

**SCEPTICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MELANCHOLY: BURTON, SWIFT, POPE, STERNE**

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This article examines common features in Swift, Pope and Sterne's responses to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and the wider humoral tradition. It documents the willingness of Swift and Pope simultaneously to take the latter discourse seriously—even to value humoral delusion—and yet to satirise its explanatory pretensions and the behavioural states it postulates; their tendency, also, to take a Janus-faced view of associated kinds of madness, affirming and deriding these concurrently. Sterne then recapitulates that stance in assuming a double perspective on hobby-horsical tendencies, and he combines this with a feel for the pathos and yet also delight which accompany the inevitable failure of *Tristram Shandy's* encyclopaedic pretensions. Swift and Sterne especially derive these dual perspectives from qualities incipient in the *Anatomy*, qualities which Burton had kept in check. In that respect, they (with Pope) transform humoral thinking into a sceptical resource, finding in it material supportive of an ironizing mind-set that willingly entertains multiple contradictory ideas at once. Such sceptical perspectivism is, I argue, characteristic of all three eighteenth-century authors discussed here and highlights their anticipation of Romantic irony.

In the critical literature of eighteenth-century melancholy Burton's *Anatomy* and the humoral tradition it epitomised have played, at best, an incidental role. Mullan's formative study of the Hanoverian 'spleen', for instance, concentrates, rather, on the period's turn to neural physiology, taking humoralism's collapse as read.<sup>1</sup> The contributions to Ingram's collection on the same subject trace a bifurcating narrative in which the satirical treatments of hypochondria penned by Swift and Pope stand apart from the more soberly contemplative strains of Young, Warton, and even *Tristram Shandy*'s melancholy. Here, too, the *Anatomy* is only occasionally present, the dialogic qualities of Burton's text (which in fact lend themselves to a fusion of satire and sentiment) going unheeded.<sup>2</sup> Whilst there have been particular analyses of how Swift, Pope and Sterne each read Burton, these have never been successfully synthesised into a general account that closes the gaps left by Mullan, Ingram et al.<sup>3</sup> The present essay addresses that lacuna, showing how Swift in his account of madness, Pope in his portrait of ruling passions, Sterne in his treatment of hobby horses and encyclopaedic pretensions, all developed from their engagements with humoralism a Janus-faced view of melancholy. Granted, this trio turned to the *Anatomy* as a fund of witty material; but they also exploited self-consuming qualities<sup>4</sup> inchoate in Burton's text and in the humours tradition, making of the latter sceptical resources via which to expose the relativism of intellectual authority and articulate what I will call double perspectives (mutually incompatible positions of a kind characteristically entertained, I suggest, by writers of a dialogic, one might say 'Scriblerian' stripe).<sup>5</sup> All three of them readily harboured contradictory judgements—held in tension contrary perspectives—as they reflected upon melancholy.<sup>6</sup> To argue this, though, is to look beyond the narrative of humoralism's decline and foreshadow instead the part played by Swift, Pope and Sterne in a wider history of eighteenth-century scepticism, a history less concerned with Enlightenment Pyrrhonism and

more focused on the cultivation of ironic perspectivism as a condition of being.<sup>7</sup> This will be my end-point, but I begin by sketching the view taken of melancholy in the early 1700s.

## I

The fate suffered by seventeenth-century humoral discourse at the turn of the new century is predictable enough: a subject once treated seriously quickly fell prey to satire. Writing in 1659, Samuel Butler had presumed that melancholy's reality and aetiology were self-evident. The melancholic mind was literally obnubilated (clouded over) by noxious vapours emanating from humoral disturbances below:

[Man's] Head is haunted, like a House, with evil Spirits and Apparitions, that ... fright him out of himself, till he stands empty and forsaken ... The Fumes and Vapours that rise from his Spleen and Hypochondries have so smutched and sullied his Brain (like a Room that smoaks) that his Understanding is blear-ey'd, and has no right Perception ... His Soul lives in his Body, like a Mole in the Earth.<sup>8</sup>

This Galenic account, commonplace throughout the 1600s, was elaborated by Burton. According to his *Anatomy*, when either the body's natural humour of melancholy accumulates to an excess, or any of the four humours spontaneously combusts thereby forming unnatural melancholy (a process known as 'adustion'), the effect is to distemper man's physiology.<sup>9</sup> These malign developments may occur throughout the body, or locally in the head or hypochondries (in which last context they are accompanied by '*fulsome belchings, continuall winde ... heate and griping in their bowels*' (AM 1.411)). Wherever situated though, such distempering humours soon putrefy, producing black vapours which

ascend through the viscera, darken the animal spirits, and infiltrate the imagination. That imagination, once suffused with these vapours, becomes troubled with ‘terrible monstrous fictions in a thousand shapes’ (1.419), thus triggering fear and sadness. With that, melancholic delusion and its characteristic emotions take hold. Nor can reason check these thoughts because, the vapours within being virtually undetectable, the fantasies which flow from them appear real. Melancholic conceits therefore prove tenacious: ‘still, still, still thinking of it ... Though they doe talke with you ... still that toy runnes in their minde, that feare, that suspition, that abuse ... that crotchet, that whimsie’ (1.393).<sup>10</sup> Henry More seized on this last point in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, interpreting dissenters’ fanaticism as its own kind of melancholy because theirs, too, was a condition of possession by ‘one particular absurd Imagination’.<sup>11</sup> He continued:

The *Spirit* ... that wings the *Enthusiast* ... is nothing else but that *Flatulency* which is in the *Melancholy* complexion, and rises out of the *Hypochondriacal* humour ... Which fume mounting into the Head ... fills the Mind with variety of *Imaginations*, and so quickens ... *Invention*, that it makes the *Enthusiast* to admiration *fluent* and *eloquent*.<sup>12</sup>

For More, then, mystical interpretations of Scripture, quaking, and visions were all products of the monomaniac fantasies of madmen gripped by hypochondriac melancholy.<sup>13</sup>

More used humoral theory to demean dissenters’ spiritual pretensions but showed no more inclination than Burton or Butler to question the truth of the discourse he was appropriating. Conversely, by 1700 both melancholy itself and humoral accounts of it were in doubt. In 1701, for instance, Anne Finch asked sceptically,

What art thou, Spleen, which everything does ape?  
 Thou Proteus to abused mankind,  
 Who never yet thy real cause could find  
 Or fix thee to remain in one continued shape. ('The Spleen', ll. 1-4)<sup>14</sup>

Finch thought that 'Falsely, the mortal part we blame' for our delusions (l. 25) and, throughout her Pindaric, oscillated between acknowledging melancholy's 'terrible' power (l. 77) and suspecting that such sentiments were factitious. In that latter respect she foreshadowed *Tatlers* 47, 80 and 181 and *Spectators* 53, 336 and 547 which depicted melancholy as fashion's fabrication.<sup>15</sup> Above all, though, it was Swift and Pope who satirised melancholy's rehearsed, formulaic nature. When the *Tale of a Tub*'s pretentious spokesman, Paulson's 'Hack', criticises Homer's supposed failure to provide 'a compleat Account of the *Spleen*', the real point of the remark—Swift's ironic purpose—is to highlight melancholy's status as a modern construction unknown to the ancients.<sup>16</sup> Gulliver concurs. He is appalled by one Yahoo whom 'Fancy would sometimes take ... to retire into a Corner, to lie down and howl ... and spurn away all that came near him'.<sup>17</sup> The operative word here is 'Fancy', implying that spleen, a condition that 'only seizeth on the *Lazy*, the *Luxurious*, and the *Rich*', is a wilful indulgence.

