1 The reinvention of sadness

> The hart of wise men is where there is sadnesse, and the hart of fooles where there is mirth.
>
> Juan Huarte, *Examen de Ingenios*

In the *Prologo* to *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605), Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra relates a purported conversation he had with a friend concerning his anxieties over publishing his book. The author Cervantes seems particularly worried about his lack of learning, which he fears has unfortunately stamped his work in stylistically, and materially, deficient ways. As he asks his friend,

> [H]ow could you expect me not to feel uneasy about what that ancient lawgiver they call the Public will say when it sees me . . . coming out now with all my years upon my back, and with a book as dry as a bone, devoid of invention, meager in style, poor in conceits, wholly wanting in learning and doctrine, without quotations in the margin or annotations at the end, after the fashion of other books.[1]

According to Cervantes, readers expect certain apparatuses in the books they purchase. To disappoint them is to risk having one's work disparaged, and one's reputation as a writer compromised before it has even been established. In spite of all of Quixote's exploits, Cervantes describes his book as a non-entity, precisely because he has "nothing to quote in the margin or note at the end." Quixote should thus "remain buried in the archives of his own La Mancha" because Cervantes is incapable of providing the glosses and proofs of erudition such a book requires: "I find myself," writes Cervantes, "through my incapacity and want of learning, unequal to supplying them [notes]."[2]

Cervantes's friend finds at least a partial solution to his problem: "all you have to do," he assures Cervantes, "is work in any sentence or scraps of Latin you may happen to know by heart, or at any rate that will not give you much trouble to look up. Thus when you speak of freedom and captivity, you can insert *Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro*; and then refer in the margin to Horace, or whoever said it."[3] Margins, in other words, need not expose one's lack of reading, or unfamiliarity with authoritative texts. They can rather be filled, quite easily, with literary tags and bits of Latin. Cervantes need not worry, for marginal notes are not the purveyors of book-knowledge so much

as ornamental features which can fulfill their function merely by occupying – with minimal, main-text correspondence – a certain space on the page.

The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England examines English writers who do not so easily, or so playfully, satirize scholarly trappings in their literary endeavors as does Cervantes in the opening of *Don Quixote*. On the contrary, most of the subjects in this study insist upon, describe, and document their intellectual abilities in clearly pathological ways, attesting not only to the high value placed on demonstrable intelligence in the period but also to its very instability. In the following chapters I argue first that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries witnessed a change in the way that the emotion of sadness was understood and written about in England, and subsequently that this change can be seen most visibly in the ensuing manner that seventeenth-century scholars described themselves as melancholic, and construed learned activity as fostering a dark, somber mood. This alteration in the comprehension of sadness, which becomes conceptualized outside and beyond the processes of mourning that epitomized Medieval representations, did not begin overnight; nor did it end neatly at a particular point in time, although I suggest that the arc of John Milton's career as a writer traces the declining influence of the qualitative, conceptual understanding of emotions, to be eventually substituted by more clinical accounts of mood disorders.

Through a number of different authors and texts, this book maintains that scholarly and literary methods of analysis and argumentation nurture rather than oppose one another, that figures we identify today as poets often saw themselves first and foremost as learned writers, and that it is not coincidental that we see many of the more celebrated authors of the period exhibit early – and in some cases enduring – investments in scholarly genres, notably Christian polemic, where methods of quotation and citation lead to innovations in the textual production of books across genres. Not only do the scholars presented here speak of their depressive states in ways that powerfully attest to a sense of interiority – however alien and distanced from our own – they also attempt to combat and, to whatever degree they consider possible, control their melancholic tendencies by the very nature of their scholarly projects and methodologies. Thus, in the cases of John Donne and Robert Burton in particular, does melancholy often constitute the scholarly focus of particular works, with the margins of these works themselves brimming with literally graphic evidence of intellectual anxiety and fear of isolation in the form of sidenotes, glosses, quotations, and asides. When Milton, by contrast, absconds with the tradition of insulating his claims within a mammoth textual apparatus, he does not merely dismiss centuries of learned opinion in the putative service of a divine muse, he also defies the presumed onset of melancholy in the face of isolation and potential scholarly ostracism.

