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Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson

Excerpt

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MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

CURIOUS FRAGMENTS,

Extracted from a common-place book, which belonged to Robert Burton, the famous Author of the Anatomy of Melancholy

EXTRACT I

I DEMOCRITUS Junior have put my finishing pen to a tractate *De Melancholia*, this day December 5, 1620. First, I blesse the Trinity, which hath given me health to prosecute my worthlesse studies thus far, and make supplication, with a *Laus Deo*, if in any case these my poor labours may be found instrumental to weede out black melancholy, carking cares, hartegrief, from the mind of man. *Sed hoc magis volo quam expecto.*

I turn now to my book, *i nunc liber, goe forth, my brave Anatomy, child of my brain-sweat*, and yee, *candidi lectores*, lo! here I give him up to you, even do with him what you please, my masters. Some, I suppose will applaud, commend, cry him up (these are my friends) hee is a *flos rarus*, forsooth, a none-such, a Phoenix (concerning whom see *Plinius* and *Mandeville*, though *Fienus de monstis* doubteth at large of such a bird, whom *Montaltus* confuting argueth to have been a man *malæ scrupulositatis*, of a weak and cowardlie faith: *Christopherus a Vega* is with him in this). Others again will blame, hiss, reprehende in

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many things, cry down altogether, my collections, for crude, inept, putid, *post caenam scripta*, *Coryate could write better upon a full meal*, verbose, inerudite, and not sufficiently abounding in authorities, *dogmata*, sentences of learned writers which have been before me, when as that first named sort clean otherwise judge of my labours to be nothing else but a *messe of opinions*, a vortex attracting indiscriminate, gold, pearls, hay, straw, wood, excrement, an exchange, tavern, marte, for foreigners to congregate, Danes, Swedes, Hollanders, Lombards, so many strange faces, dresses, salutations, languages, all which *Wolfius* behelde with great content upon the Venetian Rialto, as he describes diffusedly in his book the world's Epitome, which *Sannazar* so bepraiseth. *e contra* our Polydore can see nothing in it; they call me singular, a pedant, fantastic, words of reproach in this age, which is all too neoteric and light for my humour.

One cometh to me sighing, complaining. He expected universal remedies in my Anatomy; so many cures as there are distemperatures among men. I have not put his affection in my cases. Hear you his case. My fine Sir is a lover, an *inamorato*, a Pyramus, a Romeo; he walks seven years disconsolate, moping, because he cannot enjoy his miss, *insanus amor* is his melancholy, the man is mad; *delirat*, he dotes; all this while his Glycera is rude, spiteful, not to be entreated, churlish, spits at him, yet exceeding fair, gentle eyes (which is a beauty) hair lustrous and *smiling*, the trope is none of mine, *Aeneas Sylvius* hath *crines ridentes*—in conclusion she is wedded to his rival, a boore, a *Corydon*, a rustic, *omnino ignarus*, *he can scarce construe Corderius*, yet haughty, fantastic, *opiniatre*. The lover travels, goes into foreign parts, peregrinates, *amoris ergo*, sees manners, customs, not English, converses with pilgrims, lying