Canto IV of *The Rape of the Lock* presents another such view.<sup>18</sup> Belinda's lock having been cut, Pope inserts a journey to the underworld, despatching Umbriel to the Cave of Spleen to invoke its goddess's influence over his heroine. The cave features every conceivable trope of melancholy: a 'dreaded *East*' wind; stagnant vapours; 'Spectres, gaping Tombs' (ll. 20, 44). Its absurd occupants personify eighteenth-century equivalents of the

delusional conditions attributed to early modern melancholics, those who believed themselves made of glass, butter, leather, etc.,<sup>19</sup> hence:

Here living *Teapots* stand, one Arm held out,  
One bent; the Handle this, and that the Spout:

.....

Here sighs a Jar, and there a Goose-pye talks;

.....

And Maids turn'd Bottels, call aloud for Corks. (ll. 49-50, 52, 54)

This surfeit of clichés renders the cave allegory even more ostentatiously figurative than the rest of the poem's supernatural machinery and so encourages a sense of the target emotion's contrived nature. Melancholy emerges as less a natural passion than a rhetorical display, and it is therefore appropriate that, when we find Spleen, she has '*Pain* at her Side, and *Megrin* at her Head' (l. 24): 'at', not 'in', because these handmaids are contrived appurtenances, not the intrinsic parts of a truly organic emotion. Personified '*Affectation*' is in attendance too, supplying the socially conditioned gestures—'hang[ing] the Head aside', 'On the rich Quilt sink[ing] with becoming Woe' (ll. 33, 35)—through which melancholy performs itself. Spleen herself furnishes Umbriel with a bag of fury and a vial of tears to cast upon Belinda. Again, however, Pope encourages incredulity. The heroine's 'Rage, Resentment and Despair' have already been established as fact at the Canto's opening, before Umbriel departs, and she is thoroughly 'dejected' by the time he returns (ll. 9, 90). So although Umbriel dispenses his malign gifts, they impart only affected exaggeration to emotions already present and in no need of forced embellishment.

Clearly, Pope and Swift were intent on satirising ‘the spleen’, sapping all force from the language of vapours; yet, as I now want to demonstrate, their reflections on the subject were ultimately more various, more dialectical, than the *Rape*’s mock-epic might suggest.

## II

In Section XI of *A Tale of a Tub* Swift’s Hack remarks upon man’s ‘Six Senses’, ‘six’, that is, ‘Including Scaliger’s’ (TT 131). So precise a recollection of Burton’s *Anatomy* (which likewise recognises Scaliger’s ‘Sense of *Titillation*’ (AM 1.150)<sup>20</sup>) underlines the intimate connection between these texts already proved by Harth.<sup>21</sup> Before turning to the *Tale*’s invocations of humoral tradition though, it is worth recalling the anti-materialist context in which Swift situated the discourse of the spleen. Like other works written in a Scriblerian style, the *Tale*’s purposes include ridiculing the materialism of natural philosophy’s efforts to explain human behaviour, specifically by magnifying that philosophy’s literal-mindedness to the point of absurdity.<sup>22</sup> Hence the ‘Physico-logical Scheme of Oratorical Receptacles’ parodies contemporary efforts to attribute mass to the air by mock-postulating that words (being aerial ‘Bodies of much Weight’) are best spoken from on high that they may drop into gaping audience mouths below (TT 38-9, 350 n. 20). Likewise, Swift derides the materialist, commodifying tendencies of the Moderns’ approach to learning by having his Hack report an alchemical technique for distilling books into inhalable liquid (82, 399-400 nn. 17-18). Above all, the *Tale* disparages materialism’s tendency to reify man’s soul. What the Hack describes approvingly, Swift holds up for ridicule:

what is Man himself but a *Micro-Coat* ... a compleat Suit of Cloaths with all its Trimmings?  
... those Beings which the World calls improperly *Suits of Cloaths*, are in Reality the most

refined ... Rational Creatures. For, is it not manifest, that They live, and move, and talk, and perform all other Offices of Human Life? Are not Beauty, and Wit, and Mien, and Breeding, their inseparable Proprieties? ... Is it not they who walk the Streets, fill up *Parliament*—, *Coffee*—, *Play*—, *Bawdy-Houses* ... Man [is] an Animal compounded of two *Dresses*, the *Natural* and the *Celestial Suit*, which [are] the Body and the Soul: ... the Soul [is] the outward, and the Body the inward Cloathing. (49-50)

Inverting past beliefs, Swift's satire makes what was once thought an excrescence suddenly lay claim to be essential: the body is now that within and the soul is literally vested in man's outward garments. Implicitly, this new soul is, for *Swift*, no soul at all; *his* allegiance is to Christian tradition's altogether less materialist pneumatology. However, the reduction of that traditional soul to mere ghost in the machine, superseded now by so many fine liveries, reflects, Swift insinuates, a wider moral torpor, England's addiction to politeness and consumerism.

