of body and soul.

**Melancholy in the Passions de l’âme: Languor and melancholy**

The symptoms of Elisabeth’s condition were that she was sad, did not feel like doing her duties, she did not want to eat, she could not sleep very well, and she was often sick. In *the Passions of the Soul*, Descartes described sadness as a “langueur désagréable, en laquelle consiste l’incommodité que l’âme reçoit du mal ou du défaut que les impressions du cerveau lui représentent comme lui appartenant.” The physiological movement that accompanies sadness is that ”le sang va fort peu vers le coeur”, “l’appétit ne diminue pas” and the passage to the liver is closed up. Then follows fever and stomach aches, as well as other exterior signs of this particular passion like languor.

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503 De Careil, *Descartes et la Princesse Palatine*, p. 27.
504 Descartes, *Passions*, p. 132.
505 Descartes, *Passions*, p. 140.
506 Descartes, *Passions*, p. 146.
some action of the eyes and of the face and changes of color: “on peut aussi rougir étant triste,” as well as develop tears.

Some of the causes and symptoms of Elisabeth’s condition, and of the sadness and languor described by Descartes, are quite similar to the ones modern psychiatry uses to diagnose depression, as seen in the introduction, although admittedly the different kinds of depression found currently are much more complex. When the princess suffers gloom, helplessness, feels inadequate in her role, and lacks confidence in her ability to take charge of the kingdom, it could be argued that she displays symptoms of modern day depression. Also, she seems to have specific attacks of it, that actually manifest themselves through physical sickness as described in the following passage from one of Descartes’ letter to her where he had learned of her condition:

J’ai été extrêmement surpris d’apprendre... que Votre Altesse a été longtemps malade... que Votre Altesse a eu, trois ou quatre semaines durant, une fièvre lente, accompagnée d’une toux sèche, et qu’après en avoir été délivrée pour cinq ou six jours, le mal est retourné... La cause la plus ordinaire de la fièvre lente est la tristesse; l’opiniâtreté de la fortune à persécuter votre maison, vous donne continuellement des sujets de fâcherie, qui sont si publics et si éclatants, qu’il n’est pas besoin d’user beaucoup de conjectures...pour juger que c’est en cela que consiste la principale cause de votre indisposition.

The remedy used now is therapy, a work on the patient’s conscious and unconscious, which is not too far from Descartes’ work on the soul that he proposes. What was added in current psychiatry are medications to reestablish the chemical imbalance of the brain which are used to cure depression.

507 Descartes, Passions, p. 148.
508 Descartes, Passions, p. 156.
509 Descartes, Letters, Letter to Elisabeth, May 18, 1645, p. 115-116 (emphasis mine).
Depression as it is described now can be found in the seventeenth century, but it seems like the terms languor and sadness used by Descartes to describe this particular kind of passion of the soul are not exact terms for the condition of melancholy. Descartes does not even pronounce the word melancholy in his treatise, although it was the subject of their discussion in the letters. These other words (languor, sadness…) seem to be too weak, inadequate to characterize Elisabeth’s complaint.

**Languor for Descartes**

In the *Passions de l’âme* Descartes gave his theory of psycho-physiological affections and does not explicitly talk about melancholy. The term he uses is *langeur*, languor, as well as sadness, and it is important to define why these effects could in fact be melancholy. The current definition of languor is the following:

1. a lack of vigor or vitality; weakness;
2. a lack of interest or spirit; feeling of listlessness, indifference;
3. the condition of being still, sluggish, or dull.  

Descartes defines languor as the result of passions that can be excusable, “qui nous empêche quelquefois de mettre en exécution les choses qui ont été approuvées par notre jugement.”  

This was one of the subjects of discussion between Descartes and Elisabeth. Interestingly, he classified it as excusable, and as mostly being associated with love, as a condition that prevents one from thinking about anything else. In their situation, it was probably something they have had to face, since they were in a relationship that could never be consummated.

Physiologically, according to Descartes, languor appears because there were not enough spirits in the nerves to obey the commands of the pineal gland, when it wants to move a muscle. Descartes also stated that this passion could be caused by many different passions: love, desire, hatred, sadness, and even joy can cause this state according to Descartes. When one of these passions causes languor, it is because the particular passion is occupying the soul so much that all the movements of the gland, which are not useful to this invasion of love into the soul are stopped. This state due to love is usually associated with desire as well, desire for an object whose acquisition is not possible for the moment: “Et la Passion qui cause le plus ordinairement cet effet est l’Amour; jointe au Desir d’une chose dont l’acquisition n’est pas imaginée comme possible pour le temps present.” The same is true for the other passions: languor would occur if one passion or the other is so strong that the soul is busy with that one alone, especially when the desire of an object which cannot be acquired for the moment is associated with that passion. Most importantly, languor does not happen as a result of a surprise, but rather, it needs time to be formed, and according to Descartes, is found more with love than in any other passion. Moreover, Descartes stated that the principal of the union between our body and soul is based on the fact that if once we have joined an action with a particular thought, every time one will appear, the other one will appear automatically as well, but that it is not always the same passion that is associated with the same thought. With this idea, Descartes explained how a particular person can be afraid of cats not knowing why, but by discovering later that this person had been frightened by a cat in his

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512 Descartes, Passions, p. 151.
513 Descartes, Passions, p. 151.
514 Descartes, Passions, p.152.
youth: another proof of the importance given to childhood traumasms by psychoanalysts.

**Languor for Jean de Meun**

As seen in chapter one, Jean de Meun talked about languor as well. In the *Roman de la Rose* context, languor appears when Genius, in his speech, tells the young man where he can find a remedy for his illness: in the fountain found in the garden he describes as being the Lamb’s Park. The water from this fountain which he mentioned can cure animals who fell into languor:

\[
\text{Qui tant est bele et tant profite} \\
\text{Por guerir, tant sunt savourees,} \\
\text{Toutes bestes *anlangorees*.}^{515}
\]

The young lover is looking for a remedy for his pain, he needs relief for his sadness and depression, for his loss, for the physical agony in which he finds himself. In his final sentence, Genius proposes a remedy: the fountain. Genius explains that all the wonderful things found in the garden originate in a fountain.

\[
\text{Tretoutes choses delitables} \\
\text{Et veraies et pardurables} \\
\text{Ont cil qui leanz se deduisent;} \\
\text{Et bien est droiz, car touz biens puisent} \\
\text{A meïsmes une fonteine} \\
\text{Qui tant est precieuse et seine} \\
\text{Et bele et clere et nete et pure,} \\
\text{Qui toute arouse la closture.}^{516}
\]

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515 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.20435-20438. "cette fontaine que j’ai mentionnée, qui est si belle, si utile, et qui guérit, tant son eau est agréable au goût, toutes les bêtes tombées en langueur…” Strubel, *Rose*, p. 1059 (*emphasis mine*).

516 Jean de Meun, *Rose*, l.20353-20360. “ils disposent de tout ce qui est agréable, véritable et perdurable, ceux qui s’y divertissent. Et c’est à juste titre, car ils puisent tous les biens à même une fontaine très précieuse, limpide, belle, claire, nette et pure, qui arrose la totalité de l’enclos.” (Trsl. Armand Strubel)
Moreover, this fountain heals all beings who fell into languor. Languor being one of the adjectives describing melancholics, if the fountain heals those who fell into languor, it heals melancholy. In addition, as the fountain is described further, the understanding of many definitions of melancholy or love being necessary to describe one and unique illness becomes clearer:

[Cele fonteine]
rant tourjorz par .III. doiz soutives
eves douces, cleres et vives;
si sunt si pres a pres chascune
que toutes s’assamblyent a une
si que, quant toutes les verroiz,
et une et.III. an trouverroiz,
s’ous voulez au conter esbatre,
ne ja n’an I trouveoiz .III.,
mes tourjorz .III. et tourjorz une,
c’est leur proprieté commune.\textsuperscript{517}

This symbolism of three elements making one single one can also be associated with the religious trinity. In a work which is trying to define a concept, we find a metaphor telling us that if we consider all the parts in the picture, there is one concept that can be considered as one or as three separate ones. For our figuring of love and of melancholy, this definition is very significant. The remedy for the young lover lies in the fountain:

Genius tells him that he needs to drink some water from the fountain to be cured:

\begin{verbatim}
Lors irez ou champ deliteus,  
Par trace l’aignelet sivant,  
En pardurableté vivant,  
Boivre de la bele fonteine,  
Qui tant est douce et clere et seine
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{517} Jean de Meun, \textit{Rose}, l.20439 (b)-20448. “[cette fontaine] fait couler en permanence par trois fines conduits des eaux douces, claires et vives. Elles sont si proches l’une de l’autre qu’elles se rassemblent toutes trois en une seule, de sorte qu’en les voyant toutes ensemble vous en découvrirez à la fois une seule et trois, et si vous voulez vous amuser à les compter; jamais vous n’en trouverez quatre, mais toujours trois et toujours une: c’est la particularité qu’elles partagent.”

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Que ja mes mort ne recevroiz
Si tost con de l’ève bevroiz.\textsuperscript{518}

The water from this fountain is compared to the water from the fountain in Déduit’s orchard. Just as everything else in the first garden that the young man saw, Déduit’s fountain is fake, is a dream, and does not represent reality. It is so full of poison that it killed Narcissus when he bent over to admire himself: it is a perilous mirror.\textsuperscript{519}

In the \textit{Rose}, the first fountain caused the young man’s melancholy: it made him sick, as it does with everyone else “ou li sain devienent malade.”\textsuperscript{520} For Jean de Meun, the mirror of the fountain which creates a fake illusion of reality is what caused the young man’s melancholy: he was deceived by what he saw, he only saw the rose in the garden, but did not see that hell was all around it, that nothing was stable there, and that everything that lives in it is perishable.\textsuperscript{521} He did not realize that by following illusions he would get sick. Melancholy being described as an illness of the mind where imagination, sensations, feelings are affected, if melancholic patients follow their illusions, since they are biased by melancholy, they could get even sicker. They would follow an imaginary path full of dangers, where reason is powerless, since patients are governed by their imagination, and not by reality anymore. They think that what they see and feel is real, just as Narcissus did. But he was mislead by the erroneous mirror of the water and consequently fell in the water, drowned and died. Consequently, by following their illusions, melancholic patients could even die.

\textsuperscript{518} Jean de Meun, \textit{Rose}, l.20618-20624. “vous irez au champ de délices en suivant à la trace l’agnelet qui à la vie éternelle, pour boire l’eau de la belle fontaine qui est si douce, claire et limpide que jamais plus vous ne souffrirez la mort, dès que vous aurez goûté de son eau.”

\textsuperscript{519} Jean de Meun, \textit{Rose}, l. 20375-20389.

\textsuperscript{520} Jean de Meun, \textit{Rose}, l. 20392.

\textsuperscript{521} Jean de Meun, \textit{Rose}, l. 20320-20338.
By telling the young man to drink the water from the park he describes, Genius is telling the young man to come back to his senses, to reality, to his reason. The fountain can be considered as a homeopathic cure for melancholy. Genius thinks, just like Descartes, that by following one’s reason, and not one’s illusions, one can reach the truth, and cure from melancholy, an illness which affects the brain’s ability to think clearly, because what presents itself to the imagination tends to deceive the soul:

tout ce qui se presente à l’imagination, tend à tromper l’âme, & à luy faire paraistre les raisons, qui servent à persuader l’objet de sa passion, beaucoup plus fortes qu’elles ne sont, & celles qui servent à la dissuader, beaucoup plus foibles.\footnote{Descartes, \textit{Passions}, p. 216-17.}

For Descartes, passions need to be controlled to find health and life. For Genius, illusions need to be avoided at all cost, in order to find life and health. The similarity in thinking is quite striking between Descartes and Genius, and reveals a certain continuity of thought as far as helping people who fell into the trap of melancholy to recover.

\textbf{Descartes’ choice of words}

Descartes certainly did not choose the word languor in his work for unknown reasons. First of all, at the time when he wrote this treaty on passions, he was tired of his work always attacked by controversies, and by writing this work he wanted to interest the “gens du monde.”\footnote{Rodis-Lewis, \textit{Passions}, p. 9.} With this in mind, Descartes’ word choice and way of writing in order to interest people other than scholars, philosophers or scientists of the time, was probably influenced by a wish to be readable and understandable by less educated people. Languor is a more common name than melancholy, it is more approachable than the more
technical term, and most importantly, it can be known by the less educated people who might read his work. Also, it is a word which has been used by other writers in order to describe melancholy: Jean de Meun used it, Montaigne also uses the term languor and “languissant” throughout his work. One example was his anecdote of an attack of sadness in “De la tristesse,” when “l’âme est lors aggravée de profondes pensées, et le corps abbatu et languissant d’amour.”\textsuperscript{524} This term is consequently a part of the common vocabulary known at the time, to describe a certain condition of a person involving bodily and mental unresponsiveness or dullness to one’s environment, due to an excess of sadness, which could have been melancholy in some cases.