The theoretical claim of this book is that we misconstrue the subjectivity of the early modern, melancholic scholar when we orient our analysis around the

question of whether or not a "sincere" mode of self-understanding was available in the English Renaissance. Many literary historians have been inclined to argue, often in the context of stating their admiration for Michel Foucault, that one must read the English Renaissance in opposition to any version of what Jonathan Dollimore has called "an essentialist humanism which . . . in effect only really emerges with the Enlightenment."[4] This contention is misleading, however, in that it implies an either/or dichotomy between a pre- and post-essentialist model of the subject. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose theories inform my own historicized approach to the early modern period, opposes any essentialist, "ego"-centric, inner/outer model of the self in ways that I will argue are helpful for understanding Renaissance conceptions of human agency, the humoral body, and spiritual salvation.

One can be deeply suspicious of an essentialist view of the Renaissance subject, then, without wholly rejecting subjectivity itself. As Lacan maintains, the self may participate in its own circumscription, even its own erasure at times, and, as a result, there is always a part of this self (the *objet petit a*) that slips through the matrix of any kind of "cultural poetics."[5] The sense at times, in reading Stephen Greenblatt, Francis Barker, Jonathan Goldberg, Margreta de Grazia, Jean Howard, Peter Stallybrass, Patricia Fumerton, and others with stated cultural materialist interest in the early modern era, is that an early modern author had no body whatsoever and served only a social function.[6] Not surprisingly, work that has rejected the viability of personage in the Renaissance has generally overlooked the fascinating evidence that exists for helping us to understand how readers and writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw themselves as emotional beings. Theories of the passions, disseminated in vernacular treatises throughout the early modern period, thus form the archival moorings for this project.

The theoretical perspective against which I argue, the position that empties out the body of the early modern writer in the name of a "historicized" subject, has been modified by many of the scholars I have already named. For example, de Grazia and Stallybrass explain, in their "Introduction" to a collection of essays on Renaissance objects that they edited with Maureen Quilligan, that their aim was not "to efface the subject but to offset it by insisting that the object be taken into account,"[7] while Goldberg employs an assortment of post-structuralist theories, from Lacanian alienation to Derridean *différance*, in order to describe the textual means by which early modern subjects imagined, appropriated, qualified, and circumscribed their sense of being.[8] Greenblatt, often cited as the bastion for American cultural materialist methodology, has also turned to psychoanalysis, invoking the Lacanian concept of the Real as a useful term for understanding early modern theorizations of the Eucharist.[9]

The period-specific argument of *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* is that the reinvigorated Galenism that shaped the humoral

self-understandings of some of the seventeenth-century's most influential and innovative poets also informed their aesthetic criteria, their conception of knowledge, and their investment in an anti-Platonic, materialist conception of being. By using a word such as *reinvention* in the title of this chapter, I am contending that a conceptual shift took place in the late sixteenth century, transforming the way a cadre of intellectuals claimed to value unhappiness.[10] In this regard I follow more recent writers on early modern subjectivity, notably Katharine Eisaman Maus, Gail Kern Paster, and Michael Schoenfeldt in resisting an overestimation of the social reverberation of acts of writing and cognition and the presumably ensuing forfeiture of personally felt passions.

In *Inwardness And Theater in the English Renaissance*, Maus argues that the problem of other people's feelings and sentiments "presents itself to [early modern] thinkers and writers not so much as a question of whether those minds exist as a question of how to know what they are thinking."[11] The philosophical skepticism that flowered in this period, as it was grounded in a distrust of one's senses, and thus a hesitancy to claim that what one saw or heard constituted real or true knowledge, provides Maus with a starting point from which to trace how early modern thinkers such as Walter Ralegh found the desire to know others that much more tantalizing; that is, skepticism "seems to strengthen, not weaken, the impulse to investigate those [other] minds."[12] Such investigations occurred not only in philosophical pamphlets, but also in the homes of suspected Catholics, where Protestant examiners tried to look through outward appearance and glean the beliefs of their examinees. Thus Maus concerns herself primarily with inwardness as it was first understood and developed vis-à-vis discourses of faith, and subsequently reanimated on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage.