Since melancholy's aetiology places it at the interface between body and soul, as a condition in which vaporous particles 'obnubilate' the senses and thence the understanding (thereby suggesting that the soul is open to material influence), the *Tale*'s persistent recourse to this explanatory framework sits awkwardly with its implied anti-materialist pneumatology. This tension correlates with Swift's adopting a double perspective in respect of the spleen. On the one hand, he appropriates humoral language at face value, using it to document, in salacious, belittling terms, his fictional characters' supposed faiths. On the other hand, he also satirises this, the very language of explanation which he adopts. The *Tale*'s appropriation of humoral discourse<sup>23</sup> is apparent in the framing of Peter's Romanism and Jack's Calvinism as manifestations of delusion. Both conceive 'the strangest Imaginations' (73), each of 'the

same Foundation' (128). Peter's monomania focuses around the delusion that bread is in fact mutton, its dry crust a claret. In other respects he enjoys 'lucid Intervals' (77)—a stock phrase in the contemporary vernacular of madness (394, n. 56)—but where these perceptions intervene his imagination is as dogmatic as the stereotypical melancholic who thinks himself vitreous. Meantime, as Harth demonstrates, Jack (being 'run mad with Spleen' (94)) subscribes to a version of More's diagnosis of enthusiasm, but as if this were a creed rather than a bit of nosology. Jack and his sect take literally the precept that the soul is a kind of wind, and so fart and belch freely ('the Sourer the better' (101)) as a means of disseminating that breath of God. These Æolists imagine themselves skilled in bottling the winds of 'Σκοτία' (meaning Calvinist Scotland but also 'the *Land of Darkness*' and so melancholy). Thus equipped, they refresh their divine inspiration via regular enemas—'not ... without much Pain and Gripings', as per Burton's hypochondriac melancholics—and then 'disembogue whole Tempests upon [their] Auditories' (102). In sum, Jack's ilk actively cultivate Burton-cum-More's hypochondriac flatulence in the mad conviction that it is a truly pious condition, turning diagnosis into positive dogma. To this extent, Swift treats the language of humoral nosology as if literally true and exploits its lurid descriptiveness to satirise non-Anglicans' spiritual pretensions.

Nevertheless, even as Swift does this, he simultaneously demeans the paradigm of humoral diagnosis by pushing it to the limit of absurdity.<sup>24</sup> Ubiquitous talk of flatulence not only mocks the Calvinists but makes a joke of scientific discourse itself in a manner continuous with the *Tale*'s hostility to materialism. By giving the idea of hypochondriac motions the most literal expression possible, Swift emphasises the folly of pretending that such discourse might in any sense *explain* the mind's operations. Further accounts of frenzy in the *Tale*'s '*Digression ... of Madness*' (105) compound this impression. There, the Hack

glibly maintains that proponents of new philosophical schemes, empire-builders, and religious enthusiasts are all governed by the same aetiology—the humoral notion of melancholy. We are to believe that the occurrence of such innovative ‘Imaginations’ as Descartes’ vision of vortices can only be explained by recourse to the phenomenon of ‘Vapours, ascending from the lower Faculties, to water the [Understanding’s] Invention’ and so spawn these ideas (108, 105). Likewise, Henri IV’s bellicose designs upon the Hapsburgs are ascribed to what Burton called ‘*Venus omitted*’, that is, when unspent semen putrefies—in Swift’s terms, becomes ‘adust’—and ‘*sends up poysoned vapours to the Braine*’ (AM 1.230, *TT* 106, 429 n. 11). The problem with this generic ‘vapour’ argument is that it cannot account for the individuality of the different visions (Descartes’, Henri’s) under discussion here. Acknowledging this, Swift’s Hack attributes such variation to the uniqueness of each person’s brain, the different ‘Soils’ upon which watering vapours act (106). Yet just as he begins to outline exactly how ‘numerical Differences in the Brain, can produce Effects of so vast a Difference from the same *Vapour*, as to be the sole Point of Individuation between *Alexander the Great*, *Jack of Leyden*, and *Monsieur Des Cartes*’ (109), the *Tale*’s putative manuscript breaks off, only to resume with the words ‘And this I take to be a clear Solution of the Matter’ (110). Swift’s contrived silence mocks the vacuity of the model in play, its actual *failure* to explicate the particularity of different minds. Melancholy’s vocabulary of fumes and evacuations is shown to be too literal-minded, too reductively materialist, to accommodate the soul’s complexities. In fact, Swift implies that this mode of analysis constitutes its own kind of melancholy since there is a singularity of vision about it, a still, still, still thinking upon the same crotchet, the same whimsy, the same old notion of smoky fumes, that itself suggests the very monomania this theory would explain. A discourse which was taken as read is thus simultaneously satirised as self-parodying, a fact which illustrates the Scriblerian proclivity for entertaining double perspectives on the same one thing.

Such double perspectives abound. Hitherto I have implied that the *Tale* distinguishes sharply between its Hack and the ironizing shadow cast by Swift, but actually that distinction blurs. For instance, when the Hack protests over-fulsomely that ‘our Noble *Moderns* ... most edifying Volumes I turn indefatigably over Night and Day, for the Improvement of my Mind, and the good of my Country’ (62), and when he commends Wotton’s writings as ‘never to be sufficiently valued’ (83), it is unclear to whom the ironic barbs couched within these remarks should be imputed: whether to the speaker (presuming him to be self-conscious) or Swift. That uncertainty pertains most in the ‘*Digression ... of Madness*’. For all that that chapter’s theorising flatulence invites ridicule, the *absurdity* of the Hack’s thinking suddenly becomes less clear-cut when he infers from his account of melancholy that happiness is but ‘*a perpetual Possession of being well Deceived*’ (111). ‘How shrunk is every Thing, as it appears in the Glass of Nature’, he observes. The ‘Imagination can build nobler Scenes’: better to inhabit those. The wisdom of this claim is neither easily conceded nor easily repulsed, and Swift compounds these Janus-faced credentials in what follows:

whatever Philosopher ... can find out an Art to sodder and patch up the Flaws and Imperfections of Nature, will deserve much better of Mankind, and teach us a more useful Science, than that so much in present Esteem, of widening and exposing them ... Such a Man truly wise, creams off Nature, leaving ... the Dregs, for ... Reason to lap up. This is the sublime and refined Point of Felicity, called *the Possession of being well deceived*; The Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves. (112)

The italicised phrase here derives from a garrulous ‘fine Lady’, object of the satire in Rochester’s ‘Letter from Artemiza in the Towne to Chloe in the Countrey’, who insists upon ‘The perfect joy of being well deceived’ (ll. 74, 115).<sup>25</sup> But just as Rochester’s poem, whilst mocking this ‘Lady’ throughout, nonetheless hints at the wisdom of her precept by aligning it with admirable Artemiza’s taste for passions that ‘make the nauseous draught of Life goe downe’ (ll. 44-5),<sup>26</sup> so the credo of Swift’s Hack exerts a moral appeal even as it disowns ‘Reason’ and truth. Better indeed to be a ‘Fool’, perhaps, if the only alternative is to wallow in human imperfections. Again, double perspectives are entertained. The *Tale*’s persona, predominantly a source of risible misjudgements, momentarily commands an indeterminate degree of sympathy for prompting us to see good in the very melancholic delusions we otherwise mock. This intimation is never stable, however. The voice which would confine our view to ‘the Surface’, ‘the *Superficies* of Things’, and which eschews ‘Anatomy’s’ ‘officious’ intrusions (*TT* 111-12), is the same which earlier expected readers to ‘inspect beyond the ... Rind of Things’ and was eager to present ‘a very compleat Anatomy’ of man (41, 81). Furthermore, the example offered now in *defence* of the taste for outsides over insides is Swift’s notoriously troubling remark, ‘Last Week I saw a Woman *flay’d*, and you will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse’ (112).<sup>27</sup> This is certainly a graphic proof that surface beauties appeal more than do visceral depths, a proof so graphic that Rawson thinks the example gratuitously ‘*over-appropriate*’ to the moral it purports to uphold.<sup>28</sup> But perhaps the point of this manner of articulation—the Hack presuming we will share in his indifference and then surprise—is to reveal the danger inherent in too shallow an engagement with reality, namely that such detachment promotes inhumanity. Again, therefore, Swift shifts the perspective to disorienting effect, this time away from that superficiality and pleasantly delusory blindness which, a moment ago, the text had seemed to endorse. On the *Tale*’s evidence, then, trenchant though Swift was in identifying with

