

Introduction

Themes from the great canon of medical and philosophical writing on melancholy that was inaugurated with Hippocratic humoral lore resound through the early modern era. Such themes have been complicated by the moral psychology of medieval Christianity, as well as its misogyny and demonology, and augmented by Neo-Platonist notions of magic, celestial influence, and genius. At least until the eighteenth century, most who wrote about melancholy knew, and relied on, these earlier works. With a reverence for textual authority contrary to modern medical or scholarly approaches, the earlier ideas were adopted and reflected, often uncritically, in later writing. To understand the ideas of the subsequent era, then, requires that we recognize its genealogy in earlier thinking.

Our starting point is the Greek humoral medicine - lore found in Hippocratic works, acknowledged by Aristotelian writing, and maintained and developed by that most influential of classical doctors, Galen, court physician to the emperor Marcus Aurelius during the second century. Among the several diseases of the black bile, these thinkers identified the eponymous disorder of melancholy itself, whose symptoms included unwarrantedly dispirited and apprehensive mood states. Moods of fear and sadness 'without cause' became the hallmarks of melancholy subjectivity, and were invoked to characterize the disorder well into the modern period. The black bile was one of four bodily humors (black and yellow bile, phlegm and blood), imbalances of which resulted in disorder. This mysterious fluid was thought liable to becoming excessive, overly heated, or dangerously viscous, and each of these variations might have an adverse affect on health. Not only were normal temperamental differences attributed to variations in the balance of the humors. So too, the humors were associated with particular qualities (heat, cold, wet and dry), elements (earth, air, fire and water), seasons (winter, spring, summer, autumn), and life stages, such as youth and old age.

It was through a curious form of associationism that the mood states of the man of melancholy were linked with the natural world in these multiple ways. Today, if we were to suppose that the victims of melancholia were of dark coloring - which, of course, we do not - it would be as a product, and (medical) sign, of their disorder akin to the yellow skin tone produced by jaundice. But the melancholiac's perceived swarthinness and darkened skin color were not taken to be a causal result of the darkness of his bile. Rather,

they were emblematic of the commonality of all dark things. In the same way, the coldness and dryness of melancholy linked it to all things cold and dry. And through an association that linked over-heating to smoky and smoke-like fumes, the melancholiac's delusions later came to be seen as resulting from the obscuring effect on his brain of the smoky vapors from overheated ('adusted') black bile.

When medical and philosophical learning was centered in the Middle East after the classical era, Galenic lore was faithfully maintained by such thinkers as Ishaq ibn Imran, Haly Abbas and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and few of the associations and 'symptoms' of melancholia were forgotten or revised. Translated into medieval Latin during the early middle ages, such works perpetuated humoral assumptions and associations. In Western Europe, meanwhile, an additional set of concerns around states of despondency and inertia had come to prominence. Rather than melancholy, *accidia* and *tristitia* were a reflection of moral failings, even sins. For Evagrius and Cassian, writing in the fourth and fifth centuries, respectively, listlessness and dejection were inimical to the attitude suitable to a Christian, which should be joyful. The preoccupation with witchcraft and demonology of the medieval Christian church, combined with its inherently misogynistic attitudes, also changed how melancholia was attributed and understood. Demonic influence was exerted, in some cases, through forms of derangement. Melancholy was known as *balneum diaboli* (the devil's bath). And, as the infamous *Malleus Malificarum* written for Pope Innocent VIII in 1485 leaves in no doubt, women's moral and intellectual inadequacies rendered them especially prey to such forms of possession.

Fresh themes gained prominence with the revival of classical learning in the writing of Neo-Platonist humanists. Ficino's mighty disquisition on the melancholy of the learned man and the man of genius, *Three Books on Life* (1482), fused Christian with humanist doctrines, and faithfully recalled themes from the Greek authors, including the Aristotlian notion - perhaps itself tracing to earlier Platonic ideas about the inspired nature of madness - that melancholy accompanies outstanding brilliance and talent. The new, renaissance notion of the exceptional man - the man of genius - is firmly conjoined to that of the man of melancholy by Ficino, the link forged through astrological lore. The brooding genius is born under Saturn, as Ficino himself was. Both Mercury and Saturn: 'are cold and dry (...) like the melancholic nature' and they are the signs of the intellectual, Mercury inviting us to investigate doctrines, while Saturn makes us persevere in the quest, and remember what we discover. Ficino, it should be added, is

believed to have owed his knowledge of astrology to an Arabic compilation of Hellenistic magic, translated into Spanish under the aegis of Alphonso the Wise in the thirteenth century, and thence into Latin. Known as the *Picatrix*, this was always a subversive text. But when the Neo-Platonist thinkers attached occult and magical as well as astrological associations to melancholy, it was likely under the influence of such works. Rather than inanimate, the universe was now believed alive with spirits, occult influences, and sympathies, the cosmos an organic unity of interrelated and magically joined elements and parts. And scholars pursued astrology, magic and the occult sciences as vigorously as they did more classical learning.