In contrast to Maus, Paster argues not that "the inwardness of persons is constituted by the *disparity* between what a limited, fallible human observer can see and what is available to the hypostasized divine observer,"[13] but rather that the inwardness of a Renaissance person is understood, in literal terms, through the discourse of Galenic physiology. This discourse posited that the human body was made up of four distinct humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) that, through their fluctuations, dictated the moods and disposition of the self they inhabited. Not only did Galenism read the self through the fluids that constituted it, but – as Paster points out – it also rendered the body as intensely fungible and porous, vulnerable both to fluid fluctuation as dictated by one's temperament and environmental influence.[14]

One particular consequence of humoral theory that Paster explores in detail is the way in which Galenism materialized gender difference, privileging the presumed self-control of the man at the expense of the "leaky" female body. Like Maus, Paster also focuses primarily on how one model of inwardness, not devotional but humoral, shaped dramaturgical representations of character and – more broadly speaking – the understanding and depiction of shame in the period.

Neither Maus nor Paster pursue, as I do in this study, the manifestations and characteristics of a particular character type – the melancholic scholar – as it was described and inhabited by writers in the early modern era. While I do turn, in the third chapter of *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England*, to the play *Hamlet* (first performance circa 1601) in order to argue – in ways that clearly evoke Maus and Paster's interests – that skepticism can function as a symptom of scholarly melancholy, I nonetheless remain primarily interested not in the representational category of a disposition as it would have been viewed on stage, but rather *how* this representation signals a transitional move from a Neoplatonic conception of object-oriented, spiritually inflected sadness – a representation I examine in the first book of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) – to a more material, Galenically informed model of dispositionally rooted passions. Learned depressives that Hamlet not only epitomizes but also helps to set a behavioral standard for often argue – circularly – that they merit self-examination precisely because such study defines their own behavioral characteristics, *not* because Protestant devotional practices – for example – encourage an inventory of one's fallenness, or even because they wish to read themselves as explicitly gendered beings (although neither religious nor gendered concerns are ever wholly escapable in the period).

Through his stated interest in a physiologically influenced sense of inwardness as it is exhibited on the part of a range of seventeenth-century writers, Michael Schoenfeldt's recent work is closer to my own in both its resistance to the new historicist oversimplification of the ways in which culture writes the self, and also in its interest in teasing out the implications of Galenically inspired introspection. At the same time, however, I am less inclined to see, as does Schoenfeldt, "the empowerment that Galenic physiology and ethics bestowed upon the individual."[15] Rather, in the case of self-professed melancholics, we as readers are presented with several quandaries and contradictions. While these writers examine themselves with daunting energy and tenacity, they also ceaselessly place themselves within accepted psychological templates, following a diagnostic route that leads them – invariably – to proclaim themselves as melancholic: both gifted and sick. Schoenfeldt, by contrast, pursues a more hopeful reading of the Galenic self in the period, one in which readers and writers are encouraged to use a variety of different strategies – pharmacological, dietary, as well as philosophical – in order to attain humoral balance.[16] This reading is not – I argue – available to self-professed melancholic scholars, or even desired, at least not until we encounter Milton, whose belief in free will eventually leads him to defy some of the most onerous consequences typically ascribed to a melancholic disposition.

Largely due to *Saturn and Melancholy*, the groundbreaking study of the emergence of melancholy as an artistic, meritorious temperament, written by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl in 1964, critics of the last