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travellers, monks, hermits, those cattle, pedlars, travelling gentry, *Egyptians*, natural wonders, unicorns (though *Aldobrandus* will have them to be figments) satyrs, semiviri, apes, monkeys, baboons, curiosities artificial, *pyramides*, Virgilius his tombe, relicks, bones, which are nothing but ivory as *Melanthon* judges, though *Cornutus* leaneth to think them bones of dogs, cats (why not men?) which subtill priests vouch to have been saints, martyrs, *heu Pietas!* By that time he has ended his course, *fugit hora*, seven other years are expired, gone by, time is he should return, he taketh ship for Britaine, much desired of his friends, *favebant venti*, *Neptune is curteis*, after some weeks at sea he landeth, rides post to town, greets his family, kinsmen, *compotores*, *those jokers his friends that were wont to tippel with him at alehouses*; these wonder now to see the change, *quantum mutatus*, *the man is quite another thing*, he is disen-thrall'd, manumitted, he wonders what so bewitched him, he can now both see, hear, smell, handle, converse with his mistress, single by reason of the death of his rival, a widow having children, grown willing, prompt, amorous, shewing no such great dislike to second nuptials, he might have her for asking, no such thing, his mind is changed, he loathes his former meat, had liever eat ratsbane, aconite, his humour is to die a bachelour; marke the conclusion. In this humour of celibate seven other years are consumed in idleness, sloth, world's pleasures, which fatigate, satiate, induce weariness, *tædium vite*: When upon a day, behold a wonder, *redit Amor*, the man is as sick as ever, he is commenced lover upon the old stock, walks with his hand thrust in his bosom for negligence, moping he leans his head, face yellow, beard flowing and incomposite, eyes sunken, *anhelus*, *breath wheezy and asthmatical*, by reason of *over-much*

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sighing: society he abhors, solitude is but a hell, what shall he doe? all this while his mistresse is forward, coming, *amantissima*, ready to jump at once into his mouth, her he hateth, feels disgust when she is but mentioned, thinks her ugly, old, a painted Jesabeel, Alecto, Megara, and Tisiphone all at once, a Corinthian Lais, a strumpet, only not handsome, that which he affecteth so much, that which drives him mad, distracted, phrenetic, beside himself, is no beauty which lives, nothing *in rerum naturâ* (so he might entertain a hope of a cure) but something *which is not*, can never be, a certain *fantastic opinion* or *notional image* of his mistresse, *that which she was*, and that which hee thought her to be, in former times, how beautiful! torments him, frets him, follows him, makes him that he wishes to die.

This Caprichio, *Sir Humourous*, hee cometh to me to be cured. I counsel marriage with his mistresse, according to Hippocrates his method, together with milk diet, herbs, aloes, and wild parsley, good in such cases, though Avicenna preferreth some sorts of wild fowl, teals, widgeons, becca ficos, which men in Sussex eat. He flies out in a passion, ho! ho; and falls to calling me names, dizzard, ass, lunatic, moper, Bedlamite, Pseudo-Democritus. I smile in his face, bidding him to be patient, tranquil, to no purpose, he still rages, I think this man must fetch his remedies from Utopia, Fairy Land, Islands in the Moone, &c.

EXTRACT II

***** Much disputacyons of fierce wits amongst themselves, in logomachies, subtile controversies, many dry blows given on either side, contentions of learned men, or such as would be so thought, as *Bodinus de Periodis* saith of such an one, *arrident amici ridet mundus*, in English, this man his cronies

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they cocker him up, they flatter him, he would fayne appear somebody, meanwhile the world thinks him no better than a dizzard, a ninny, a sophist. ***** Philosophy running mad, madness philosophizing, much idle-learned enquiries, what truth is? and no issue, fruit, of all these noises, only huge books are written, and who is the wiser? ***** Men sitting in the Doctor's chair, we marvel how they got there, being *homines intellectus pulverulenti*, as Trincauellius notes; they care not so they may raise a dust to smother the eyes of their oppugners; *homines parvulissimi* as *Lemnius*, whom *Alcuin* herein taxeth of a crude Latinism; dwarfs, minims, the least little men, these spend their time, and it is odds but they lose their time and wits too into the bargain, chacing of nimble and retiring Truth: Her they prosecute, her still they worship, *libant*, they make libations, spilling the wine, as those old Romans in their sacrificials, *Cerealia*, *May-games*: Truth is the game all these hunt after, to the extreme perturbacyon and drying up of the moistures, *humidum radicale exsiccant*, as *Galen*, in his counsels to one of these wear-wits, brain-moppers, sponges, saith. **** and for all this *nunquam metam attingunt*, and how should they? they bowle awry, shooting beside the marke; whereas it should appear, that *Truth absolute* on this planet of ours is scarcely to be found, but in her stede *Queene Opinion* predominates, governs, whose shifting and ever mutable *Lampas*, me seemeth, is man's destinie to follow, she præcurseth, she guideth him, before his incapable eyes she frisketh her tender lights, which entertayne the child-man, untill what time his sight be strong to endure the vision of *Very Truth*, which is in the heavens, the vision beatifical, as *Anianus* expounds in his argument against certain mad wits which helde God to be corporeous;