High Church religion and Old Whig or Tory politics,<sup>29</sup> his attitude towards moral rationalism was anything but stable.<sup>30</sup>

Further to this, just as the '*Digression ... of Madness*' throws into relief the potential happiness derivable from melancholic delusions, so it also relativizes 'madness'. The speaker posits that 'there is a peculiar *String* in the Harmony of Human Understanding' which, in different individuals, may be 'of the same Tuning', so that if one encounters others of like 'Pitch' they will deem you sane and if of a jarring note they will 'call you Mad' (108).<sup>31</sup> 'A *Fool* in one Company' may be '*Philosopher*' in another, just as we treat '*Curtius* with Reverence ... *Empedocles*, with ... Contempt' though both 'leapt into a Gulph' (109, 113).<sup>32</sup> Here again is the *Tale*'s perspectivism. Swift makes political satire from it,<sup>33</sup> his Hack suggesting that Bedlam's occupants could find roles in public life because every so-called mad symptom has its corollary in the putatively sane world: 'Is any Student [of Bedlam] ... Swearing and Blaspheming, biting his Grate, foaming at the Mouth? ... give him a Regiment of Dragoons, and send him into *Flanders* among the *Rest*. Is another eternally talking, sputtering, gaping, bawling? ... away with Him to *Westminster-Hall*' (113-15). Multiple examples ensue, each emphasising that incarcerated man is no madder than his socialised counterpart. The list ends abruptly with a crazy tailor, the text then succumbing to another pretended gap in Swift's manuscript of which only a fragment remains: '---*Heark in your Ear---*' (116). A printer's footnote—Swift in disguise—claims not to know what this means, but the line (largely ignored by critics) is arguably Lear's, spoken to blinded Gloucester: 'see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear: change places, and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?' (*King Lear* 4.6.151-4).<sup>34</sup> Granted, Swift's phrase appears in Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*<sup>35</sup> and in variant form in *Troilus and Cressida* (5.2.34), implying that it had idiomatic currency, but the resonance with *Lear*

suggests a specific allusion to that. Lear's point anticipates the *Tale*'s, that distinctions between the empowered and marginalised (in Lear's case, judge and thief, beadle and whore) are arbitrary. Significantly, however, Shakespeare's character observes this whilst beset by an ambiguous madness, oscillating between insanity and insight—between 'fie, fie! pah, pah!' and 'I know thee well enough, thy name is Gloucester', 'kill, kill, kill!' and 'they told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie, I am not ague-proof' (4.6.129, 177, 187, 104-5). As Edgar says, 'O, matter and impertinency mix'd, Reason in madness' (174-5).

Swift's fragmentary allusion, therefore, is richly suggestive. It may, of course, be the crazy tailor's own ventriloquizing of Lear; but equally this demand to be heard may be the Hack's, or even Swift's interjection. If the Hack's, the effect is again to cast a double perspective over this persona's judgements, to suggest that what seems folly's voice might nonetheless be enlightening, an insight into the sanity of the deluded. If Swift's, perhaps the *Tale*'s inventor here glimpses in himself a second Lear, barking at a mad world in a mixture of matter and impertinency whilst feeling uncomfortably complicit with the very madness he exposes. The Hack hints that he himself was once a Bedlam inmate (*TT* 113), and, having rooted delusion in those hobby-horsical moments when 'Man's Fancy gets *astride* on his Reason', then concedes, 'even I ... am a Person, whose Imaginations are ... exceedingly disposed to run away with his *Reason*' (110, 116). But perhaps these revelations, too, tell against the Hack's creator. After all, this *Tale*, this *satire* on melancholy, concedes that 'the Satyrical Itch' itself derives from 'beyond the *Tweed*' (i.e., 'Σκοτία', 'the *Land of Darkness*'), the implication being that the real Swift's own *métier* is a case of the spleen—'the Author's Spleen' to which, in another reversal, the work's eventual 'Conclusion' would suddenly have us 'give some Allowance' (30, 135). Whatever its application though, the *Lear* allusion's resonances

emphasise the plausibility of the '*Digression*'s' claim that madness is relative, a perspectival judgement.

With that thought *The Anatomy of Melancholy* leaps back into view because, whereas the *Anatomy* proper attempts to localise melancholy to specific pathologies focused in specific individuals, Burton's preface, 'Democritus Junior to the Reader', meditates rather on the universal melancholy cum madness that afflicts us all.<sup>36</sup> The distinction here is between transitory bouts of melancholy to which all succumb whenever they fail to govern their passions (a failure which temporarily distempers the body), and the habitual, inveterate melancholy which afflicts only the few (in whom an established pathology sets in due to their sustained misgovernance). The important point for Burton is that this step from everyday folly to habitual melancholy is imperceptible: 'To some it is in disposition, to another in habit; ... one is *melancholicus ad octo*, a second two degrees lesse, a third halfe way. 'Tis super particular' (*AM* 1.404). Even the sanest, 'soundest of us all' must therefore imagine ourselves balanced on 'a steep rocke', perpetually 'in danger to be precipitated' (1.408, 419-20). The distinction between soundness and madness, one of degree not kind, is opaque. The relevance of this claim to the *Tale*'s argument will be self-evident, but it also pertains to the question of authorial self-presentation. Crucially for Swift, Burton uses his Democritus persona to play out the *Anatomy*'s anxiety about sanity's instability. At times in his preface Burton identifies with Democritus, Democritus the satirist and disciplined rationalist whose 'Ironically passion' (1.33), born of moral authority, enables him to stand apart from the world's madness. Elsewhere Burton concedes, instead, precisely his own immersion in that world's universal melancholy: 'I write of Melancholy ... being busie to avoid Melancholy'; 'I have anatomized mine own folly' (1.6, 112). From this second position, Burton speculates that Democritus, more than he, may be the real madman: a misanthropic satirist, absurdly

intolerant of those little follies and imperfections intrinsic to humanity. Hence Burton's periodic efforts to dissociate himself from this all '*too Satyricall*' figure: 'tis not I, but *Democritus, Democritus dixit*' (1.110). It is these oscillatory movements—the self-consuming, dialogic features of the *Anatomy*—that Swift mirrors as he variously endorses and satirizes his Bedlamite Hack, or slides in and out of Lear's voice, even as his text meditates on lunacy's fragile boundaries. However, the difference here is that, whereas Burton was no sceptic, Swift's exaggerated extension of the *Anatomy*'s perspectival possibilities does work to sceptical effect. In this regard, Swift compares with Pope, but to understand *his* treatment of humoral psychology I turn first to *The Guardian*.