forty years have generally read early modern depictions of estimable sadness through the work of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres* (1480), and particularly the first book, *De Vita Sana* ("On a Healthy Life"), or *De cura valetudinis eorum qui incumbunt studio litterarum* ("On Caring for the Health of Those Who Devote themselves to Literary Studies"), grants scholarly melancholy a lasting, positive valence by connecting the condition to genius, even prescience. This connection is derived from the (pseudo-) Aristotelian *Problem* 30.1, which begins by asking, "Why is it that all men who are outstanding in philosophy, poetry or the arts are melancholic?"[17] Aristotle's answer is that natural melancholy – a melancholic mood that is dispositionally based and not the result of humors that have been overheated – is a clear indicator of extraordinary intellectual power, and cites Socrates and Plato as examples of particularly gifted sufferers.[18] Ficino, for his part, adopts the Aristotelian concept of natural, or genial, melancholy and Platonizes it. That is, as Winfried Schleiner explains, the Italian humanist "blends the explanation he found there [in *Problem* 30.1] with the well-known Platonic ideas about different kinds of mania (or furors) from *Phaidros*, and even claims divine guidance for the very attempt to explain private revelation."[19] As a result, in the Ficinian tradition, genial melancholy is clearly distinguishable from its Galenic variety, the latter of which is associated with black bile and said to cause not prodigious aptitude but madness.

It is a central premise here that we misconstrue early modern scholarly melancholy when we assume that it remains purely Ficinian – that is, genial – into and through the seventeenth century.[20] Schleiner argues this point convincingly in *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance*. According to him, "in the early seventeenth century it was no longer possible to expound at length the melancholic's outstanding abilities of foresight and divination without taking into account an increasing opposition to this view."[21] The opposition to this view was presented by Galenic writers in this period: theorists who did not accept the Ficinian distinction between black bile, thought to have been unhealthy, and natural or pure bile, associated with inspired cogitations. For these thinkers, dispositional melancholy was a decidedly contradictory condition from which to suffer. Provided one's black bile did not become overheated or burnt, a condition referred to as "melancholy adust," melancholics were capable of exhibiting tremendous intellectual abilities; but if a melancholic's already predominant black bile increased, becoming thicker and hotter, then mental breakdown was a very real danger. Learnedness and mental ability remain connected with melancholy, and thus it is rare to uncover scholars in this period, male or female, who do not claim melancholy as their predominant complexion; but just as this condition was esteemed in early modern England, it was also lamented, and while proposed cures proliferated in the "medical" pamphlets of the period, we cannot assume that good health, or the ever-elusive perfect balance of the humors, was really desired by the melancholic scholar.[22] Rather,

it was believed that the acquisition of mental balance was accompanied by an inevitable cooling of the humoral heat that fired the intellect. Thus, thinkers of a natural melancholic temperament were thought capable of being "verie wittie . . . because the humour of melancholie with some heate is so made subtile," as Timothy Bright explains in his *Treatise of Melancholie* (1586), "that as from the driest woode riseth the clearest flame, and from the lyes of wine is distilled a strong & burning aqua vitæ, in like sort their spirits, both from the drinesse of the matter, and straining of the grosse substance from which they passe, receauing a purenesse, are instrumentes of such sharpnesse."[23] To gain a peaceful hold on one's passions thereby carried with it the loss of mental insight in a kind of reverse Faustian bargain – the body being saved at the expense of the inspired spirit.

In *The Gendering of Melancholia*, Juliana Schiesari relies upon a Ficinian model of melancholy to argue that "when melancholia is considered undesirable it is stereotypically metaphorized as feminine or viewed as an affliction women bring onto men; when melancholia is valued as a creative condition, however, its privilege is grounded on an implicit or explicit exclusion of women."[24] Schiesari is on firm ground when she argues for the root misogyny of Ficinian melancholy, but a reanimated Galenism in sixteenth-century England fundamentally alters and confuses what had, in Ficino, been esteemed as unequivocally venerable and male.[25] That is, after the proliferation of writings that turn to the body's interior to explain mood and complexion – even if these explanations remain largely unsubstantiated by anatomical discovery – we cannot maintain an either/or dichotomy between melancholy as "on the one hand . . . a clinical/medical condition and, on the other hand, *as a discursive practice* through which an individual subject who is classified as melancholic or who classifies himself as a melancholic is legitimated in the representation of *his* artistic trajectory."[26] On the contrary, melancholy by the time of *Hamlet* functions as both a condition *and* a practice; it is a disease that no longer connotes merely *redemptive* sadness in the case of scholars, by which I mean a sadness that functions as a badge of moral and spiritual uprightness. One can be sad, and sick, in *Hamlet* without, as a consequence, being prophetic or inspired, as Ficino would have it. In the first book of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, by contrast, all of the exemplary figures (male and female) exhibit depressive tendencies but none of them are described as dispositionally melancholic.