Also, when describing the passions of the soul, Descartes did not want the reader to consider them illnesses or natural phenomena to avoid: “elles sont toutes bonnes de leur nature, et (...) nous n’avons rien à éviter que leurs mauvais usages ou leurs excès.”\textsuperscript{525} With this in mind, languor can be understood as a natural passion for Descartes, one which is good to experience at times, as long as one does not fall into its excess, which would be melancholy. It is normal, then, that Descartes does not choose the word “melancholy” as an actual passion of the soul, because it would mean, since all passions are good by nature and should not be avoided, that he considered melancholy as good by nature and not to be avoided, as long as it is “used” well. Obviously, this understanding of what passions are for Descartes does not apply to melancholy, because he was telling the Princess, in his letters to her, that he should avoid it: avoid gloomy thoughts, avoid thinking about it, avoid the excess of languor and sadness, because that is what would lead her or lead her to melancholy. Once the melancholic phase reached,

\textsuperscript{524} Montaigne, \textit{Essais}, I, 2, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{525} Descartes, \textit{Passions}, p. 215.
since there was no more room for the soul to act freely, the patient was sick, not only mentally, but physically also, since the mind and body are united, and interact with each other, especially in cases of such a strong passion as melancholy.

The reason why Descartes chose to use languor and not melancholy in his treaty on the passions was consequently a strategic one. If he would tell people that melancholy was good in nature, everybody would want to become melancholic. Sadness and languor were passions which were more realistic to experience intermittently. Fortunately, not everybody suffered melancholy, if it is understood as depression, and as Descartes understood it.

**Depression and melancholy possible through trialism only**

Descartes’ effort to explain, treat and cure the passion named melancholy, or depression, treat and cure illustrates that, for him, the union between body and mind did exist. Indeed, if there is a union between the body and the mind, then a mental change causes a physical change and vice versa. When someone becomes depressed a mental change has occurred and the person touched with this affliction becomes physically sick. In the definition of modern-day depression, there could be some psycho-motor retardation in a patient suffering from that condition, which is a physical change that came from a mental change. This is an example of the union and consequent interaction between the body and the mind.

A trialism in Descartes’ theory of human nature would have explained human beings more thoroughly than a dualism that did not take into consideration sensory sensations or imagination, which are what make humans what they are, and which are as
essential as our bodies and minds to the human nature. This seems to be what Descartes concluded, with the help of Elisabeth’s perspicacity, when he realized that his dualism did not allow for melancholy, or a person of her rationality mixed with emotionality, to exist, when, obviously, they did. Also, human beings are tri-dimensional, and the fact that Descartes could have thought that what made them was actually a combination of three substances and not two drew a parallelism between its physical appearance and natural composition.
CHAPTER 5
A REMEDY FOR THE MAL DU SIECLE

Pensez-vous que ce soit une petite affaire que d’exposer quelque chose de comique devant une assemblée comme celle-ci; que d’entreprendre de faire rire des personnes qui nous impriment de respect, et ne rient que quand ils veulent?  

Comic characters as melancholics in seventeenth century comedies

In the seventeenth century, doctors differentiated among three kinds of melancholy. The first one was believed to have its seat in the brain, the second one in the whole body and the third one in the bowels (hypochondrias.) Patients taken with the first kind were described as being afraid of everything, of fearing death and at the same time desiring it eagerly, full of despair, and the vapors of the melancholic humor were black. Their imagination could be troubled because of three things: the natural constitution of their bodies, their mind (a violent passion which took over their mind), or by intercourse with an evil angel. They are also restless and have a corrupt kind of reasoning. Finally, they love silence, are enemies of the sun, and “have in a manner all of them one special object, from which they cannot be weined till time have wore it out.” The melancholic man sees shadows and apparitions in the air, which are

526 Molière, Impromptu, I, 1, p.214.
527 Du Laurens. Discourse, p. 88.
528 Du Laurens. Discourse, p. 100.
529 Du Laurens. Discourse, p. 94.
530 Du Laurens. Discourse, p. 96.
conveyed to his imagination and cause him to be in constant fear and terror.\textsuperscript{531} This melancholy is cured with a change in diet and with cheering up the spirits of the patient: physical and mental remedies.\textsuperscript{532}

Hypochondriac melancholy was believed to be caused by a disturbance of the digestive system (the hypochondrias), which would produce fumes that would in their turn attack the brain: “The third [hypochondriac melancholy] ariseth from amongst the bowels, but especially from the spleene, liver and the membrane called mesenterium.”\textsuperscript{533} It was also considered the least dangerous but the most difficult to understand.\textsuperscript{534} Patients with hypochondriac melancholy also display sadness and fear, they have a violent heart beat, and feel wearysomeness, as well as lassitude.\textsuperscript{535} Their whole bodies are weak, and consequently, their brain weakens and causes the imagination to be troubled.\textsuperscript{536} This melancholy is cured with remedies which take care of the body alone.\textsuperscript{537}

Considering the attributes associated with a melancholic man, such as fearful, sad, despaired, alone, seeking shadowy places, enemy to the sun, and one whom nothing can please but only discontentment,\textsuperscript{538} and considering the way Jean Rotrou, Pierre Corneille and Molière portrayed melancholic characters in their plays, it seems that they were describing the melancholic man, rather than the hypochondriac man, or maybe they assimilated the two illnesses into one. Also, considering the darker connotation of such melancholic attributes, it would have been appropriate to portray such melancholic

\textsuperscript{531} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{532} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 104-112.
\textsuperscript{533} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{534} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{535} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{536} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{537} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 134-139.
\textsuperscript{538} Du Laurens. \textit{Discourse}, p. 81.
characters on stage in tragedies, where the amplitude of their sorrow would have been more logical to show. But Molière, Corneille and Rotrou portrayed melancholic characters in comedies, such as in Jean Rotrou’s *L’Hypocondriaque ou Le Mort Amoureux* (1631) Pierre Corneille’s *La Place Royalle ou l’Amoureux extravagant* (1637), and Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* (1666) and *Le Malade Imaginaire* (1673.)

The choice of comic characters to portray melancholics in these plays can be explained by two reasons. The first one is that melancholy seems to appear as an illness of the upper class in the seventeenth century, of the *honnest homme*: “La cour de Louis XIV est peuplée de dépressifs, (…) Le grand âge accroît la détresse des courtisans.”

La Bruyère in *Les Caractères* described the life at court as follows:

La vie de cour est un jeu sérieux, mélancolique, qui applique: il faut arranger ses pièces et ses batteries, avoir un dessein, le suivre, parer celui de son adversaire, hasarder quelquefois, et jouer de caprices; et après toutes ces rêveries et toutes ces mesures, on est échec, quelquefois mat.

Melancholy is not associated with the lower class of the society. A melancholic servant would not fit on stage. All characters from the plays studied are representations of *honnestes hommes*, and they all display one form or another of melancholy. Also, as Jean-Claude Vuillemin explains, a big mutation arises between 1610 and 1640 in that the theater, which had been a popular activity until then, becomes necessary for all high-society divertissement.

Corneille, according to Jean-Claude Vuillemin, “souligne le prestige tout neuf du théâtre, la place qu’il tient désormais parmi les plaisirs

540 La Bruyère, *Caractères*, p.64.
Consequently, the audience wanted to see characters with whom they could identify: people from the court, the aristocracy or bourgeois.

The second reason to portray melancholics in comedies is that comedies were the genre destined to the *honnêtes gens*. Comedy would please them, because of its entertaining nature. According to Emmanuel Burry, comedies were written for the *honnêtes gens*: “Pour comprendre les inflexions que prend le rapport entre littérature et politesse au XVIIe siècle, il est nécessaire de se tourner vers un genre qui se situe concrètement à l’articulation du public des honnêtes gens et des modèles littéraires qu’on leur proposait: le théâtre, et tout particulièrement la comédie.”

Comedies were written for the *honnêtes gens*, because they fit into the concept of pleasing, *complaisance*, so important to *honnêteté*: “Plaire aux honnêtes gens, c’est en définitive leur proposer sur scène des modèles dans lesquels ils se reconnaissent volontiers, tant du point de vue des préoccupations générales, (galanterie, réussite mondaine) que de celui de leur expression, dans le style net et enjoué qui correspond alors à l’idéal de ‘naturel.’”

The *honnête homme* was very preoccupied with pleasing, with appearances, with the effect he produced on others, and all *honnête homme* writers “cherche à promouvoir une esthétique qui met l’accent sur les valeurs subjectives du goût et de l’agrément.”

By seeing melancholics portrayed in comedies, the *honnête* public would recognize themselves as possible melancholics. By seeing what the characters in the plays did to cure, or not, their

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542 Vuillemin, *Baroquisme*, p. 98.
545 Dens, *Honnête Homme*, p. 139.
illness, the honnêtes gens, through a process of identification, might understand what they would have to do to avoid, and possibly cure melancholy.

This chapter does not attempt to restate what has already been said about Molière’s comedies or the melancholics he portrayed on stage. With this chapter I intend to show how Molière, Corneille and Rotrou used comedy to display their thoughts on melancholy, its symptoms, different categories, and cure through laughter their honnête public. I intend to show that with seventeenth century French theater and especially Molière’s plays, Montaigne and Descartes’ or proto-Cartesian ideas on man, body and soul come to a concrete realization and representation. Molière, as well as other comic dramaturges, figures melancholy, as well as the idea of the union of body and soul through melancholic characters, and stages the ideas discussed by his influential predecessors. Molière, Corneille and Rotrou showed the influence of Cartesianism or proto-Cartesian thoughts in their plays, in their ways of presenting the constant debate between folly and reason, body and spirit, heart and soul. They also discussed how body and soul should be kept together at all times, as Montaigne had stated, otherwise man loses his human nature. These authors’ works show that out of all of man’s faculties, the one that differentiates him from animals is that of laughter. Without laughter, men become melancholic, go mad, and die. In this chapter, the emphasis will be put on the influence Montaigne, Rotrou, Corneille, Descartes and Molière’s writings had on each other, as well as the significance of melancholy for seventeenth century theater as a whole.
Curing melancholy through comedy: Rotrou, Corneille and Molière as comic playwrights for the *honnête homme*

Although Corneille and Rotrou have most exclusively and extensively been studied for their art as tragedy writers, they both also wrote a number of comedies, especially at the beginning of their careers and, as Harold Knutson says, “A thorough look at Rotrou’s comedies could give us new insight into the comic technique of his illustrious successor,” namely, Molière, and, as Han Verhoeff states “ses [Corneille’s] premières comédies ont même contribué au renouvellement du genre.” The comedies of both authors are consequently important in the development of the comic genre in France.

By writing comedies, the playwrights had one intention in mind: make the audience laugh: “By labeling his work a ‘comedy,’ for instance, [Rotrou] gives us a clear cue as to how we should react.” The reaction of the audience by seeing performances of these plays should have been laughing, which is central to Molière’s plays and the other comedies, as well as to the aesthetic of the *honnête homme*.

According to W. D. Howarth, Molière was concerned with the reception of his plays “at the hands of cultured spectators with a keen sense of their own dignity, in whose eyes reluctance to join in the laughter of a theater audience was a mark of superiority.” Molière expressed his preoccupation with the fact that his *honnête* audience might not laugh during his comedies in a few plays, such as in the following lines of *l’Impromptu de Versailles* (1663):

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Pensez-vous que ce soit une petite affaire que d’exposer quelque chose de comique devant une assemblée comme celle-ci; que d’entreprendre de faire rire des personnes qui nous impriment de respect, et ne rient que quand ils veulent?550

Another example of his worry that the honnête homme would not necessarily laugh while watching his comedies comes from La Critique de l’Ecole des Femmes (1663), when Dorante says: “C’est une étrange enterprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens.”551 Even if the honnête homme appreciated the comedies, laughter was not necessarily generated, because a certain code of conduct had to be observed in society: “Because honnêteté was an ideal of self-perfection, the honnête homme had to excel in all the virtues of the heart, the mind and those relating to social conduct.”552 The Chevalier de Méré (1610-1684) is the aristocratic author, defined as the theoretician of honnêteté, known to have defined honnêteté as means for men to perfect themselves.553 He had made it clear that the ideal gentleman was not easily moved by laughter, but Donneau de Visé’s (1639-1710) concept of “rire dans l’âme,” which is likened to a spiritual laugh, reconciled laughter and honnêteté.554 It was consequently possible for Molière to make the honnête homme laugh, if not out loud, at least in his spirits.