### III

Despite Addison and Steele's general hostility to 'singularity' of behaviour and merely imaginary forms of self-existence, *Guardian* 144 celebrates '*British humours*', maintaining that every Englishman has 'a peculiar Cast of Head, some uncommon Whim'—some 'Original Humour'—that 'distinguishes him from others'.<sup>37</sup> Individual idiosyncrasies, which in Jonson or *The Tatler* and *Spectator* would have been indices of absurdity, departures from complexional balance, here become badges of pride to be cherished. Steele's inspiration for this Whiggish conviction (which made permitting men 'their own way of thinking ... a standing bulwark of [our] Liberties') was Temple's 'Upon Poetry':

This [humorous quality] may proceed from the Native Plenty of our Soil, the Unequalness of our Climate, as well as the Ease of our Government, and the Liberty of professing Opinions and Factions, which perhaps our Neighbours have about them, but are forced to disguise ...

Thus we ... have more Originals, and more that appear what they are: ... more Humour,  
because every Man follows his own, and takes a Pleasure, perhaps a Pride, to shew it.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, behaviours deemed expressive of abnormal psychology and all that was malign about  
‘the English malady’ in the seventeenth century were, by 1713, being vaunted as markers of  
splendid normality, the best of Britishness.

Pope’s verse essays voice a related view, equating individual identity with each person’s  
‘Ruling Passion’, some one dominant emotion. In the *Epistle to Cobham* this *idée fixe*, a  
petty madness, is conceived not as aberrant but as man’s essence, a trait poets may satirise,  
yet also the focus of energetic being: ‘In this one Passion man can strength enjoy, / As Fits  
give vigour, just when they destroy’ (ll. 222-3).<sup>39</sup> Epistle II of the *Essay on Man* repeats the  
point.<sup>40</sup> There, the ruling passion begins as ‘The Mind’s disease’, its distempering and so  
‘peccant part’ (ll. 138, 144), as per the traditional perspective of humoral discourse. However,  
‘Th’Eternal Art’—Providence—‘educing good from ill, / Grafts on this Passion our best  
principle’, turning it to virtuous effect even whilst ‘Nature’s vigour works at the root’, and so  
rendering the dysfunctional functional (ll. 175-6, 184):

What crops of wit and honesty appear  
From spleen, from obstinacy, hate, or fear!  
See anger, zeal and fortitude supply;  
Ev’n av’rice, prudence; sloth, philosophy;  
.....  
Nor Virtue, male or female, can we name,  
But what will grow on Pride, or grow on Shame. (ll. 185-8, 193-4)

As lines 193-4 signal, this argument ameliorates the thesis of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, its reach extending even to Swift, the figure whose ruling passion of 'spleen' (confessionally emphasised in the *Tale*) morphs into honest wit.<sup>41</sup> Gulph-plugging Curtius is cited here too, as one whose 'ambition' makes him a 'patriot' just as it makes of another—in Pope's case 'Catiline' to Swift's Empedocles—a 'knave' (ll. 199-202). We are reminded, therefore, of the *Tale*'s contention that the crazy may be domesticated for civic service, so permeable is the frontier between madness and sanity. Pope similarly risks relativizing virtue by occluding the boundary between it and man's master passion or humour: 'the difference' may become 'too nice / Where ends the Virtue, or begins the Vice' (ll. 209-10). Even as he acknowledges this danger he resists it, insisting, 'If white and black blend, soften, and unite / A thousand ways, is there no black or white?' (ll. 213-14). Yet these lines are no sooner proffered than undermined, Pope likening attempts to define 'th'Extreme of Vice' to asking 'where's the North? at York, 'tis on the Tweed; / In Scotland, at the Orcades; and there, / At Greenland ...' (ll. 221-4). A sceptical perspectivism is thus established which eventually returns the *Essay* to the ruling passion's status as our 'peccant', that is, mortally diseased, 'part'. To it we may owe 'true friendship, love sincere, / Each home-felt joy', but it is also an agent of 'decay' that induces 'death' (ll. 253-60).

The pirouettes turned in the *Essay on Man* in respect of ruling passions' value had already led Pope, in the variorum *Dunciad*, to make those monomaniac fantasies the stuff of satire. That poem's third book imagines Tibbald draped across Dulness's lap and 'curtain'd round with vapours blue' (l. 3).<sup>42</sup> From these obscuring fumes stems (the text implies) every dunce's ruling passion,

the Fool's paradise, the Statesman's scheme,  
The air-built Castle, and the golden Dream,  
The Maid's romantic wish, the Chymist's flame,  
And Poet's vision of eternal fame. (ll. 9-12)

Such visions are satirically dismissed here; not so in the *Essay on Man*'s second Epistle. The latter, despite contending that providence can redeem ruling passions by appropriating them for virtue's purposes, nonetheless ends by envisaging the opposite—that individuals might better be left to enjoy those obsessions in their raw, unimproved form; and what they enjoy are the very manias mocked in *Dunciad* III:

See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing,  
The sot a hero, lunatic a king;  
The starving chemist in his golden views  
Supremely blest, the poet in his muse. (ll. 267-70)

Pope recognises these fixations as adult equivalents of 'toys' and 'baubles' (ll. 280-1), but now, far from satirising this fact, greets it with amused indulgence. Again perspectival reversals are therefore apparent, as they are also in the Horatian 'Epistle II.ii.'<sup>43</sup> This work recalls with plaintive fondness a Peer

Who, tho't the House was up, delighted sate,  
Heard, noted, answer'd, as in full Debate:  
In all but this, a man of sober Life,  
Fond of his Friend, and civil to his Wife,

.....