In my second chapter, I argue that Spenser's endorsement of a holy kind of sadness depends upon his Neoplatonism, and that the concomitant rejection on his part of commendable scholarly melancholy is, in fact, a rejection of the most unsettling heresy that one could attribute to Galenism in the early modern period: that in the end it envisions a material soul, acted upon and shaped as much by human intervention as godly. Platonism, as Jon Quitslund reminds us, "was known to Spenser as a profusion of opinions, not an 'ism.'"[27]

Nonetheless, as Quitslund also acknowledges, Spenser – throughout his career – "deals with themes that had been the property and legacy of Platonists."[28] Among these themes is the immateriality of the soul. I emphasize Spenser's conceptualization of the soul as immaterial in order to argue that the Neoplatonic conception of inspired ecstasy – often figured as a metaphysical flight from the body – distinguishes Spenser's theory of the passions from the more materially inflected accounts of humoral mood disorders that will be forwarded in the seventeenth century. I use the term *Neoplatonist* rather than *Platonist* merely to accentuate Spenser's debts to Renaissance writers such as Ficino, from whom it is generally assumed that Spenser developed his conception of rapture – a concept at odds with the Galenic depiction of a humorally embedded self.[29]

Spenser's indifference to the plight of the suffering scholar, so at odds with the sympathetic portrayals we see in William Shakespeare, Donne, Burton, and Milton, amplifies the same trepidation recorded in Bright's *Treatise*, where readers are warned that unfettered Galenism "hath caused some to iudge more basely of the soule, then agreeth with pietie or nature."[30] In the eyes of some, learned sadness – achieved through both dispositional tendencies and, increasingly, the effects of an intellectual lifestyle (long hours spent reading and writing in solitude, without sufficient exercise, adequate ventilation, or proper food and drink, not to mention the difficulty of obtaining patronage, or larger, social recognition for one's work)[31] – secularizes a passion previously thought of as praiseworthy only when it was explicitly tied to devotional practices. As I will argue in the next chapter, Spenser associates worldly sorrow with Galenism and redemptive sadness – epitomized by a remorseful regard of one's own sins – with the Neoplatonic tradition in which he works. After Spenser's death, and with the relative demise of Platonic allegory – which is still utilized by many poets well into the seventeenth century but is no longer representative of the default sensibility of an influential school of writers, and no longer provides the stimulus for the copious production of love sonnets in the Petrarchan tradition – we see a shift in English aesthetics toward what will be termed, retrospectively in the eighteenth century, "metaphysical" verse, or – more broadly still – a Jacobean ethos that offers a more visceral, material take on human nature and that is, as a result, more comfortable with humoral theory than were members of Spenser's circle.

Galenism rectifies the purported sinfulness of secular sadness by attributing human failing not to the erring self, but instead to humors with which the subject is burdened from birth. On the one hand, Galenism mirrors the Protestant conception of election and reprobation, whereby the mark of either God's favor or God's damnation is engraved on a person's heart, a process "wholly of God's causation" in which "neither the preparation of the heart nor the effectual calling is achieved by his own efforts."[32] On the other hand, however, the subject in Galen's medical praxis is at least afforded the possibility of *trying* to correct

his or her humoral inadequacies or superfluities. Some Galenic theorists, such as Thomas Walkington, are more optimistic than others, suggesting that one "may in time change and alter his bad complexion into a better,"[33] but most commentators through the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries agree with Andreas Laurentius, who notes somberly that sadness "almost neuer leauth melancholike persons."[34]