There must have been another reason, beyond the preoccupation with the comic success of his plays for Molière to mention it throughout his work, especially when concerning the honnête homme. As Danilo Romano states it: “Le poète a un message. Au simple plaisir d’écrire une comédie s’ajoute le désir de dire ‘quelque chose.’”555 Could

550 Molière, Impromptu, I, 1, p.214.
552 Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, p. 15.
553 Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity, p. 15.
554 Howarth, Molière, p. 27.
555 Romano, Comique de Molière, p. 58.
this message have been that laughter, especially in plays portraying melancholics, was an important part of the healing process in curing the illness? There have been numerous studies about the comic in Molière’s plays, and his willingness to please his audience with a comic spectacle, such as *Molière et les Métamorphoses du Comique* (1980) by Gérard Defaux or *Molière and The Comic Spirit* (1991) by Peter Hampshire Nurse, but none of these studies pay attention to the possible medical implications laughter could have had on the melancholic audience of the time (and possibly on the audience today.)

**Comedy and laughter as natural cures to melancholy**

In all plays taken into account in this study, the heroes are those of comedies and, “Le contexte comique éclaire d’une lumière particulière cet héroïsme.”\(^{556}\) If the hero is a melancholic *honnête homme*, how is his heroic character seen differently in a comic context? What does comedy bring to the melancholic character which tragedy, for example, did not? The answer lays in that the comedy surrounding the hero, the laughter that the comedy provokes, could be considered as a cure, or at least as preventive medicine against melancholy.

Laughter is a part of the healing process of a human being suffering, because it heals men, as Philipp Berck says it in “The Therapy of Art in Le Malade Imaginaire” (1972,)\(^ {557}\) it alleviates fears by lifting up the spirit with comedy. Gérard Defaux states that comedy has the advantage of efficiency over medicine, because medicine does not heal, but comedy does: “Elle est capable, en de certaines choses, d’aider la nature.”\(^ {558}\)

\(^{556}\) Verhoeff, *Comédies*, p. 7.
Defaux believes in the healing power of comedy, but also states that it failed with Argan, for example, because the latter does not want to join the comedy. In other words, Argan refuses to laugh, and consequently he cannot be cured from his illness. The audience as spectator of this comedy can also realize that comedy and laughter are an essential part of Argan’s possible healing process. Argan, representing an *honnête homme*, attacked by hypochondriac melancholy, can represent all *honnêtes hommes* subject to this popular upper-class illness, and if the identification process between the *honnête homme* in the audience and the one on stage is made, there is a possibility of healing through comedy, as long as the *honnête homme* in the audience participates in the comedy.

According to André Du Laurens, melancholic men can be cured by changes in diet, but also they should not be left alone, they should be pleased and praised in their actions, and they should listen to music.\(^{559}\) According to la Mesnardière, words that strike the imagination can help with the cure of melancholy.\(^{560}\) Also, since melancholy darkens the spirits and causes the brain to be full of confusion and darkness, a remedy would be to lift up the spirits.\(^{561}\) Laughter in comedies is a good way to lift up the spirits, and especially to divert the attention of the dark melancholy humor, which causes the dark thoughts and the illness.

**Novelty of the study**

Despite the numerous studies that have been made on the possibility of healing through laughter and comedy, they only concentrate on Molière’s plays, especially on *Le

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\(^{559}\) Du Laurens, *Discourse*, p. 106-107.

\(^{560}\) Mesnardière, *Apologie*, p. 152.

Malade Imaginaire. Also, the studies, such as the one by Defaux, seem to concentrate more on Molière’s healing through his characters, rather than showing the possibility of impact on the audience. There is no study on the healing power of Rotrou and Corneille’s comedies, to my knowledge. Jean-Claude Vuillemin made an allusion to the possibility of Rotrou’s work proposing an optimistic solution, “pour apprécier un monde qui se révèle dans son angoissante modernité.”

But this allusion does not refer to comedies and laughter in particular, as well as the healing power that laughter could have on a particular manifestation of anxiety, perhaps, melancholy.

Patrick Dandrey has produced an exhaustive work about Molière’s plays and has studied in depth the representation of melancholic characters on stage in seventeenth century France. His work Les Tréteaux de Saturne: Scènes de la Mélancolie à l’Époque Baroque (2003) studies the meeting point of two systems of the representation of melancholy: the one in doctors’ offices and the one on stage, or, as he says it, “la doctrine éthico-médicale du désordre atrabilaire et la dramaturgie de la folie… Ce sont les noces de Théâtre et de Mélancolie que l’on se propose d’y évoquer.” In the second volume of his in depth study of medicine and sickness in Molière’s theater La Médecine et la Maladie dans le Théâtre de Molière: Molière et la Maladie Imaginaire ou De la Mélancolie Hypocondriaque (1998), he traces the intellectual origins, the conditions of invention and the significance of the concept of imaginary sickness staged by Molière.

Dandrey studies the range of his satire of medicine and what is revealed concerning the vision of the world through laughter. His major project is to trace the major lines of the melancholic imaginary, as comedies represent it, in order to understand

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562 Vuillemin, Baroquisme, p. 318.
563 Dandrey, Les Tréteaux, p. 23.
its implicit and explicit meaning and to measure the part it took in the elaboration of the poet’s comic anthropology. In his work entitled *Le ‘Cas’ Argan: Molière et la Maladie Imaginaire* (1993), Dandrey studies the path taken by Molière to find the elements that constitute the imaginary sickness. He considers three elements in his study. The first one is that hypochondriac melancholy can be defined as a sickness of the body, which touches the mind. The second one is that the troubles of the imagination can be understood as the effects of a sickness of the soul harming the body. The third one is that the furor of passions is situated between body and soul, at the place of junction between physical sensation and mental interpretation. For Dandrey, these three elements explain the classical paradigm of relations between body and spirit, which the imaginary sickness seems to have revived in excluding sickness as a reality, while maintaining it in the nature of illusion and error. Dandrey does his study by studying the medical conditions of the emergence of the different hypotheses, which deal with the origin of Argan’s illness. Dandrey’s study is very thorough, but I think that what lays at the junction between physical and mental interpretation can be more specific than the furor of passions only. I believe that melancholy is at that junction, since it is the illness which defines and represents this junction the best.

Dandrey and the others, such as Defaux and Berk did not extend their study far enough to link the healing process of comedy or laughter to all of Molière’s comedies as well as Rotrou’s and Corneille’s. Although the studies show that there is some kind of healing power through comedy, the connection between melancholy and the possibility of curing it through laughter has not yet been shown. Since melancholy is not present in all

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plays, the healing power of laughter for melancholy can only be applied, if proven, to the plays by the three playwrights, which portray melancholy.

**Cartesian or proto-Cartesian ideas in seventeenth century comedies**

The influence of Descartes, Pascal and Montaigne, as well as other writers, is obvious in Molière’s compositions. As seen in chapter three, Descartes criticizes Aristotelianism and other ancient and accepted theories and promotes new theories based on experiments and observations or empiricism, rather than scholasticism. Descartes, Gassendi and Pascal all belonged to this group of critics of the ancient ways. Molière could be seen as being influenced by this movement as well, considering the extent of appearances of pedants in his plays, taken from the long tradition of farcical Aristotelian doctors who appear in such plays as *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), comparable to stage clowns, whose function is to provide one or two farcical episodes, which help to characterize the comic protagonist. Through his characters, Molière also criticized the doctors of the Paris university who still based their knowledge on humoral medicine and refused the use of newly-found remedies, which were empirically proven to work. His disdain for doctors mirrors Montaigne’s opinion that doctors interpreting their patients’ similar symptoms as different illnesses showed that their diagnosis was not based on scientific evidence.

In his comedies, Molière initially followed the classical tradition of farce, and little by little composed a new kind of comedy, where more characters were represented,

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566 Calder, *Molière*, p. 113-114. Calder explains how Molière’s pedants are blind and deaf to the world, consequently incapable of understanding empirical evidence, which is gathered through the senses.
giving him the ability to expand his repertoire of fools or follies represented, and where the usual and happy dénouement did not necessarily have to happen for all characters. Most of the time, Molière’s plays represented fools who failed to cope with the demands of sociability and reason, as did Descartes’ theory of reason against folly.

Descartes believed that men could attain truth through reason by following his Méthode. But first, a man must be reasonable, and folly must be defeated. According to this logic, Molière’s foolish characters would first need to be reasonable before they could attain any truth. Descartes particularly addressed his theories to the honnête homme, a character often represented in Molière’s plays, and opposed to the pedant mentioned earlier. The honnête homme had to avoid all excess, especially physical, so that the qualities proper to the soul could dominate, like reason, and especially so there would not be an excess of passions, as opposed to the pedant whose tone of voice and other physical attributes were made excessive to show that the rational soul had been silenced by being overwhelmed with excessive passions. 567 According to Descartes in his Passions de l’âme, passions exhibit exterior signs such as eye and face movement, “les changements de couleur, les tremblements, la languer, la pasmoison, les ris, les larmes, les gemissements, et les soupirs.” 568 If characters on stage show these signs, exaggerated for the purpose of comedy, it could indicate that their soul was taken over by passions, and that they were not reacting rationally.

Molière also realized through his characters the importance of keeping mind and body together, as discovered by Montaigne. The characters who cultivate either their soul or their body alone do not have the equilibrium necessary to attain reason. If one aspect

567 Calder, Molière, p. 64.
568 Descartes, Passions, Article CXII, p. 146.
of a human being is more emphasized than another, it makes this person less human, more animal-like, and so more risible. Folly and vice are punished by laughter: “Le rire nait toujours de la destruction d’un monde que le spectateur, d’accord avec l’auteur, rejette et condamne.”

Molière especially made fun of the précieuses and preciosity, when they attempt to separate mind from body in order to only live in the higher regions of the mind, sometimes neglecting the body up to a point of discomfort. As for characters who are endangered because they pay too much attention to the body, Molière portrays a man, Chrysale, in *Les Femmes Savantes* concerned only with material things such as food and comfort. As noted by Calder also, the problem with caring exclusively for the soul allows the neglected body to be out of control. As Montaigne warned in his *Essays*, the separation of body and soul leads to madness, and this is what happens to Bélise, a précieuse, in *Les Femmes Savantes*. Madness is the last stage after suffering from melancholy, it is the final stage before death. By keeping mind and body together, Molière’s characters were sure to avoid melancholy, folly, and the possibility of death due to melancholy and not natural causes. The *honnête homme* audience could understand through the unwinding of the plot the importance of avoiding excess of passions and of keeping mind and body together to avoid melancholy.

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569 Romano, *Comique de Molière*, p. 147.
570 Calder, *Molière*, p. 140. Calder gives a very detailed explanation of this phenomenon: “Molière exploits the delightful absurdity of the precious women’s view that they can love with their minds only…The special irony is that their flirtation is made easier by the pretense that the life of the mind alone matters; when all agree to ignore the existence of the flesh, there is no need to feel constrained by the social conventions which discourage obvious flirtation.” Calder, *Molière* p. 140-141.
572 “Weak, self-absorbed and living in a small world bounded by food and fear, Chrysale has given up any thought of cultivating his soul, of running his family, curbing the excesses of his wife and promoting his daughters’ welfare and happiness.” Calder, *Molière* p. 145.
The problem of a character in a play being taken over by his passions was not a new phenomenon which started with Molière. Pierre Corneille in his 1637 comedy *La Place Royalle* presents a character, Alidor, ravaged by his excess of passions, which cause him to suffer from melancholy. With this ailment, he is not even able to keep his role as main character throughout the play, since he becomes a secondary character in the fifth act, and is not a part of the happy dénouement a comedy should provide in the seventeenth century rules of comedy. He ends up alone, with his beloved devoting the rest of her life to God in a convent.

Although this play was written before Descartes’ *Passions de l’âme* (published in 1664-written in 1644) was published, the impact of passions and their effect on human behavior had been studied before, considering how the honnête homme of the seventeenth century had to behave with moderation, within the limits allowed by society. Vuillemin comments on the fact that before Descartes, the druid-philosopher Adamas imagined by the author Honoré d’Urfé (1567-1625) by teaching that a great courage controls all passions, constituted a model which inspired a way of life and a passion. Vuillemin then says that the ideology transmitted through the novel influenced the literature of the time and informed that reason had primacy over the irrational and could regulate passions. Corneille expands the idea related to body against mind with Alidor, the main character of the play. With Alidor, the idea that a defective soul can induce bodily changes and illnesses is exemplified, showing that there is a link between the two, and that they cannot be totally separated from each other. The notion of heart against reason is explained throughout the play, and reason does not prevail: “la discussion et l’appel à la

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raison ne portent plus aucun fruit.” In his excesses, the protagonist loses sight of what is reasonable, of what it is to be an honnête homme, and loses sight of his reason. He let his passions overtake him, which is what makes of him a comic character, since: “Corneille a justement su voir les côtés comiques de cette dichotomie entre la raison et les excès de la passion.” Even an honnête homme can commit some kind of crime or be unreasonable when overtaken by passions. The audience witnessing this, and identifying with the situation could understand the importance of keeping away from strong passions, and consequently avoid melancholy.