Him, the damn'd Doctors and his Friends immur'd,  
 They bled, they cupp'd, they purg'd; in short, they cur'd:  
 Whereat the Gentleman began to stare—  
 My Friends? he cry'd, p—x take you for your care!  
 That from a Patriot of distinguish'd note,  
 Have bled and purg'd me to a simple *Vote*. (ll. 186-97)

The implication is that this character was better off and possessed greater integrity when living within his delusion than he is now, cured of that monomania. The geniality of Pope's recollection suggests, here, a wistful, even melancholic fondness for precisely that structure of madness so characteristic of melancholy and so belittled elsewhere in Pope's verse. Doubleness of attitude prevails, just as in Swift's *Tub*, and as before the effect is to throw into sceptical relief attempts to pass judgement on madness.<sup>44</sup>

The same doubleness proliferates in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*. The satirist who pictured Houyhnhnms riding in sledges drawn by Yahoos evidently remembered Burton's Democritus who, amidst his vision of mankind's universal madness, professed to see 'horses ride in a Coach, men draw it' (*AM* 1.54). However, the *Travels*' connection to the *Anatomy* goes deeper than this since Swift's is another work that recapitulates Burton's Janus-faced view of sanity. Throughout his narrative Swift uses scalar contrasts to establish (in a manner reminiscent of Sextus Empiricus' modes of scepticism) the extent to which judgement is perspectival.<sup>45</sup> Different characters' senses of height and distance in Lilliput and Brobdingnag underline the truism that 'nothing is greater or little otherwise than by Comparison' (*GT* 124). Likewise, close encounters with skin, breasts, and body lice relativize the idea of beauty,

Gulliver recognising that what disgusts him about the Brobdingnagians disgusted the Lilliputians about him (130-1, 159, 168). Body odour is rendered similarly contingent, the Lilliputians revolting at Gulliver's stench as he does at the Brobdingnagians because 'Sense [is] more acute in Proportion to ... Littleness' (167). These instances of perspectivism prepare readers for Book IV's volte-face. During his stay in Houyhnhnm-land, it is Gulliver's narratorial perspective that dominates Swift's chapters. Swift coerces readers into accepting his hero's misanthropic view of the Yahoos. Regarding Lemuel as, comparatively, a sane, discriminating figure, we share his distaste for these vulgar bipeds. However, once back in human company, where Gulliver's outlook is measured against the benevolent Captain Pedro's, then against his loving family's, such misanthropy appears mad. Gulliver's attitudes have not, in fact, changed—only the context in which we view them has—but it is as if Swift, having initially admired his hero's moral rigour, now recognises the value of a little wilful self-delusion when confronting Englishmen's Yahoo-like shortcomings. A 'Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves' is called for, and Gulliver is convicted for his want of it. The effect is to impress on us, in Burtonian fashion, the tenuous relativity of judgements about sanity.

#### IV

By the mid-eighteenth century accounts of melancholy premised upon principles of humoral physiology were all but defunct. Anatomists had found no chimney-like passages within the body, no fumes 'wafting up from the guts and smoking out the brain'.<sup>46</sup> Although at any given moment competing discourses continued to exist side by side, the explanatory focus had gradually been shifting since the late 1600s, first to iatrochemical, then to hydrodynamic, and finally to mechanist cum vitalist pathologies which identified melancholy with torpor and

rigidity in the nerve fluid inhibiting the nerves' capacity to transmit vibratory motions.<sup>47</sup> By the time Sterne wrote *Tristram Shandy* the 'nervous' language of hypochondria and 'the spleen' was well-established (as was the fashion, born of 'Il Penseroso', for cultivating a melancholic sensibility). However, whilst the novel shows a keen familiarity with the new nervous discourse of Whytt and Cheyne, its preoccupation with 'Hobby Horses' is equally rooted in the Popian notion of 'ruling passion' and Swift's language of Fancy getting astride Reason—hence, in Burton's humoralism; and, like Pope's *Essays*, *Tristram Shandy* turns its material to genially comic but also sceptical effect.<sup>48</sup>

A melancholy shadow expressive of a Burtonian 'sorrowful consciousness'<sup>49</sup> but also related to the mid-century's Miltonic, contemplative tastes certainly haunts *Tristram*. Anxieties about loss pervade a novel which chronicles asthma attacks, crushed noses, and groins beset by shrapnel, chestnuts and sash windows, and which mourns the deaths of Yorick, Bobby, Le Fever, Trim, and (proleptically) Tristram himself. Man's capacity for voluntary self-torment adds to that mix, Walter and Tristram deriving 'melancholy' foreboding from every step of the latter's genesis that violates Walter's precious theories, whether the disrupted moment of the boy's conception so damaging to the animal spirits ('tis too melancholy'), the bungled delivery detrimental to nose and cerebellum alike ('this part of my story ... most ... melancholy'), or the erroneous christening ('TRISTRAM—Melancholy dissyllable of sound!' (TS 1.354, 254, 64)). Yet, despite all this, *Tristram* is actually written 'against the spleen' (1.360).<sup>50</sup> Its 'fanciful guise of careless disport' and invitations to laughter serve to dispel those 'bilious and more saturnine passions' which create disorderly 'humours', to 'open the heart and lungs', and to 'force the blood ... to run freely' (1.359-60, 401-2), exactly as Swift's *Tale* aimed to 'clear the Breast and ... Lungs' with laughter and so be 'Soverain against the *Spleen*' (TT 119).

Sterne accomplished this therapeutic volte-face by making hobby-horsical behaviour (potentially the locus of melancholy consciousness) an object of delight. Like Pope and Steele, he transformed such monomaniac delusions as seemed to Burton definitive of madness into laudable, lovable indices of the Englishman's character, idiosyncrasies with which there need be 'no disputing' and which could innocently assist one to 'canter away from ... cares and solitudes' (*TS* 1.12, 2.716). Hence, although Toby's preoccupation with recreating every detail that precipitated his battlefield trauma risks becoming obsessive, exacerbating the symptoms from which it is meant to distract (1.103-4), it is also the quality that 'electrifies' him—as when Walter catches him 'riding at ... a desperate rate' as he imagines marching up a glaxis (1.86, 353). Walter, equally, is animated by the very preoccupations which simultaneously lay him open to 'whimsical distresses' (1.256), namely his fixation on the manner of Tristram's propagation, delivery and christening. And Tristram, too, is happy to indulge himself, acknowledging that he is 'mounted' precisely when composing the *Life and Opinions*: 'What a rate have I gone on at, curvetting and frisking it away'—the terms are from dressage—'for four volumes together, without looking once behind ... to see whom I trod upon!' (1.356). Writing, then, is the direct expression of hobby-horsicalness, emphatically so in the inset narrative of Slawkenbergius's tale since the point of the joke there is to invert and normalise a stock symptom of melancholy, rendering comical what might otherwise be disturbing. A common trope of Renaissance medical case-books, Burton's included (*AM* 1.420, 2.112), was the patient who anxiously deluded himself that he had an enormous nose and so would not venture out lest he damage it. Sterne makes that nose real (within Slawkenbergius's fictional world) and transfers the neurotic fetishizing of this organ on to those who witness it rather than he who bears it, thereby finding humour (and denying melancholy) in the very place where medical tradition prompts expectations of the

opposite. This reversal illustrates in miniature the tonal shift implicit across the novel in its translation of fuliginous vapours into hobby-horses. Since, however, this is set against the work's aforementioned undercurrent of melancholy, the overall impression is of Sterne following the lead of Swift and Pope in entertaining perspectival shifts.