The early modern English downgrading of the merits of melancholy, occasioned by the tenets and material trajectory of Galenism, replaces genial melancholy with scholarly depression in the seventeenth century (or, in other words, drains Ficino's melancholic scholar of his prophetic powers), just as other belief systems are being reevaluated and transformed. Sorcery, necromancy, and conjuring, for example – all practices in which Ficino believed – are all also predicated on a Neoplatonic worldview, as Keith Thomas has shown.[35] Eventually, scientific inquiry in the seventeenth century will cast doubt on all of these arts, and also occasion the rejection of Galenism as a viable, empirical theory of the body, but prior to this rejection melancholy will be repackaged as a mood that attests to bookishness and contemplativeness, if not fantastic powers of prognostication (modified, in Schleiner's phrasing, to attest to "insight, not foresight").[36] This reconceptualization marks the beginning of an "intellectual" self-portraiture whereby the sufferer conjoins mental skills with an anguish and despair previously understood, in the Western tradition, through expressly devotional templates.[37]

Thus, early modern scholars find themselves in the curious, one might say sadomasochistic, predicament of wanting to be sad at the same time that they recognize that such sadness imperils their lives, not because sadness kills directly – indeed, according to Burton, it seldom "procures death" – but rather because it can prompt thought of self-annihilation.[38] This awareness on the part of the melancholic that his condition is painful for the psychological trauma it creates registers an important, if often overlooked, indication of introspection and self-awareness in the period. If we consider, for example, Barker's well-known assertion that in Hamlet's interior "there is, in short, nothing," we might propose that suicide, in the play and the period, unmoors such a supposition.[39] If the self is a fiction, in other words, why and how does it want to destroy itself?

This shift in the understanding and symptoms of sadness, although certainly debatable in its particulars, has nonetheless been insufficiently recognized, not only by literary scholars such as Barker but also by literary historians who have analyzed emotions in the early modern period. The most noteworthy and enduring studies of melancholy, those by Lawrence Babb and Bridget Gellert Lyons, concern themselves with *representations* of the condition – notably on stage – and not with the self-understanding of melancholics.[40] Neither do broader, historical attempts to understand aesthetic and generic transformations typically

consider the possible influence of Galenic thought. The demise of English love sonnets after the 1590s, for example, has by and large been attributed to the change in political leadership, from Queen Elizabeth, who – in Arthur Marotti's analysis – "recognized the reality of ambition, manipulated it, and allowed it to be expressed in the language of love," to King James, who was less comfortable with such artful pronouncements.[41] I do not wish to reject such an explanation, but only point out that a socio-political account typically provides one *kind* of answer. My interest, rather, is to qualify such an approach by exploring instead how a changing perception of the self – as it was construed in humoral terms – led a number of writers deeply committed to their self-presentations as scholars to rethink the aesthetic and psychological models for understanding emotional experiences that they had inherited.

But what is it that they were rethinking? After all, the works of Galen, a second-century CE physician, had formed the bedrock for Western understandings of the body and its diseases for millennia. In his history of melancholy, Stanley Jackson argues that the "transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, however one conceives of it and whatever dates one assigns to it, did not bring any significant change in how melancholia was described, explained, or treated." Rather, "[m]edical writings on the subject were essentially more elaborated versions of the same."[42] While it impressively sweeps over centuries of thought on depression, Jackson's study makes no attempt to contextualize either the changing presentation of Galenism over time in Europe, or the increased sphere of its influence; neither does he consider the significant alterations to Galenic thought that occur during the Renaissance. For example, character *types*, as established by dominant bodily humors, are *not* traceable to Galen himself, but rather to medieval, Galenic theories,[43] but to suggest as a result that the early modern appreciation of a humoral type is the same in the sixteenth century as in the fourteenth is to overlook the unparalleled degree to which early modern theorizers view a myriad of different aspects of the self – professional, racial, amorous, even religious – as a function of one's fluid and thermal constitution.[44] While, in an intellectual historian's account, literary representations of melancholics, and self-descriptions of melancholics, are largely ignored, a literary study such as Schiesari's chooses, on the contrary, to understand melancholy "as a cultural category rather than as a medical one."[45] I contend, in contrast to both approaches, that the characteristics of what we would today term a "medical" or a "literary" text interpenetrate one another in the early modern period. Our analyses of Renaissance writings that focus on the passions – irrespective of their generic standing – need to recognize the diversity, speculative confidence, and syncretic tendencies that epitomized intellectual enterprises in this era.

As with the transmission of all ideas, doctrines, and ideologies in early modern Europe, print played an enormous part in remaking Galenism (and also,