Jean Rotrou also presented proto-Cartesian thoughts in his tragi-comédie L’Hypocondriaque ou Le Mort Amoureux in 1631. Cloridan, the hero, becomes delirious when he learns, falsely, that his lover, Perside, has died. Rotrou describes him as being a hypochondriac the moment he wakes up after having fainted because of the news of Perside’s supposed death. The play implies that Cloridan displays the typical excess of passions which impedes his reason to see the truth and to believe it. His case is so severe that he even believes he is dead when he wakes up after his fainting episode. He is presented as entirely ravaged by his passions, in this case sadness and love, which could ultimately lead him to his real death.

In Cloridan’s case, we see again the interaction of body and soul and how inseparable they are. Cloridan becomes melancholic: at that time it was believed that his kind of melancholy was due to a disturbance of the digestive system (the hypochondrias), which would produce fumes that would in their turn attack the brain. Cloridan’s

575 Kerr, Amour, p. 16.
576 Kerr, Amour, p. 82.
hypochondrias are affected by Perside’s death, which affected his brain, which affected his soul, which in turn affected his body. Once again, the soul has an action on the body and vice versa. The idea of mind-body dualism is in constant interaction in l’*Hypocondriaque*.

As Du Laurens stated it, melancholic men “have in a manner all of them one special object, from which they cannot be weined till time have worn it out.”\(^577\) Cloridan’s special object is Perside, and he cannot be weaned from her, until he has worn out all the possibilities to be with her again. But Cloridan, as a melancholic character, seems to have been wise enough to gain consciousness of the evils of the illusions of a self, which becomes attached to its possessions, and becomes melancholic, and even mad by dwelling on his situation in a world which demands changes on a daily basis.

Vuillemin states that: “Rotrou se distingue de ses contemporains par un désir total, semble-t-il, de ne rien sacrifier à la volonté humaine et de conserver au Dieu Amour la toute puissance qui lui est généralement concédée par tous, mais dont les prérogatives se trouvent néanmoins très souvent limitées ailleurs par la sanction obligée de la raison.”\(^578\) Reason, despite all efforts, always prevails. In Molière’s plays which portray melancholics, the author showed that unreason would be defeated by reason first, before the characters could attain truth: it seems to be the same with Rotrou’s characters. Cloridan’s melancholy or even folly must be defeated before he can reach reason, and then discover the truth about Perside.

\(^{577}\) Du Laurens. *Discourse*, p. 96.

\(^{578}\) Vuillemin, *Baroquisme*, p. 166.
Presentation of the different melancholias in three playwrights

If melancholy is associated with solitude, shadiness, dreaming, a difficulty of being, instability, and unreason, a melancholic character presenting melancholy would display these signs. Since the characters in the following works are represented as such, they are hyperbolic expressions of the melancholic trait. Molière, Corneille and Rotrou used melancholy as the main personality trait of the following characters.

Alceste in Le Misanthrope: atrabilious misanthropy

Alceste in Le Misanthrope is a very disillusioned character, especially when it comes to believing in the human condition, or human relationships. He only sees flattery, injustice, treachery, and treason around him, which make him sick:

Mes yeux sont trop blessés, et la cour et la ville
Ne m’offrent rien qu’objets à m’échauffer la bile;
J’entre en une humeur noire, en un chagrin profond,
Quand je vois vivre entre eux les homes comme ils font. 579

As seen from Alceste’s vocabulary, what he sees around him makes him sick with melancholy: his eyes are hurt, which could refer to the blurriness caused by the melancholic vapor. Also, the melancholy humor is usually cold, and if it gets warmed up, it causes melancholy. He also mentions the black humor, and his fall into a deep sadness. From the beginning of the play, Alceste tells the audience that black humor consumes him, that his bile is sick: in other words, that he is melancholic in the original definition of the term: black bile. His illness makes him misanthropic. He wants to keep away from humankind because he has built a certain hatred against it: “J’ai conçu pour elle une

579 Molière, Le Misanthrope, I, 1, 1.89-92.
effroyable haine.” Alceste feels this way against all kinds of people, especially those with vices, particularly hypocrites. He cannot stand the masks people wear in society and believes that everything should be said frankly to everyone. With this, Alceste forgets about the moderation that the honnête homme must observe, according to which all behaviors are acceptable within a certain measure. Salwa Mishriky says that in this behavior lays his raison d’être: “la raison d’être d’Alceste, misanthrope, est de s’opposer à la domination des conventions bienséantes et complaisantes, à la soumission aux ‘dehors civils’, afin de souligner l’irréalité des apparences trompeuses.” I agree with Mishriky in that Alceste rebels against the exaggerated conventions of society, but I disagree when he says that Alceste “ne fait pas rire.”

Alceste doubts everything, even his lover’s words. He cannot believe that she would only say sweet words to him, without saying them to another man a few minutes later. He keeps changing his mind about her and cannot say what his true feelings really are, unless he explodes with jealousy. His theory is that: “Plus on aime quelqu’un, moins il faut qu’on le flatte,” and he practices what he preaches with poor Célimène who mocks him by responding:

Enfin, s’il faut qu’à vous s’en rapportent les cœurs,  
On doit, pour bien aimer, renoncer aux douceurs,  
Et du parfait amour mettre l’honneur suprême  
A bien injurier les personnes qu’on aime.

580 Molière, Le Misanthrope, I, 1, l.114.  
581 Mishriky, Misanthrope, p. 195.  
582 Mishriky, Misanthrope, p. 189.  
583 Molière, Le Misanthrope, II, 4, l.701.  
584 Molière, Le Misanthrope, II, 4, l.707-710.
The other characters listening to the conversation agree that when someone loves someone else, flaws and imperfections are not important anymore, they are even forgotten, but Alceste does not change his mind. He cannot forget or forgive flaws, and at the same time, he expects Célimène to accept him with his huge flaws of misanthropy and melancholy. His love for Célimène is extreme, as he describes it himself, but what he wishes for her is a very dark life from which he could save her:

Ah! Rien n’est comparable à mon amour extrême;
Et, dans l’ardeur qu’il a de se montrer à tous,
Il va jusqu’à former des souhaits contre vous.
Oui, je voudrais qu’aucun ne vous trouvât aimable,
Que vous fussiez réduite en un sort misérable,
Que le ciel, en naissant, ne vous eût donné rien ;
Que vous n’eussiez ni rang ni naissance, ni bien ;
Afin que de mon cœur l’éclatant sacrifice
Vous pût d’un pareil sort réparer l’injustice ;
Et que j’eusse la joie et la gloire en ce jour
De vous voir tenir tout des mains de mon amour.  

As Célimène says, it is a very strange way to love someone. The life Alceste wants for her, as also described at the end of the play, would require her to renounce to her life as a young desirable woman. She would have to give up seeing other people, going places, so he would not get jealous: “Moi, renoncer au monde avant que de vieillir,/Et dans votre désert aller m’ensevelir!”  

Alceste wants exclusivity as well as perfection, and even if Célimène is willing to be with him, as long as she can still see other people, he will not accept that because his misanthropy went too far. He has become extreme in his vice: he has become insane. Andrew Calder does a description of Alceste’s character, ravaged by melancholia, where he describes him as having usurped

the functions of the soul: “Ruled by his black bile, his melancholic lovesickness, his jealousy, his unbridled philautia and misanthropy, all passions which begin in the body and, if allowed to grow unchecked, inhibit the action of the soul, Alceste loses his judgment, fails to understand the world and himself, and so condemns himself to failure, loneliness and despair.” 587 Alceste’s flaws and passions have made him irrevocably melancholic, and not in the hypochondriac sense of the word.

His inconsistency is also related to the baroque background of the play: ideas, movements, and even feelings go from one extreme to another. He is in love and then he hates Célimène; he wants to hear nice things from her, but as soon as she says something nice he does not believe her. With Alceste, melancholy could be the typical illness of a Baroque character.

Alceste is a comic character because his behavior is too extreme, and if he says what he thinks to everyone he meets, he will have problems in his society: his behavior will not be acceptable. It is not because Alceste himself does not laugh, that people who see him cannot laugh: “Cet homme qui ne rit jamais ne cesse d’être poursuivi par le rire des autres.” 588 I believe, just as Defaux, that laughter has a central place in the play. If Molière wanted to tell his honnête public that bienséance and complaisance should not be taken to the extreme, he also showed that Alceste’s extreme behavior was to be despised and laughed at: “le rire est le signe par lequel Philinte se désolidarise des extravagances de son ami, affirme son bon sens et son appartenance au clan des bien-portants, conserve intact son prestige social et sa réputation d’honnête homme.” 589 In this, a juste milieu

587 Calder, Molière, p. 68.
588 Defaux, Molière, p. 170.
589 Defaux, Molière, p. 166-167.
needed to be followed in order to avoid all excesses. Alceste refuses to laugh, and this particular excess is the one which leads him to melancholy: “Cette haine obsessionnelle du rire, cette incapacité fondamentale à jeter sur le monde et sur soi ce regard distant et ironique derrière lequel Philinte sauvegarde sa liberté, constituent la maladie comique d’Alceste.”

Through Alceste, the audience understood that laughing was essential not to become like this misanthropic character, and especially, not to catch melancholy.

Molière mentioned in his Préface to Tartuffe that he wishes to present and possibly correct vices: “Si l’emploi de la comédie est de corriger les vices des homes, je ne vois pas par quelle raison il y en aura de privilégiés.” Molière believed that all men had vices, especially at the court, and that all vices were at the same level and had to be corrected. The excess of passion which leads to melancholy is one of them. By showing vices on stage and especially by showing how exaggerated and ridiculous they were, Molière intended to help the audience correct those vices, or control their passions, just as Descartes had intended to do through his work, directed towards the honnête homme. Molière especially wanted to present these vices in a comic way, because one is able to laugh at miserliness, hypochondria, or even misanthropy. If the audience experiences these vices and also sees how ridiculous and exaggerated they are, they are on the right path to recovery, to therapy through laughing. If the audience would laugh at the people on stage, it would mean that they would laugh at themselves and would not get

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590 Defaux, Molière, p. 178.
591 Molière, Le Tartuffe, p. 256.
592 “there is a consensus of opinion that human nature is basically flawed and that this is particularly apparent in highly organized society, as is the case at Court, where the vices are concentrated.” Nurse, Molière, p. 106.
so tangled in their vices or illnesses that they would get melancholic, mad, and maybe die.

Laughing is one of the great cures for melancholy. It seems that Alceste is too seriously sick to laugh at himself, or even to laugh at other’s vices. He takes everything very seriously and it makes him sick. Since he is not able to laugh at humankind and its flaws, he is not able to laugh at himself: he is just not able to laugh at all, it seems, although Philinte tries to put him on the right path by telling him that human nature’s flaws should be seen with a little sweetness: “Et voyons ses défauts avec quelque douceur.” 593 In fact, Philinte represents Alceste’s opposite in terms of behavior. He is phlegmatic, as he says it himself. 594 Alceste is doomed, because his incapability for laughter will lead him to melancholy madness, insanity and even possibly death.

The atrabilious melancholy seems to be the darkest of the two melancholias studied here presented in Molière’s work. However, this idea is also a question of interpretation and representation. Some directors and actors believe that Le Misanthrope should be played as a true comedy, while others see in it a latent tragedy. John Cairncross believes that the play is divided in two parts which correspond to the evolution of Alceste’s character from an Atrabilaire Amoureux to a misanthropist, where the author shows his disillusion and bitterness. 595 Salwa Mishriky is on the same side when he describes Alceste’s tragic fate. 596 While Gérard Defaux has a lighter way of conceiving the whole play, referring to Alceste’s illness as a comic one. 597 The reason for these opposed

593 Molière, Le Misanthrope, I, 1, l. 148.
594 Molière, Le Misanthrope, I, 1, l. 166.
595 Cairncross, Molière, p. 82.
596 Mishriky, Misanthrope, p. 220.
597 Defaux, Molière, p. 178.
interpretations lays in the concept of the cure for melancholy. Directors might not have in mind the healing power of a true comedy on the audience watching the play, and might have forgotten Molière’s goal in writing comedies: “J’aurais souhaité de pouvoir vous tirer de l’erreur où vous êtes, et pour vous divertir, vous mener voir sur ce chapitre quelqu’une des comédies de Molière.”\textsuperscript{598} Béralde says this line to Argan in \textit{Le Malade Imaginaire}. Molière’s goal was an entertaining one, with a possibility of preventive medicine in healing melancholy through laughter. A play about a melancholic man should especially be a comedy, and not a tragedy. Moreover, as Jacques Arnavon states it: “L’étrange enterprise de faire rire les honnêtes gens n’implique nullement que les rires doivent être obtenus vaille que vaille.”\textsuperscript{599} Laughter does not necessarily need to be heard, it could be internalized. But as long as the message of the comedy is understood, the goal has been reached.