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these were dizzards, fools, *gothamites*. **** but and if *Very Truth* be extant indeede on earth, as some hold she it is which actuates men's deeds, purposes, ye may in vaine look for her in the learned universities, halls, colleges. Truth is no Doctoresse, she takes no degrees at Paris or Oxford, amongst great clerks, disputants, subtile Aristotles, men *nodosi ingenii*, able to take *Lully* by the chin, but oftentimes to such an one as myself, an *Idiota* or common person, *no great things*, melancholizing in woods where waters are, quiet places by rivers, fountains, whereas the silly man expecting no such matter, thinketh only how best to delectate and refresh his mynde continually with *Natura* her pleasaunt scenes, woods, water-falls, or *Art* her statelie gardens, parks, terraces, *Belvideres*, on a sudden the goddesse herself *Truth* has appeared, with a shyning lyghte, and a sparklyng countenance, so as yee may not be able lightly to resist her. *****

EXTRACT III

A CONCEPT OF DIABOLICAL POSSESSION

By myself walking,
 To myself talking,
 When as I ruminatē
 On my untoward fate,
 Scarcely seem I
 Alone sufficiently,
 Black thoughts continually
 Crowding my privacy;
 They come unbidden,
 Like foes at a wedding,
 Thrusting their faces
 In better guests' places,

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Peevish and malecontent,
 Clownish, impertinent,
 Dashing the merriment:
 So in like fashions
 Dim cogitations
 Follow and haunt me,
 Striving to daunt me,
 In my heart festering,
 In my ears whispering,
 'Thy friends are treacherous,
 Thy foes are dangerous,
 Thy dreams ominous.'
 Fierce Anthropophagi,
 Spectra, Diaboli,
 What scared St Anthony,
 Hobgoblins, Lemures,
 Dreams of Antipodes,
 Night-riding Incubi
 Troubling the fantasy,
 All dire illusions
 Causing confusions;
 Figments heretical,
 Scruples fantastical,
 Doubts diabolical,
 Abaddon vexeth me,
 Mahu perplexeth me,
 Lucifer teareth me—

*Jesu! Maria! liberate nos ab his diris tentationibus
 Inimici.*

EXTRACT IV

This morning, May 2, 1662, having first broken my
 fast upon eggs and cooling salades, mellowes, water-
 cresses, those herbes, according to *Villanovus* his
 prescription, who disallows the use of meat in a
 morning as gross, fat, hebetant, *feral*, altogether fitter

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for wild beasts than men, *e contra* commendeth this herb-diete for gentle, humane, active, conducing to contemplation in most men, I betook myselfe to the nearest fields. (Being in London I commonly dwell in the *suburbes*, as airiest, quietest, *loci musis proprio*, free from noises of caroches, waggons, mechnick, and base workes, workshoppes, also sights, pageants, spectacles of outlandish birds, fishes, crocodiles, *Indians*, mermaids, adde quarrels, fightings, wranglings of the common sort, *plebs*, the rabble, duelloes with fists, *proper to this island*, at which the stiletto'd and secrete *Italian* laughs.) Withdrawing myselfe from these buzzing and illiterate vanities, with a *bezou las manos* to the city, I begin to inhale, draw in, snuff up, as horses *dilatatis naribus* snort the fresh aires, with exceeding great delight, when suddenly there crosses me a procession sad, heavy, dolourous, tristfull, melancholick, able to change mirth into dolour, and overcast a clearer atmosphere than possibly the neighbourhoods of so great a citty can afford. An old man, a poore man, deceased, is borne on men's shoulders to a poore buriall, without solemnities of hearse, mourners, plumes, *mutæ personæ*, those personate actors that will weep if yee shew them a piece of silver; none of those customed civilities of children, kinsfolk, *dependants*, following the coffin; he died a poore man, his friends *assessores opum*, those cronies of his that stuck by him so long as he had a penny, now leave him, forsake him, shun him, desert him; they think it much to follow his putrid and stinking carcase to the grave; his children, if he had any, for commonly the case stands thus, this poore man his son dies before him, he survives, poore, indigent, base, dejected, miserable, &c. or if he have any which survive him, *sua negotia agunt*, they mind their own business, forsooth, cannot, will not, find