This, then, is the broad setting, at the start of the sixteenth century in Western Europe, when the early modern period opens. Some thinkers acknowledge each of these elements and ideas, even perpetuating humoral theory in the face of more 'empirical' ideas; emphasis remains on dejected and dispirited mood states, the link with astrology, inspiration and genius, the acknowledgement of demonic and magical influence. Other writers select within this body of ideas and themes. Yet that said, each strand in the ongoing canon reflects the distinctive time and circumstance of its author, and none more evidently so than the writing of those embracing the new epistemologies of the modern era. To comprehend texts of early modern times, we must not only situate them within these enduring traditions from the Greek, Greco-Arabic and medieval past, but also show where they diverge from such traditions, revealing newer, more modern, epistemologies, preoccupations and motifs. And this approach, which acknowledges what is old in order to recognize what is omitted, can best be demonstrated through the examination of particular texts.

Jennifer Radden

Vanaf de oudheid hing één aandoening als een duistere dreiging boven beoefenaars van de schone kunsten en medici gelijk: een 'ziekte' die een ieder die erdoor getroffen werd zwaarmoedig en lusteloos maakte en iemand uiteindelijk helemaal kon verteren. Een toestand die al met al vermeden diende te worden en één van de voornaamste studieobjecten werd van de ontlukende medische wetenschap. Dat humanisten als Ficino tijdens de Renaissance de verwoeste invloeden van melancholie als slechts één zijde van de medaille benoemden, waarbij de andere zijde gevormd werd door genialiteit en talent, deed de populariteit van melancholie echter alleen maar groeien in de vroeg-moderne tijd. Zo zeer zelfs, dat er in de Lage Landen van de 16^e en 17^e eeuw bijna geen schrijver, dichter of kunstenaar leek te zijn

die *niet* beïnvloed of aangedaan was door melancholie, de grote modeziekte van deze tijd. Maar hoe heeft melancholie drie eeuwen cultureel leven zo kunnen doordringen? In dit themanummer van Groniek wil de redactie de lange traditie van melancholie in beeld brengen door in de verschillende thema-artikelen te bekijken hoe melancholie zich manifesteerde in teksten en afbeeldingen uit de (late) middeleeuwen en vroeg-moderne tijd. Groniek sluit hiermee aan op de tentoonstelling *Melancholie – Waanzin en talent in West-Europa*, die Parijs en Berlijn in 2005 en 2006 aandeed, en hoopt binnen dit grotere thema de situatie in de Lage Landen verder in te kunnen vullen.

Het themagedeelte opent met een theoretische inleiding van Philip van der Eijk, die de invloed van de werken van Aristoteles op het melancholiebegrip in de vroeg-moderne tijd laat zien, waarbij in het bijzonder aandacht is voor het denken over het lichaam. Johan Oosterman toont hoe Jan Moritoen, de laat-middeleeuwse dichter van Gedicht 13 uit het Gruuthuse-liedboek, gegrepen én geïnspireerd werd door melancholie. Rudie van Leeuwen vult een kunsthistoriografische leemte door de kunstzinnige uitbeelding van melancholie in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw onder de loep te nemen. Hij pleit hierbij voor een religieuze duiding van voorstellingen met melancholische houdingen. In een extra lang artikel beschrijft Nanne Streekstra hoe de denkbeelden over melancholie bekende Nederlandse auteurs als Coornhert, Huygens en Hooft hebben beïnvloed. Tevens besteedt hij aandacht aan de ziektegeschiedenis van de melancholicus Barlaeus. In het laatste thema-artikel, tenslotte, laat Jennifer Radden zien hoe de medicus Johann Weyer de duistere middeleeuwse kanten van melancholie en de ‘moderne’ humanistische medische wetenschap in zich verenigt.

Het supplement opent met een betoog van redacteur Jelte Olthof, waarin hij historici oproept tot een constructieve bijdrage aan de geschiedenis, in plaats van de cynische houding die het huidige maatschappelijke debat kenmerkt. Deze Hoog van de Toren wordt gevolgd door een interview over de aankoop van het Gruuthuse-handschrift, dat sinds het voorjaar 2007 in het bezit is van de Koninklijke Bibliotheek. Redacteuren Kris Brus-sen en Anne Huijbers spraken met drie betrokkenen over de aankoop, de nieuwe teksteditie en de liederen uit het handschrift. Het supplement wordt tenslotte afgesloten met een artikel van Vincent van Elburg over de Duitse historicus Karl Lamprecht, waarin hij een herwaardering van deze controversiële persoonlijkheid bepleit.

De redactie wenst u veel leesplezier