\textbf{Argan in \textit{Le Malade imaginaire}: melancholic hypochondria}

Argan is presented as a rather healthy man in the view of everybody but himself and medical doctors. In the first act, he describes the list of all remedies he has to take and how much they cost. The audience clearly hears the irony of the situation in his daughter Angélique, his wife Béline, and his servant Toinette when they talk to him: they do not believe that he is sick, but believe that he pretends he is sick in order to get some attention. The irony of Argan’s situation goes to a deeper level when the audience learns that he wants to marry his daughter to a doctor because:

\textsuperscript{598} Molière, \textit{Le Malade}, III, 3, p. 652.
\textsuperscript{599} Arnavon, \textit{Malade Imaginaire}, p. 20.
me voyant infirme et malade comme je suis, je veux me faire un gendre et des alliés médecins, afin de m’appuyer de bons secours contre ma maladie, afin d’avoir dans ma famille les sources des remèdes qui me sont nécessaires, et d’être à même des consultations et des ordonnances. 600

From the beginning, the audience knows that Argan is miserly. He starts the play by telling the audience how much his remedies cost and that they are too expensive, no matter how much they cost. He also shows his selfishness, since he seems to want everybody’s attention all the time. With these two traits of character, it is made clear that Argan only has his interests in mind when marrying his daughter to a doctor, and not hers. Toinette knows this and makes sure that he understands that his daughter’s husband should be her choice, not his, and that since she is not sick, she does not need a doctor. Béline, his wife, even treats him as a child by telling him “Pauvre petit fils!601” and she repeats it throughout the play. Even his brother Béralde realizes that Argan has his own interests in mind rather than anyone else’s, and that his illness is “against nature”, possibly imaginary:

J’entends, mon frère, que je ne vois point d’homme qui soit moins malade que vous, et que je ne demanderais point une meilleure constitution que la vôtre. Une grande marque que vous vous portez bien, et que vous avez un corps parfaitement bien composé, c’est qu’avec tous les soins que vous avez pris, vous n’avez pu parvenir à gâter la bonté de votre tempérament, et que vous n’êtes point crevé de toutes les médecines qu’on vous a fait prendre.602

Béralde knows that his brother’s illness is probably more mental than physical. But looking back at the definition of hypocondriac melancholy, as Du Laurens stated it, if a patient is taken by hypocondriac melancholy, his brain weakens and troubles his imagination. Argan could possibly be ill with melancholy, which leads his troubled

601 Molière, Le Malade, I, 6, p. 634.
602 Molière, Le Malade, III, 2, p. 650.
imagination to think that he has all kinds of other diseases which need to be cured. Moreover, La Mesnardière describes the melancholic man as being “sain de corps,” and that they live a long life. In this light, Argan’s illness does not seem as imaginary as the others might think it is.

Just like his predecessor in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, who was diagnosed with a case of mental disease, namely, melancholy, Argan is diagnosed as being severely sick (while supposedly really being healthy) by two different doctors: Monsieur Purgon, his usual doctor, who says that his liver is the cause of the illness, and Thomas Diafoirius, son of Monsieur Diafoirius, who diagnoses that his spleen is the cause of the illness. Two doctors give him two different diagnoses for the same symptoms: fortunately, Monsieur Diafoirius is smart enough to say that the two, liver and spleen, are actually linked, and that Purgon and Thomas are both correct in their diagnosis. Both the liver and the spleen are organs mentioned by Du Laurens when a person suffers from melancholy and are dysfunctional in case of hypochondriac melancholy. Those organs being the ones mentioned by the two doctors in Argan’s case, the hypothesis that Argan really suffers from some kind of melancholia is being suggested. Interestingly, James F. Gaines suggests that the family name Diafoirius means “through the liver.” A very appropriate name for a person who diagnoses an illness related to the liver.

Diafoirius diagnoses Argan a few minutes after he claimed to the latter that he preferred to work for the bourgeois, rather than for the aristocrats, because with the bourgeoisie, doctors do not have to justify what they do to anybody:

603 La Mesnardière, Apologie, p. 230.
604 Gaines, Molière Encyclopedia, p. 118.
Le public est commode: vous n’avez à répondre de vos actions à personne; et, pourvu que l’on suive le courant des règles de l’art, on ne se met point en peine de tout ce qui peut arriver; mais ce qu’il y a de fâcheux auprès des grands, c’est que, quand ils viennent à être malades, ils veulent absolument que leurs médecins les guérissent.\footnote{Molière, Le Malade, II, 5, p. 643.}

In other words, doctors can diagnose someone who is not part of the court with different illnesses while displaying the same symptoms, simply because nobody will expect to heal, not matter what the illness is. With this explanation, Argan not really being a part of the “grands,” meaning, of the court, it is understandable that the doctors who see him, according to Diafoirius, will not really try to heal him.

Argan believes blindly what the doctors tell him, and does not question their judgment. He does not realize that Diafoirius and Purgon not only had a difference in diagnostic but in cures also (boiled or roasted meat). Moreover, when his brother tries to tell him that he is very healthy and surprised that he did not get sick from the numerous remedies he has taken, Argan replies that his doctor Purgon told him he would not live three days without taking the numerous remedies he takes, and that the remedies preserve him and his health.\footnote{Molière, Le Malade, III, 2, 650.} Dandrey comments on Argan’s non-critical view of what his doctors tell him to do, saying that this behavior “s’inscrit sans contexte à l’intérieur d’une logique médicale et d’une tradition de la relation thérapeutique parfaitement attestées: c’est une vieille règle hippocratique, et bien connue car toujours répétée, que le malade doit obéissance au médecin dans la lutte contre l’affection.”\footnote{Dandrey, Maladie Imaginaire, p. 332.}

It should not have been surprising to the audience of the time, that Argan believed everything he was told, but it could still have been interpreted or seen as a comic scene.
Argan’s illness is very interesting also in the fact that when he has to deal with other problems, like checking if his daughter Angélique sees Cléante, her admirer, in secret or not, he forgets that he is sick and feels just fine, until he remembers that he is supposed to be sick and becomes weak again: “Ah! Que d’affaires! Je n’ai pas seulement le loisir de songer à ma maladie. En vérité, je n’en puis plus. (Il se laisse tomber sur une chaise.)”  

When his brother Béralde arrives and begins talking about Argan’s daughter, Argan gets excited again which leads to an ironic comment from the brother, noticing that Argan forgot he was sick again: "Je suis bien aise que la force vous revienne un peu, et que ma visite vous fasse du bien.” Argan even forgets to walk with his cane, but fortunately, Toinette is there to remind him: “Tenez, monsieur, vous ne songez pas que vous ne sauriez marcher sans votre bâton.” Descartes observed that the best way to prevent melancholy is to be occupied with other matters, rather than the sadness of the illness. Although Descartes prescribed happy thoughts, and Argan tends to forget his illness when he becomes agitated, as long as his mind is set on something else than the disease, the remedy seems to work.

Not only is Argan’s illness only present when he has the time to think about it, but his doctor, Monsieur Purgon, is able to work on his disturbed mind and make him believe that he has the power not only to cure him with enemas and bleedings, but also, that he has the power to make him more sick, as if he had magic powers, even to bring him to death if Argan does not respect his prescriptions. Ironically, after giving Argan the long list of diseases he will suffer from since Argan disrespected Purgon’s medical

608 Molière, Le Malade, II, 8, p. 648.
610 Molière, Le Malade, III, 1, p. 649.
knowledge, Purgon says: “Et de l’hydropipsie dans la privation de la vie, où vous aura conduit votre folie.” ⁶¹¹ In his words, the folly probably means the folly of not respecting his prescription, but if the situation is studied more carefully, Argan suffers from a mental illness, melancholy, which can lead to folly, and once that point is reached, it is known that death is near, according to the doctors of the time. Monsieur Purgon may be more correct than he realizes in his diagnosis this time. Moreover, as Patrick Dandrey studied, all the illnesses mentioned by M. Purgon can be related to and derive from hypochondriac melancholy: “[le diagnostic de M. Purgon] s’accorde tout à fait avec l’hypothèse d’une hypochondrie atrabile et en confirme d’une certaine manière le diagnostic.” ⁶¹² Despite the comic effect of the scene, the audience needed to realize the seriousness of the illness portrayed and that it could degenerate into other illnesses which would lead to death if not cured in time.

In a mise-en-scène where Toinette is portrayed as a doctor from a different city, the audience gets the list of all of Argan’s symptoms: headaches, blurry vision, heart aches, weariness in all members, and stomachaches (colics). Most of these symptoms (blurry vision, weariness, heart aches, stomach aches) are those of the melancholic. But Toinette, the “doctor”, diagnoses him with a lung disease, and tells him that he can only heal if one of his arms is cut and if one of his eyes is blinded. This time Argan does not feel that he is sick enough to necessitate becoming a one-armed, one-eyed man. That moment could be the beginning of Argan’s recovery. Soon after, a stratagem is put together to test his wife’s love. Of course, the truth is discovered and Argan realizes that he was blinded by his sickness and did not see that his wife was only after his money.

⁶¹¹ Molière, Le Malade, III, 5, p. 654.
⁶¹² Dandrey, Maladie Imaginaire, p. 336
Argan also realizes that his daughter, Angélique, loves him, and he finally agrees to marry her to Cléante, who in turn agrees to become a doctor, which is a rather easy thing to do, according to Molière. Since Argan comes closer to the truth about his family, it also means that he comes closer to the truth Descartes describes for those who follow his method. It could mean that Argan is closer to being reasonable. But Argan’s total recovery would probably come, as his brother mentions it, if he becomes a doctor himself. He probably knows just as much as “real” doctors do: “Vous êtes savant; et il y en a beaucoup parmi eux qui ne sont pas plus habiles que vous.”

Béralde knows that entering Argan’s folly will probably help him to get out of it. If everyone plays along, as recommended by doctors of the time to cure melancholy when everything else fails, it might create the counter-shock that would reverse the consequences of the initial shock which put the protagonist in his state of melancholy. Béralde says it in a better way when Angélique asks him: “Mais, mon oncle, il me semble que vous vous jouez un peu beaucoup de mon père.” To this line, he responds:

Mais, ma nièce, ce n’est pas tant le jouer, que s’accommoder à ses fantaisies. Tout ceci n’est qu’entre nous. Nous y pouvons aussi prendre chacun un personnage, et nous donner ainsi la comédie les uns aux autres.

Du Laurens had said of melancholics that they needed to be pleased and praised in their actions. Béralde was simply applying medical advice of the time. Jacques Arnavon states about that scene that: “De l’image fidèle d’une famille, on est passé à une sorte de féérie burlesque où l’histoire d’Argan est oubliée ou peu s’en faut.” In trying to help

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Argan, his mind needs to be distracted: “Only his eventual transformation into a
carnivalesque médecin de fantaisie among equally fantastic purgers, bleeders, and
dissecters will allow him open joy.”618

Argan is finally cured thanks to the illusionary scene set up by his brother and
servant, when happiness finally replaces the gloominess of melancholy. The ballet scene
at the end makes the audience’s spirits be distracted as well. As Stephen Fleck says, the
music and dance of Molière’s comedy-ballets were integral to the works.619 He also
states that the novelty of Molière’s comedy-ballets was that they evolved “away from the
derisive, socially conformist laughter characteristic of grande commédie,”620 that the
genre “was marked by the gradual deepening of Molière’s comic vision and
 technique,”621 and especially that the ballet parts of the comedies allowed him to extend
 his vision.622 Moreover, as Charles Mazouer states, “L’alliance du rire, de l’harmonie et
de la danse apaise et crée la joie.”623 If Molière’s vision in the Malade Imaginaire was to
portray a man who could be cured from his melancholy by diverting his spirits through
comedy, music and dance, then the audience who also participates in this divertissement
can be liberated of their everyday concerns: “In these pleasuring absurd moments,
 festively expanded through dance and music, we are relieved of the ordinary weight of
life and brought viscerally into a world in which music, dance and laughter reign
together.”624 By recognizing that everyone can participate in the comedy, even the
audience, a lesson can be learned from Argan’s excess of passions which made his soul

618 Fleck, Music, p. 139.
619 Fleck, Music, p. 183.
620 Fleck, Music, p. 39.
621 Fleck, Music, p. 179.
622 Fleck, Music, p. 180.
623 Mazouer, Comédies-Ballets, p. 279
624 Fleck, Music, p. 185.
weak enough to be touched by the melancholy that attacked his whole body. By going to a theater where such a comedy—ballet as *Le Malade Imaginaire* is being shown is already a first step to a recovery from an illness which put people in despair.