The self-consuming parts of Burton's *Anatomy* anticipate Sterne's ludic propensity. Burton's fidgeting with his persona, for example, to which I have already referred—'tis not I, but *Democritus*, *Democritus dixit*'—is part of a wider game of denying his own text. Periodically, he mock-condemns the larcenies of his cento-work and 'this scribbling age' of humanism: like 'Apothecaries we make new mixtures every day, poure out of one Vessell into another ... weave the same Web still, twist the same Rope againe and againe' (*AM* 1.8-10). The addresses to the reader that follow such sham confessions vacillate, equally playfully, between defiance and apology: hence, 'I confesse all ('tis partly affected) thou canst not thinke worse of me then I doe of my selfe. 'Tis not worth the reading', versus 'if you like not this, get you to another Inne; ... goe read something else' (1.12, 14). This oscillation pervades the 'Democritus' preface, culminating in the reversals of the latter's closing pages: 'I owe thee nothing, (Reader) I looke for no favour at thy hands ... No, I recant ... I have spoken foolishly' (1.112). Such sentiments then disappear in the *Anatomy* proper but they are reprised in Partition 3's preface. In another, similarly ludic vein, the *Anatomy* is described as written to distract from (and so evacuate) melancholy. It is Burton's 'playing labour ... to ease my minde', and is likewise offered to readers to 'recreate' and 'recitifie' them (1.7, 3.5). This is why digressions, indulgences of Burton's own 'roving humour' such as 'of Ayre' (an Icaromenippean voyage) and Partition 3's 265-page discussion of love-melancholy (a 'delightsome field' to 'refresh my muse ... and my weary Readers'), abound (1.4, 3.4). However, crucially, these relieving episodes are just that: *episodes*,

carefully localised within the text. Whilst such interludes intimate the possibility of an alternative perspective on the *Anatomy*, one of ironic distancing, they are contained and dispelled by another, otherwise preponderant mood of anxious, insistent encyclopaedism.<sup>51</sup>

The *Anatomy* exudes, throughout, manifest disquiet at the fact that its encyclopaedic project remains unfulfillable. The work is characterised by extempore formlessness (1.17) precisely because it hopes to record melancholy's every conceivable manifestation; but even in the preface we find Burton reduced to mere repetition in lamenting the impossibility of this: 'To insist in every particular were one of *Hercules* labours ...', 'To prosecute the rest would require a volume ...', 'To insist in all particulars, were an *Herculean* task ...' (1.55, 97, 106). Efforts to enumerate melancholy's symptoms are dogged by a sense of their heterogeneity, hence: 'Who can sufficiently speake of these symptoms? ... The foure and twenty letters make no more variety of words in divers languages, then melancholy conceipts produce diversity of symptomes ... Who can ... confine them into method?' (1.407-8). 'Confining' melancholy is exactly Burton's aspiration, and the failure to achieve this—the more one reads, the further the horizon to be plotted recedes into the distance—produces an undercurrent of anxiety. The very feverishness with which this text strives to record all there is to say of its subject intimates the forlorn nature of its author's struggle to fend off melancholy. There is no better illustration of that than the vast 'Consolatory Digression' (2.125-207)—in truth, less a 'Digression' than Partition 2's argumentative heart. The Digression attempts to epitomise all the best consolations against suffering offered from Plato to Cardano. Even as it does so, however, it is beleaguered by a sense of its inadequacy. At the outset, realising his excursus will sound platitudinous, Burton heckles himself (ironically, in Pliny's voice): 'say something I never read ... before, or else hold thy peace' (2.126). In practice, all he has to offer is indeed recycled wisdom: '*Non meus hic sermo*, 'tis not my

speech this, but of ... *Austin, Bernard, Christ.*' Despite that, the divine thrice insists, 'Yet I will go on, for this must needs do some good ... comfort and ease a little' (2.125-6).

Subsequently, weighing the infinitude of human afflictions, Burton concedes that 'to divert all I cannot hope', resolving instead 'to point alone at some few of the chiefest' (2.190), but even this attempt at circumscription degenerates into lists: 'Looke for more in *Isocrates, Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, &c.*' (2.206). Here again is the self-consuming *Anatomy*, betraying its impotence before melancholy; yet Burton persisted, nonetheless, in his project to impart consolation.

*Tristram Shandy* directly reflects the *Anatomy*'s forms of playfulness. As Jackson notes, Volume V's epigraph alludes to Burton's '*Democritus dixit*' remark, and the rope and vessel larceny images are repeated *verbatim* in this volume's opening chapter (*TS* 1.404, 408).<sup>52</sup> By plagiarising specifically Burton's jokes about plagiarism, Sterne redoubled their ironic denuding of every pose of originality and hence authority. Equally, Tristram (like Burton) button-holes and goads his 'fair reader'. He makes a joke of refusing to disclose the nature of his own relationship with Jenny, urges 'Madam' to keep rereading Volume I, chapter 19, until she has grasped why Mrs Shandy was no papist, and advises those who would picture Widow Wadman to draw their own mistresses (1.56, 64-5, 2.566). Meanwhile, Volume IX's epigraph adopts a quotation from Julius Scaliger (lifted from Burton's preface to Partition 3) imploring readers not to demur if Sterne sports too facetiously with them (*AM* 3.8, *TS* 2.731). Here, then, is Burton's reader-focused vacillation writ large. But if, in these respects, the works compare, what Jackson's incisive comparison misses is the extent to which the two diverge in their attitudes to encyclopaedism.

That difference is best illustrated by Volume V, chapter 3, of *Tristram Shandy* in which Sterne has Walter mouth a parody of Burton's 'Consolatory Digression'. The burlesquing of the *Anatomy*'s encyclopaedism is advertised immediately. Where the 'Digression' had opened by declaring itself a digest of nineteen different authors, Sterne (drawing from the same list of names) makes a joke of indebtedness: "'Tis either *Plato*, or *Plutarch*, or *Seneca*, or *Xenophon*, or *Epictetus*, or *Theophrastus*, or *Lucian*—or someone perhaps of later date'—more names follow—'or possibly it may be some divine or father of the church'—yet more names, before the closing bathos—'who affirms that it is ... natural ... to weep for the loss of ... children' (*TS* 1.418). Walter then embarks on consoling himself for the like loss with a medley of 'fine sayings' (1.421) appropriated from Member 5 of Burton's 'Digression', but now delivered so disjointedly that their platitudinous quality is foregrounded and the source whence they stem parodied—witness the following stilted, staccato sequence, a collage of Burtonisms:

"My son is dead!—so much the better;—'tis a shame in such a tempest to have but one anchor."