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time, leisure, *inclination*, *extremum munus perficere*, to follow to the pit their old indulgent father, which loved them, stroked them, caressed them, cockering them up, *quantum potuit*, as farre as his means extended, while they were babes, chits, *minims*, hee may rot in his grave, lie stinking in the sun *for them*, have no buriall at all, they care not. *O nefas!* Chiefly I noted the coffin to have been *without a pall*, nothing but a few planks, of cheapest wood that could be had, *naked*, having none of the ordinary *symptomata* of a funerall, those *locularii* which bare the body having on diversely coloured coats, *and none black*: (one of these reported the deceased to have been an almsman seven yeares, a pauper, harboured and fed in the workhouse of St Giles-in-the-Fields, to whose proper burying-ground he was now going for interment). All which when I behelde, hardly I refrained from weeping, and incontinently I fell to musing: 'If this man had been rich, a *Cræsus*, a *Crassus*, or as rich as *Whittington*, what pompe, charge, lavish cost, expenditure, of rich buriall, *ceremoniall-obsequies*, *obsequious ceremonies*, had been thought too good for such an one; what store of panegyricks, eulogies, funeral orations, &c. some beggarly poetaster, worthy to be beaten for his ill rimes, crying him up, hee was rich, generous, bountiful, polite, learned, a *Mæcenas*, while as in very deede he was nothing lesse: what weeping, sighing, sorrowing, honing, complaining, kinsmen, friends, relatives, fortieth cousins, poor relatives, lamenting for the deceased; hypocriticall heirs, sobbing, striking their breasts (they care not if he had died a year ago); so many clients, dependants, flatterers, *parasites*, *cunning Gnathoes*, tramping on foot after the hearse, all their care is, who shall stand fairest with the successour; he mean time (like enough) spurns them from him, spits at them, treads

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them under his foot, will have nought to do with any such cattle. I think him in the right: *Hæc sunt majora gravitate Heracliti. These follies are enough to give crying Heraclitus a fit of the spleene.*'

ON THE INCONVENIENCES RESULTING
FROM BEING HANGED

To the Editor of The Reflector

SIR,—I am one of those unhappy persons whose misfortunes, it seems, do not entitle them to the benefit of pure pity. All that is bestowed upon me of that kindest alleviator of human miseries, comes dashed with a double portion of contempt. My griefs have nothing in them that is felt as sacred by the bystanders. Yet is my affliction in truth of the deepest grain. The heaviest task that was ever given to mortal patience to sustain. Time, that wears out all other sorrows, can never modify or soften mine. Here they must continue to gnaw, as long as that fatal mark——

Why was I ever born? Why was innocence in my person suffered to be branded with a stain which was appointed only for the blackest guilt? What had I done, or my parents, that a disgrace of mine should involve a whole posterity in infamy? I am almost tempted to believe, that, in some pre-existent state, crimes to which this sublunary life of mine hath been as much a stranger as the babe that is newly born into it, have drawn down upon me this vengeance, so disproportionate to my actions on this globe.

My brain sickens, and my bosom labours to be delivered of the weight that presses upon it, yet my conscious pen shrinks from the avowal. But out it must——