Also, Argan could be another type of typical Baroque character. His behavior is constantly changing, he is never satisfied with what the doctors tell him, the play ends in a big illusion, and the art of dance and music extend the play with a spiritual message in the background: all characteristics of the Baroque are present in this play.

In Corneille’s comedy, *La Place Royalle* (1637): Alidor

Alidor is loved by a lovely lady, Angélique, but after a year as her lover, he realizes that being loved by her builds a prison around him, and if they continue to see each other, their relationship will probably end up in marriage, an even greater prison according to this man. He loves quietness, solitude, and rest and does everything to get rid of Angélique’s love and the possibility of marrying her. Once successful, he becomes passionate about her again and wants to be loved by her at any cost, not being able to share her with his friend any longer. Alidor has no concept of moderation and does not represent an *honnête homme* for that reason. Everything he does is in excess: not only does he deceive Angélique once, but he does it twice.

Alidor shows inconsistency in his behavior and in his passions: he feels at ease in changes. This part of his personality makes him live alternatively on hope and remorse, which parallel his description of his dreamy mind “mon esprit s’esgare”\(^\text{625}\) and his

\(^{625}\) Corneille, *Place Royalle*, IV, 4.1.1069.
melancholic heart “Cœur mélancolique.” These expressions are used as soon as Alidor thinks that Cléandre, his best friend, left with Angélique, as Alidor and Cléandre had planned. His mind is not reasonable, and consequently his soul is prone to defects, like melancholy, which touch his heart, or his body, or both.

Alidor’s inconsistency makes him appear as having troubles being, not knowing what he should do to be happy. When he has Angélique’s love he does not want it, and when he loses it, he realizes that he cannot live without her anymore. This may be just a sign of indecision, but in Alidor’s case, it makes him physically sick, and even if his condition were not severe at first, it progressively plunges into melancholia. Alidor refers to his unhappiness, “mon malheur,” and his feelings are constantly expressed by oxymorons such as: “Ce n’est qu’en m’aimant trop qu’elle me fait mourir,/ Un moment de froideur et je pourrai guérir,” “Je veux que l’on soit libre au milieu de ses fers,” or "Me feindre tout de glace, et n’être que de flamme/ La mépriser de bouche et l’adorer dans l’âme !” These oxymorons also parallel his internal ambiguity about Angélique. He is afraid to love, he is afraid of love, and is weak because of it. His cover as a nice friend who gives up his beloved is only there to hide his weakness: “He acts thus, not because he prefers his friend to himself, but because he fears to love on his own account; his gesture is less a spontaneous act of strength, but an attempt to disguise his own

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626 Corneille, *Place Royale*, IV, 4, l.1078.
627 Corneille, *La Place Royale* I, IV, l.191.
629 Corneille, *La Place Royale* I, IV, l. 212.
630 Corneille, *La Place Royale* III, IV, l.725.
weakness.” It is probable that Alidor’s melancholy was caused by his fear of love.

Alidor also expresses his melancholic condition with symptoms he notices within himself: “Peux-tu bien t’exposer à des maux sans remède” 633, “Mon esprit en déroute,” 634 “Vaine compassion des douleurs d’Angélique/ Qui pensez triompher d’un cœur mélancolique/ Téméraire avorton d’un impuissant remors.” 635 As noted by Du Laurens, melancholic men as restless in their bodies and spirit, they often change from one kind to another, they are constrained to change and find out new things, “which being no more acceptable to them than the first, doe still continue them in these restless distractions.” 636 This restless quality of melancholics is apparent in Alidor’s inconsistencies. Alidor realizes his inconsistency with Angélique, he knows that his mind does not think clearly, and he knows that his actions do not honestly reflect what he feels. Once he does something, he is not satisfied and has to do another, in constant search of what will satisfy him. Interestingly, Alidor’s inconsistency is paralleled by Angélique’s. She is not more constant than he is. As soon as Alidor leaves him, she runs into the arms of Doraste, she takes back Alidor and leaves him again: “Jouet de sa passion, ses actions, loin de préfigurer son emancipation, ont été marquées par le dépit et la contradiction.” 637 Her behavior does not help Alidor settle down and come to a rest.

There are discrepancies between Alidor’s actions and his emotions, and consequently between his body and his mind. Alidor has a classic case of melancholy: his

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631 Mallinson, *Corneille*, p.142.
632 Mesnardière, *Apologie*, p. 82.
633 Corneille, *La Place Royale*, IV, I, 1.966.
634 Corneille, *La Place Royale*, IV, I, 1.977.
635 Corneille, *La Place Royale*, IV, IV, 1.1077-79.
636 Du Laurens, *Discourse*, p. 94.
637 Verhoeff, *Comédies*, p. 45.
soul is troubled, and his body suffers from it. His inconsistency is also related to the baroque background of the play: ideas, movements, and even feelings go from one extreme to another: “L’esthétique baroque est fondée (...) sur le changement rapide du monde, et des formes du monde. C’est pourquoi elle s’attache à peindre l’instable.”

He is in love and then he hates Angélique; he wants to keep her and then rejects her; he wants Cléandre to be with Angélique, and as soon as he is with her, Alidor regrets it. With Alidor also, melancholy could be the typical illness of a baroque character.

**In Rotrou’s comedy, *L’hypocondriaque ou le Mort Amoureux*: Cloridan**

As seen with Montaigne in Chapter Two, there usually is an event, which triggers melancholy in a person who is prone to the condition of melancholy. For Montaigne it was the death of his dear friend La Boétie, for Cloridan, it is the (supposed) death of his lover, Perside. From the moment when Cloridan wakes up from his fainting moment, Rotrou refers to him as the “hypochondriac”, he is never simply “Cloridan” until he is cured of his illness.

Physically, Cloridan displays all the symptoms of being prone to melancholy. Upon discovering that he needs to leave Perside, he refers to suicidal thoughts: “Rien ne peut divertir la *sentence homicide*/ Qui me doit aujourd’hui separer de Perside.”

Cloridan, right before hearing of Perside’s death, uses words from a lexical field related to illness:

```plaintext
Et ce Coeur ne sçaurait avoir trop tost quitté
Un air *contagieux* à la fidélité./
Mais non, ta *passion* peut achever nos *peines* ;
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639 Rotrou, *L’Hypocondriaque*, I, 1, 139-40. (emphasis mine)
Fay que le fer agisse où les flames sont vaines.\textsuperscript{640}

When learning about Perside’s death, his melancholic side definitely takes over and he refers to his body as pale and cold, which succumbed to pain, claims that only his death will be able to repair the misfortune that has struck him, that darkness should surround him, and that his spirits are failing:

\textit{La nuict succede a l’empire du monde}  
\textit{Mais ce corps pale et froid succombe à la douleur;}  
\textit{Ha! Mort, seule tu peux reparer mon malheur;}  
\textit{Esteins ces foibles yeux, que le jour importune}  
\textit{…}  
\textit{D’une eternelle nuict mes tristes yeux se couvrent,}  
\textit{Les portes des Enfers à ma priere s’ouvrent:}  
\textit{Mes esprits languissants font leur dernier effort.}\textsuperscript{641}

In other words, Cloridan describes word for word the different steps of the metamorphoses he experiences as he becomes melancholic: he feels the coldness of the melancholic humor, he becomes weak, in pain, sad, unfortunate, and finally felt languor. When he wakes up, and believes he is dead himself, more symptoms of his melancholy are described: he refuses to eat, he has visions (he mistakes Cléonice for Perside, and later sees a shadow and thinks that it is Perside), he is unhappy, and he wants to be in dark places. Further in the play, Cloridan refers to his spirit as unhappy “\textit{mon esprit malheureux}.”\textsuperscript{642} He displays all the symptoms of hypochondriac melancholy as described at the time by medical doctors like Du Laurens and La Mesnardière.

Once awake, Cloridan believes himself to be dead, and delights in the situation, knowing that his soul is finally liberated from the body that made it impure and influenced by senses: “\textit{Mon corps ensevely n’est plus ma sepulture/Je me sens}

\textsuperscript{640}\textsuperscript{640} Rotrou, \textit{L’Hypocondriaque}, III, 2, 1.643-646.\textsuperscript{641}\textsuperscript{641} Rotrou, \textit{L’Hypocondriaque}, III, 2, 1.726-735.\textsuperscript{642}\textsuperscript{642} Rotrou, \textit{L’Hypocondriaque}, IV, 1, 1.1087.
maintenant d’une essence plus pure.”

Although when a person is alive it is important to keep body and soul together at all times, once a person is dead, the soul is freed from the body and can reach truth easier because it can be nothing but reasonable, since it is not influenced by the body. But Cloridan’s soul is still moved by Perside, he is still obsessed by her, and his soul is completely ravaged by passions: happiness, unhappiness, doubt, fear, love, admiration: all of them are mixed within his soul, even as a “dead” person, which should make him realize that he is still very much alive. Cléonice points this out to him in a rather long response to him:

Toy, tu vois que ton corps encor ici subsiste,
Et que ton cœur malade à la douleur resiste :
Il respire, il souspire, et pousse encore des veux ;
Tu voy tes mesmes bras et les mesmes cheveux
Dont tu flottes sans fruict ton ardeur insensée,
Separé du sujet qui charme ta pensée
Perside est aux Enfers, sans vie, et sans amour,
Toy, tu vis ! et ton œil encore voit le jour.  

Cléonice’s lines sound true to a person who has all of his sanity. But for Cloridan, Cléonice is the one who is crazy, and her words mean nothing reasonable in his opinion:

“Simple! Que ta raison dans ces raisons s’égare,/ Et qu’un étrange effort du bon sens te separe !”

For the reader and the audience, it is obvious that Cloridan is the one who has lost his reason. Cloridan thinks of other people that they have lost their mind, for example Erimand, Cléonice’s father. Cloridan, during a dialogue with him says: “Dieux! Il est donc aussi des fols dans les Enfers?” And to this, Erimand replies with a line that shows his knowledge of which disease debilitates Cloridan: “Donc cette froide

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643 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, III, 2, l.761-762.
644 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, IV, 1, 1.1145-1160.
645 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, IV, 1, l.1061-1062.
646 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, IV, II, l.1264.
humeur ne change point de terme?” 647 Cloridan ignores what Erimand refers to, “it never occurs to Cloridan that Erimand is actually talking about Cléonice,” 648 and keeps his mind set in his own foolish belief that his interlocutor is the crazy one: “Adieu, sois toujours fol, comme moy toujours ferme.” 649 The period from the moment when Cloridan becomes melancholic to the moment when he is healed, which represents about three acts of the play, is when the comedy really takes place. In Cloridan’s case, his melancholy has gone so far that he could be considered crazy. The fact that folly is represented on stage and that the audience is omniscient of all situations make Cloridan’s madness, as well as madness in general, seem like a form of illusion, and is taken as a form of distraction by the audience. 650 Cloridan is a fool by thinking he is dead despite all the signs around him which prove him the opposite.

Cloridan’s cure is found in a theatrical illusion on stage: “un véritable spectacle dans le spectacle est organisé en vue de la guérison de Cloridan.” 651 Some characters play the role of dead people talking, one of them shoots Cloridan with a gun (only filled with powder) to scare him and cure him of his belief to be dead by the fear of dying: “Ma raison voit en fin la fourbe découverte!/ On me rend la santé sous le front de ma perte!/ refuser du secours c’estoit me secourir,/ Et vous me guerissez par la peur de mourir.” 652

647 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, IV, II, l.1269. Cold is associated with the melancholic humor as described by Hyppocrates.
648 Knutson, Ironic Game, p. 43.
649 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, IV, II, l.11270.
650 “Essentiellement appréhendée comme une forme d’illusion, et non comme un vice rédhibitoire et durable de l’esprit, la folie est de ce fait en mesure de donner lieu à un spectacle dont l’on peut…se divertir en toute bonne conscience….Assimilée à une pensée temporairement aveuglée, c’est-à-dire ‘mal conduite’ pour emprunter à la terminologie cartésienne, la folie d’autrui ne mobilise aucune affectivité et il est généralement admis qu’elle peut, au théâtre comme dans la vie, s’ériger en source de distraction.” Vuillemin, L’Hypocondriaque, p. lxi.
651 Vuillemin, Baroquisme, p. 164.
652 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, V, 6, l.2089-2092.
Cloridan is cured of his madness thanks to a *mise-en-scène* within a performance. Vuillemin interprets this staging as Cloridan renouncing the values of society as far as love is concerned. Vuillemin states that in order for the perfect lover to live in Eros’ world, he needs to die in Man’s world: “La démarche amoureuse s’apparente ainsi tellement à un suicide métaphysique qu’il est compréhensible, de ce fait, qu’un amoureux débouté recherche la fin de ses délicieux tourments dans un analogon de martyre.”

Vuillemin also believes that Cloridan represents the perfect sufferer of *folie d’amour*, which is explained physiologically by the physicians of the time as having the same symptoms as hypochondriac melancholy.

Theatrical illusions were not rare to cure people from melancholic diseases in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as explained by Du Laurens in his *Discours*, when everything else had failed, which shows the intricate relationship medicine and theater played in the role of curing illnesses at that time. In Cloridan’s case, the theatrical illusion is within a theatrical illusion, which makes it possible to show the intensity of Cloridan’s passion, as well as the depth of the abyss in which he had fallen. Having an illusion within an illusion emphasizes how far the characters are from the reality of the world surrounding them.

Cléonice suffers from love sickness, an illness which melancholics are very much prone to, and Cloridan suffers from hypochondriac melancholy, generally caused by the (thought of) the loss of a loved-one. As Cléonice says, “Guéris-moy de ce *mal*, ou luy de sa *folie*.“ Both characters have the same symptoms, and both would be cured by

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654 Vuillemin, *Baroquisme*, p. 163.  
recovering their beloved, but in this triangular situation where Perside is also involved, the solution is not so easy. Apparently, Perside also suffers from the love-sickness, because at the end of the play, when Cloridan is cured from his melancholy, she admits to her father that they are only sick from love: “Nous ne sommes plus malades que d’amour!” In this play, many characters suffer from an illness, which might make it seem a play about contagion. One person gets sick, then another, and another. Oronte, Perside’s father, even says that he promises a remedy to love sickness if Health itself did not become melancholic:

Si la santé n’a point son ame refroidie,
Je promets un remede à cette maladie,
Et consens que le Ciel, qui par de saincts accord
A conjoinct vos esprits, conjoigne aussi vos corps.

He also ends the play by saying: “Que jamais froideurs ny les dissentions/ Ne puissent traverser vos belles passions.” Oronte knows how to cure the love-sickness, and he also knows that melancholy is related to coldness: he hopes that his family and friends will never catch these illnesses again. He probably also knows that in order to avoid melancholy, one should not take one’s passions as seriously and as far as Cloridan did: the best remedy might be to be in the audience, not being a part of the illusion, but being its witness.

Over all, Cloridan also proves to be a typical character of the Baroque esthetic. The excess in Cloridan’s behavior, who thinks he is dead when he is not, makes him live for a while in total illusion. His passion blinds him and is a proof of his irrationality due to his melancholy. Also, just as in Le Malade Imaginaire, Cloridan, like Argan, is cured

656 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, V, 6, l.2108.
657 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, V, 6, l.2105-2108.
658 Rotrou, L’Hypocondriaque, V, 6, l.2119-2120.
through a theatrical illusion within the illusion of theater. The characters around Cloridan know that they cannot contradict him, but that they need to join him in his madness, so he can cure. They put on a mask and metamorphose themselves, and a metamorphosis is an essential element to the Baroque world: “La métamorphose fascine les artistes baroques parce qu’elle leur permet de saisir le moment où deux êtres coexistent, où la multiplicité de l’être éclate visiblement.”659 Since the characters play a role within their role, they are “wearing a mask,” if not physically, at least in their behavior. This illusion, which extends the play to follow the fold as described by Deleuze, helps cure a melancholic character.

**Alceste and Alidor: Studies in black humors**

There is much in common between *Le Misanthrope* and *La Place Royale*. Both plays have been interpreted as being darker comedies. Of *La Place Royale*, G.J. Mallinson says: “The curious anti-heroic actions of Alidor who constantly mistreats Angelique in his attempts to overcome his love for her are seen to make of this play a particularly dark comedy.”660 Of *Le Misanthrope*, Antoine Adam says: “Plus que *Tartuffè*, plus que l’*Avare*, cette comédie tend vers le drame.”661 There is also much in common between the melancholic behavior of Alceste and Alidor. Alceste cannot stand the world around him, and with this situation comes a feeling of a difficulty of being. He is a rationalist who is a prisoner of his sincerity and does not see that Célimène is the one for him, and that she is all he wants in a woman, probably because of a different way of

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communicating, or a lack of communication. When he hears that she talks to other men or when another man tells him that she is desirable, he becomes jealous. Suddenly, he changes his mind when she is in front of him and he needs to declare his passion: but he cannot. He chooses a desert, rather than Célimène, who chooses to remain with the world. Alceste’s choice could be compared to going to a monastery, far from people, secluded, not being able to see all of men’s vices in action.

Alidor is as inconstant as Alceste: he feels at ease in inconsistency. Alidor constantly changes his mind about Angélique, and this change of mind makes the comedy take off again a few times, when the audience feels that the dénouement is close. This change of mind proves that Alidor is not at ease in the present: he either dwells in the past or thinks of the future, plus he is sad in love. He always has what he does not want, which emphasizes his need for changes.

Alceste and Alidor both are left without love and alone at the end of their respective plays. Alceste refuses to forgive Célimène and to accept a compromise with her, and Alidor prefers to see Angélique go to a convent, rather than be with another man. None of them was able to express his feelings for his lady at the right time, because both were too tied up in their own gloominess and selfishness. Neither was able to see that what he wanted was right in front of him. Also, Alceste’s friends cease to tolerate his gloomy personality, and they betray him. Alidor becomes almost a secondary character in the last act of the play, since the secondary characters who get married, Cléandre and Philis, take center stage. Alidor only reappears in an epilogue in which he explains how delighted he is that Angélique has given herself to God, so he can live in peace without thinking of her in the arms of another man.
Alidor and Alceste are both can be interpreted as very dark characters, who literally represent the blackness of melancholia: their characters are truly gloomy, and although the title of each play refers to them as comedies, the name of tragedy could have just as well. But since there are weddings at the end of each play, even if they are not the main character’s wedding, the plays had to be called comedies: they technically contain happy endings, if not for all characters. Both characters are far into their illnesses: they are both close to insanity. Since neither of them is part of the happy ending of their stories, it is clear that both are unable to laugh and enjoy life, because they cannot enjoy what they have. They cannot heal, because they cannot find a single pleasure around them, or laugh, at themselves or at others. Everything is always serious or tragic for them. One element that differentiates them is their courage: Alceste is very brave in his assertions of what he thinks; he does not seem to be afraid of his opinion or of the consequences of his actions. On the other hand, Alidor does not have any honor, he lies without a problem, steps back when it comes to fighting, and he is very selfish and does not see the pain he can cause. It is in that last point that we can recognize Alceste as well.

On the other hand, the extreme inconsistency the two characters display can be taken as so extreme that it is laughable. Such extreme behaviors are not tolerated in the society in which they live, and in the society of the honnêtes gens. By categorizing their plays as comedies, the authors were telling the audience how to react, and by laughing, or smiling at the excess portrayed, the audience agreed that what was being shown was being criticized. Also, the restlessness of these two melancholic characters can be associated with the Baroque esthetic of the time.
Argan and Cloridan: Melancholic illusion

Argan and Cloridan are also very similar characters in their melancholia and distinct from the gloomier Alceste and Alidor. The most obvious common point is that both believe that they suffer from an illness that they do not have, or so do other characters think: Argan thinks he is extremely sick and only survives thanks to the many remedies he takes every day, and Cloridan thinks he is dead. Not that death is an illness, but both characters have had events in their lives that have triggered a certain kind of melancholia, which disconcerts their thoughts and triggers their imagination. To avoid aggravating their illnesses, the other characters around them decide to play along with their folly, because it was known to be the best remedy for melancholics. According to Du Laurens, “Il les faut parfois flatter et leur accorder une partie de ce qu’ils veulent, de peur que cette humeur, qui est de sa nature rebelle et opiniastre, ne s’effarouche.”662 J. C. Vuillemin also says that, “C’est à partir de la perception même d’une ‘réalité’ qui semble, en premier lieu, valider son délire que l’hypocondriaque va être finalement capable de dénouer son erreur et de recouvrer l’usage de la raison.”663 Theater could then be the perfect forum for diagnosing and curing illusion. Argan and Cloridan’s melancholy being caused by their imagination being troubled, theater, by comforting them in their illusion, could help them cure their illness, as discussed by Du Laurens.

Both characters are very excessive in their behaviors. With Cloridan we see the illusion of an illusion. With Argan, especially at the end, during the ballet, when a man is established as a doctor, and he answers with the same remedies for different illnesses and always gets the right answer, the audience sees the depth of the unreason in which the

characters were found. Also, when the audience sees such follies, the goal is probably a reaction of mockery: such behavior is not possible or acceptable in real life. Such behavior goes against the rules of the *honnête homme* and moderations, such behavior is not that of a gentleman. But at the same time, the audience realizes that these are vices they probably experience or have experienced, or have seen around them. Seeing a man so vulnerable because of love or in front of his own mortality is not a fact to which the audience cannot relate.

Moreover, both patients recover, or are on the way to recovery: Cloridan finds out that Perside is not dead, and he ends up marrying her, while Argan finds out the truth about his treacherous wife who will not get any of his heritage money, he finds the love of a daughter and of a son-in-law, and is on his way to a possible recovery, by maybe becoming a doctor himself. These two characters have joy in their lives, and it seems to be a big part of the recovery process. Just as Alceste and Alidor presented a darker side of melancholy, Argan and Cloridan present a lighter side, and a possibility of cure. With these two characters, the elements of excess, inconsistency, illusion, and masks, which are the elements of the Baroque, come to a total representation, and both melancholic characters portray a typical Baroque character.

**The choice of a melancholic character as a protagonist**

Molière was known to be an observer of men. In each of his plays, he wanted to portray different types of characters, different social classes, and different vices. Montaigne had also wanted to make a portrait of human nature, as seen in chapter three. He wanted to find out what men were made of, and in order to do this, he observed
himself and discovered numerous things, the most important ones being that man was made of mind and body and that the two could not be separated, as well as that life should be lived as well as one could, with a little bit of poetry.

By representing a different type of vice in each comedy so that the audience would study that vice along with Molière, laugh at it, and learn from it, it was probably the best way Molière had to help correct the vices. The correction of society’s vice could only happen for Molière through the salutary influence of the comic portrait of the defects.

Corneille and Rotrou, before Molière, portrayed the same type of characters in their comedies studied here. They both knew about the causes, symptoms and cures of the different types of melancholy, considering the knowledge they put in their plays, and consequently also thought of comedy as the best way to portray the illness that was known to be able to be cured through theatrical illusion and laughter. It was also the one illness that was believed, if not cured before a certain point, could degenerate into insanity and then death. The two characters who do not heal did not have laughter in their lives: it seems that laughter has long been a remedy to a lot of man’s flaws and defects, in order to remain sane.

The importance of laughter as healthy and indispensable to keep a good mental balance has been noted for instance in medieval fabliaux and other comic texts, as seen in chapter one. Laughter, in many of the medical treatises of the medieval times, was one of the remedies for many illnesses, melancholy included, but not restricted to it. Then Montaigne, in the Sixteenth century, mentioned that life should be lived with a little bit of
poetry. Montaigne ended this last essay with a piece of poetry from Horace, emphasizing that life should probably end with some poetry as well as music:

Frui paratis et valido mihi
Latoe, dones, et, precor, integra
Cum mente, nec turpem senecatam
Degere, nec cithara carentem. 664

This end is very symbolic: Montaigne ended his Essays with poetry. He ended his search for the definition of human nature with words asking for music in his old age, for an entertainment away from his condition, so his intellect would keep busy, and he would not get mad.

With this, one can understand many things, but it seems that laughing, being happy, is a part of poetry as well. Then Descartes mentioned a few cures for melancholy, one of them being thinking happy thoughts: happy thoughts lead to smiling or even laughing. And finally Molière depicts most of men’s vices in comedies so we can laugh at them and learn from them.

One element, which differentiates men from animals is laughter: animals are not capable of laughing, but humans are. Moralists of the seventeenth century did satirical portraits of man. They “all viewed man through a perspective of laughter, and their readers were invited to display a firm grasp of reason by laughing or smiling with them at their pictures of unreason at work among men and women.” 665 The reason why those moralists wanted their readers to grasp reason by laughing was because of the influence

664 “De jouir des biens que j’ai acquis, avec une santé robuste, voilà ce que je te demande de m’accorder, fils de Latone, et je t’en prie, que mes facultés restent entières; fais que ma vieillesse ne soit pas ridicule et puisse encore toucher la lyre.” Horace, Odes, I, XXXI, 17. Translation by Alexandre Micha
665 Calder. Molière, p.75.
of Cartesianism, where reason is the source that all is good in men. So, if one can laugh at unreason, one can find reason. Andrew Calder also argues that laughter in the audience is a measure of the folly presented on stage.

Since Molière, Corneille and Rotrou were influenced by such ideas, it is possible that through their comedies, they wanted their readers to find reason, in order to become *honnêtes hommes* and *femmes*, who know before all, that man is the rational animal. But he is also the laughing animal, and both of these items need to be kept together to make man who he is. It seems that the melancholy illness, although appropriate to describe other past and future centuries as an illness that defines a whole genre, finds its place best in the seventeenth century, after having been developed and studied for numerous centuries. All of the ideas accumulated from the Hippocratic and Galenic times, passing through Arabic doctors, Medieval writers, Montaigne and Descartes find their realization in a sort of synthesis of everything that has been said, with a new interpretation of it which sheds a totally different light on it, in comedies of the seventeenth century, especially those of Molière.

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667 Calder. *Molière*, p.73.
The major literary French works from the medieval period to the seventeenth century presented in this study have a theme in common: their authors incorporated melancholy into their written works. Although melancholy was conceived differently in each of the time periods covered, this illness appears in different literary genres, such as a vernacular romance of the thirteenth century, numerous tales of the later Middle Ages, essays of the sixteenth century, and philosophical writings, letters and plays from the seventeenth century. Each genre presented melancholy in different ways, because all the authors studied in this dissertation have presented melancholy with their own tools. Since the genres studied in this work are so eclectic, a connection among them is not obvious. This is where melancholy plays its role: it is the junction among the written works studied.

With this dissertation, I have discerned a new genre, one centered on an illness. Melancholy is what inspired the authors chosen for this dissertation, was at the center of their works, and made them discover something about themselves and human nature in general. Melancholy, or illnesses likened to it, such as lovesickness or acedia, gave these authors an occasion to observe the close connection between mind and body, and the powerful influence the one has on the other.
In the thirteenth century, Jean de Meun appropriates Guillaume de Lorris’ hopeless, lovesick protagonist and introduces him to a variety of advisors who link the art of seduction to scholastic philosophy and the learned heritage of antiquity. Jean de Meun might have understood that there were more serious implications to melancholy, beyond it being a sad emotion anyone can experience. Also, he seems to have discovered that entertainment and diversion of the spirit could help prevent the illness, even and especially if it was still in its early phase: love sickness. The study of *Le Roman de la rose* by Jean de Meun, as well as of some fabliaux and nouvelles from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries show that what gave relief to the characters who suffer from an illness likened to melancholy was being active sexually. This could be interpreted as a sexual healing.

In the case of the *Rose*, although Jean de Meun shows all the traits of fin’amor and the art of love through all his characters, he was also believed to have departed from the tradition of the *roman courtois*. The ending of the *Rose*, full of bawdy imagery, could also be a parody of fin’amor, and consequently serve the entertaining goal Jean de Meun might have had. However, without his possible knowledge of the necessity to alleviate a lovesick person, to avoid melancholy, Jean de Meun could have chosen another end for his work to parody courtly love. Knowing that coitus and entertainment were two given cures for melancholy, as described by Rufus of Ephesus, there is a possibility to see a parallel between the healing in the works with a preventive healing for the reader: humor and the “entertainment” of the brain are indispensable to keep man healthy, mentally and physically.
Montaigne in his essays explored how, in order to keep healthy, body and mind must be kept together at all times. Otherwise, an individual risked losing his intrinsic humanity. If this rule was not respected, it could lead to a degradation of the self, and consequently to melancholy, which can lead to madness and possibly death. Although his condition is the key to his writing of the *Essays*, Montaigne belittled his condition, by despising violent passions such as sadness, and by taking care of differentiating himself from the melancholic humor by saying he was “songecreux,” a daydreamer. He managed to make it appear less important or tragic than it really was, or tried to divert the reader, or even himself, from it.

In his long journey through the *Essays*, Montaigne tried to discover who he was by studying himself. By doing so, he realized that in order to study man, body and mind had to be kept together at all times. Once he discovered this, he realized that his illness, melancholy, was in the middle of this union, because it is his illness which made him realize that the two components which make him human needed to be kept together at all times. By discovering himself, Montaigne also discovered man and his limits. He would not have reached this stage without melancholy as part of his complexion.

Montaigne ended his work with a part of *Odes*, I, XXXI, 17 by Horace. With this extract of poetry, Montaigne asked for health and the ability to use the lyre, related to music and poetry writing. Moreover, odes were written to be sung, emphasizing the musical part of the *divertissement* Montaigne was asking to enjoy in his melancholic old age. Still trying to divert himself, and maybe the reader from a possible attack of melancholy, his final words lay in Horace’s wish not to be ridicule during old age, but to be able to play music and write poetry. Both activities are part of the author’s diversion
of spirits, or entertainment to avoid melancholy. Interestingly, out of everything Montaigne could have chosen to end his *Essays*, he chose a piece of poetry which gives a key to dealing with a melancholic temperament.

Descartes, in his correspondence with Elisabeth of Bohemia and her questioning of his theories also discovered something about himself through melancholy: that his dualist separation of mind and body did not imply “faults” such as melancholy in its theory, although it is now arguable that Descartes believed in a total body and soul separation at all times. In his treaty on the passions, dedicated to Elisabeth, which explained how passions acted physiologically, Descartes did not specifically mention melancholy, because he realized that it was the result of an excess of passions, in his opinion. It was an unnatural condition which he was not able to explain physiologically only: it had a psychological part to it, and both parts were linked, as he came to realize. The influence the body can have on the mind and vice versa lead Descartes to discover the union of the two as another part of human nature. He was able to discover this through melancholy because it is the very illness that affects both, because it has its seat in that union. Melancholy consequently best defines human being’s weakness.

The authors studied here discovered human nature and human weaknesses at a deeper level than with any other diseases. It allowed for an understanding of the way the soul affects the body and vice versa. Interestingly, all works are directed towards a certain privileged class. With this in mind, one could understand that melancholy is an illness which touched the upper class, the elite of the society. Although this finding can no longer be applied currently, knowing that for the writers studied in this dissertation
melancholy was the manifestation of a privileged illness sheds a different light on the reason why they chose to portray it in their works.

Seventeenth century comedies presented a synthesis of everything learned previously, both in terms of medical heritage and the uses of melancholy in various types of writing. Melancholy being an illness of the upper class, it could have been the authors’ intention to show their honnête audience what an honnête homme should or should not do. As employed by medieval writers as well as Montaigne, the homeopathic remedies for preventing melancholy are laughter and entertainment. It seems that by entertaining their brain, the authors keep it occupied away from gloomy thoughts. Robert Burton had mentioned it in his Anatomy of Melancholy “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy.” The authors studied entertained not only themselves in their way to avoid melancholy, but they entertained a potential reader as well. This is also where humor or entertainment took their effect. Since a melancholic character has been taken over by his excess of passions, a behavior that was unacceptable for the honnête behavior of the time, it probably seemed obvious to choose comedies as the means to display men’s vices and faults to try to correct them and help people fight the possibility of becoming melancholic.

Melancholy was represented as a condition that could be countered by diverting the mind and the senses, and consequently could be fought with laughter and entertainment; which proved to be the best remedies against it. Without necessarily being aware of it, the authors of melancholy produced a kind of writing through the illness

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669 Burton, Anatomy, p. 20
which has elements in common, although all writings are from different genres, that are only present in writings which have melancholy at their center.

Obviously, melancholy has gone a long way since the seventeenth century in terms of understanding its causes and symptoms, as well as possible cures. However, Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C. had already discovered that it was an illness of the brain, and that it should be treated physiologically and psychologically. Freud also notes in his work *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, that humor has liberating effects,⁶⁷⁰ and “the humorous attitude is one that refuses to undergo suffering.”⁶⁷¹ Authors from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century were already aware of it and seem to show a better understanding of the illness than is attributed to them. These authors and their works are linked by this illness, although they figured it differently due to the different characteristics of each genre, and possibly because the way to treat melancholy oscillates itself among two poles, as F.A. puts it, “libérer la parole ou anéantir le mal par des actions externes (drogues ou dispositifs magiques.)”⁶⁷² They chose to represent people with problems, because it was a means to connect with an audience who might experience the same problems. Since melancholy seemed to be a fashionable illness of the upper class from which to suffer, using it at the center of their work was another way to make their work fashionable as well. Representing characters with problems allows the analysis of causes, symptoms and possible remedies. It is a way to show the scope of the problem, its different facets, and its possible characteristics: “La dépression n’est pas une entité, chaque état dépressif a sa spécificité, son expression

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⁶⁷⁰ Freud, *Jokes*, p. 266.
propre, celle d’un sujet qui souffre.”

Since it is possible to represent melancholy and the illnesses likened to it in so many different ways, this illness in particular gives a theme with numerous possible interpretations, a great scope of origins, symptoms and cures, and a possibility to play with the notion that all these illnesses are likened to each other and are sometimes difficult to differentiate. It is possible to make fun of the problem to parody it, to laugh at it, to belittle its importance, or, present it so that the audience would learn from it.

Currently, the mind-body question figures often in the popular press, such as Newsweek or Time: “The well-being of one is intimately intertwined with that of the other… Disorders of the brain, conversely, can send out biochemical shock waves that disturb the rest of the body.”

The articles that discuss the problem always emphasize the power of the mind on the body and vice-versa, as Miller puts it, “Many men transmute their depression into other pathologies. Some seek relief in alcohol or drugs—solutions that only compound the problem—while others express their unhappiness through reckless or violent behavior.”

The intimate connection between mind and body has a greater influence on the body than one realizes: “People with such afflictions as cancer, diabetes, epilepsy and osteoporosis all appear to run a higher risk of disability or premature death when they are clinically depressed.”

The mind-body relation can be understood in the Férida’s statement: “La dépression est une ‘maladie’ complètement humaine et violemment deshumaine qui affecte le visage, les gestes, la parole et la

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673 Verlet, Ecrire, p. 36.
674 Springer and Adler, Prostate Cancer, p. 63.
675 Miller, Stop Pretending, p. 71
676 Lemonick, The power of Mood, p. 66.
voix.”

That a cultural understanding of the power of the mind on the body is still present in Western culture is evident from these statements.

Moreover, this renewed interest makes available different philosophies from around the world on how to deal with the mind-body separation or interaction and its role in depression. Chinese medicine, for example, includes theories where acupuncture is believed to heal depression, which shows an Eastern perspective on the mind-body problem and interaction. Many talk about the healing powers of the mind on the body, and the beneficial use of natural remedies, such as certain herbs (St-John’s wort, gingko biloba, and soybean extract, as well as Omega-3 fatty acids) which calm the body or the mind to start the healing process. Integrating yoga in one’s healthcare routine has been discovered as very beneficial for the health of the body and the mind. Breath work, talk therapies, and humor therapies are developed in practices and hospitals to help alleviate some of the gloominess of being in a hospital, or suffering from an illness, such as cancer or depression: “Lifting up your spirits can be a potent medicine,” because “a sense of humor, even of the absurd, is necessary for a lifesaving sense of proportion.”

The writing of melancholy is part of a constant dialogue, among authors, across centuries and genres. All authors have access to what has been said before them and what

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677 Fédida, Dépression et Création, p. 27.
678 For more information, works such as Acupuncture in the Treatment of Depression: A Manual for Practice and Research by Rosa N. Schyner and John J. B. Allen published by Churchill Livingstone in 2001 should be consulted.
679 Lemonick, The power of Mood, p. 66.
680 Cowley, The Biggest Prize, p. 47.
681 Weil, Mother Nature, p. 70.
682 Grossman, Can Freud Get his Job Back, p. 76.
683 Lemonick, The Power of Mood, p. 64. Also, a book such as Chicken Soup for the Surviving Soul: 101 Healing Stories About Those Who Have Survived Cancer by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Patty Aubrey, Beverly Katherine Kirkhart, and Nancy Mitchell-Autio can be consulted to read about the importance of healing the mind along with healing the body, and the healing power of words and comedy
684 Corliss, Is there a Formula for Joy, p. 74.
is being discussed around them, which gives them the possibility to import ideas and combine them with the received knowledge on melancholy. Because of this combination, they are able to represent melancholy with the facets they choose to keep, with the symptoms that are more pertinent and relevant to the effect they want to have on their public, and especially with the elements that fit best into the genre they chose to use to represent it. The questions raised by thirteenth century Jean de Meun about entertaining an audience, which was developed again later by Molière, as well as the mind-body relation and the role melancholy plays in this relation as developed by Montaigne and Descartes are still intriguing. Although melancholy is no longer reduced to a fashionable illness of the upper class and touches all classes of society, it can currently be found in many written works, because it is linked to human nature and its problems, and has been for centuries, because it is “notre mal intime.”

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