"But he is gone for ever from us!—be it so ... he is but risen ... from a banquet before he had got drunken."

"The *Thracians* wept when a child was born ... and feasted and made merry when a man went out of the world; and with reason."

[And so on.] (1.424)

Such sequences suggest that a reservation which Burton admitted only initially in his 'Digression' (*Non meus hic sermo*) subtends Sterne's whole chapter, and to comic effect. The derivative, fatuous nature of Walter's sentiments is constantly evident. Furthermore,

when Walter recapitulates Burton's comparison between the demise of ancient cities and the mutability of human life, segueing in the process into a ventriloquizing of Servius Sulpicius' first-person account of a voyage around Greece, this, too, is reduced to mockery by Toby's uncomprehendingly literalist enquiry: just when did Walter make this Hellenistic expedition (*TS* 1.421-3, *AM* 2.181-2)? In fact, Walter's entire speech descends into self-parody because it palpably becomes another of his hobby-horses. Bobby, whose death ostensibly occasions Walter's self-consolation, is plainly forgotten amidst an exhilarating rhetorical gallop: 'my father's eloquence was too rapid to stay for any man—away it went' (*TS* 1.425). Parental grief opens the chapter, threatening to cast a melancholy shadow over it: Cicero's distraught words quoted here, 'O my *Tullia*! my daughter! my child!—still, still, still,—'twas O my *Tullia*' (1.419), pointedly recall the 'still, still, still thinking of it' definitive, for Burton, of melancholic conceits. But by the chapter's end threatened despair has yielded to hobby-horsical vitality and the 'Consolatory Digression's' earnest, encyclopaedic pretensions have been ridiculed to sceptical effect, accentuating a doubting tendency occasionally acknowledged but never ultimately capitulated to in the original *Anatomy*.

*Tristram Shandy* includes meditations on various encyclopaedic projects ranging from Walter's *Tristra-paedia* to compendia of rhetoric. Each descends into amusing absurdity; each provokes a sense of robust scepticism about man's intellectual pretensions.<sup>53</sup> The largest of the adventures in intellectual exhaustiveness satirised here is the novel itself, Tristram's project to narrate his *Life and Opinions*. This, above all, exposes Sterne's divergence from Burton. *Tristram*'s reader is repeatedly asked to contemplate the difficulty of framing a narrative whose intersecting characters each demand to have their tale told first. The problem of getting on to the midwife in Volume I is a case in point, her story suffering prolonged interruption to accommodate the cameo of Yorick. Tristram frets, likewise, about just where

to insert the affair of Trim and Bridget breaking Toby's drawbridge. By the end of Volume III narrative threads have so proliferated that Tristram complains of 'a hundred difficulties which I have promised to clear up, and a thousand ... domestic misadventures crouding in upon me'; and that barrage of 'things to do' prevents him, for volumes on end, from fulfilling his 'earnest desire' to narrate Toby's amours (1.278, 400). Those whose tales Tristram chronicles assume lives of their own so that not until Volume III, when 'All my heroes are off my hands' momentarily, is he free to write a long-delayed author's preface (1.226). The novel becomes so much its own world that surreal images such as the door that opens 'in the next chapter but one' abound (1.212). In this context the aspiration to produce an encyclopaedic autobiography founders. By the middle of Volume IV Tristram is

one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month ... and no farther than to my first day's life—[so that] I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out ... As at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write—It must follow ... that the more I write, the more I shall have to write. (1.341-2)

The comparison with Burton's plight in trying to track melancholy's metamorphoses is emphatic.

The difference, however, is that, even as Tristram's predicament commands a certain pathos, it is also made pervasively delightful. The story's endless unfoldings become occasions for mock-dramatic jokes, witness the promise that such-and-such a problem 'shall be solved,—but not in the next chapter' (1.125). The digressions that intervene are framed as nodes of pleasure rather than frustration, Sterne relishing the capricious paths they steer in the squiggly lines by which he represents the courses plotted in Volumes I to V (2.570-1), or

impudently insisting in Volume IX, chapter 14, that the digression he has been adumbrating was always destined for chapter 15 so that 14 must be put to some other, random use (2.765). Whereas Burton's digressions (especially when ludic) are incidental and circumscribed, Sterne's proliferate to become the essence, even the monomania, of their parent novel.<sup>54</sup> They are, by Tristram's reckoning, 'the sun-shine ... the life, the soul of reading' (1.81). The *Life* thus teaches readers to regard its encyclopaedic abundances not as burdensome but as 'a delicious riot of things' (2.595), not contingent but central. Furthermore, Sterne quickly identifies in the astronomical observation that diurnal motions are encompassed within annual ones a metaphor which rationalises his practice:

I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going;—and ... shall be kept a-going these forty years. (1.80-2)

As Lamb shows, this claim crystallises Sterne's capacity to adopt a double perspective in respect of his material. The novel proves at once sensitive to the melancholy of a human condition that defies ordering—the ordering of comprehensive biography and of effective encyclopaedic intellectual projects—yet able to relieve that melancholy by casting such failures in a good-humoured, ironic light. Both these attitudes are perpetually *co-present* in *Tristram Shandy*, whereas Burton could only oscillate between them, more often than not inclining towards the former: an intimation of melancholy at his project's fated nature.

I have argued that, in the hands of Swift and Pope, the humoral conception of melancholy was simultaneously a discourse to take seriously and a language to satirise (not least as self-parodying). Both writers mocked melancholy for its factitiousness yet could also recognise its value, the benefit of being well deceived. ‘Madness’ need not be so mad after all, and ruling passions—once thought aberrant, now deemed normative—might be objects of scorn one moment, of amused indulgence the next. Sterne, likewise, found in the mind’s capacity for self-torment grounds for melancholy but also for delightful hobby-horsicalness. Equally, his novel’s parodic reductions of encyclopaedism could stimulate pathos in the face of man’s failure to create intellectual order, yet also the pleasure of abandoning oneself to the ‘riot’ of all things digressive. Such were the fruits of these writers’ encounters with Burton. However, their pirouettes reveal, too, a wider tendency in the Scriblerian tradition: a penchant for entertaining contrary ideas and weighing them equally, so that each position, being always inscribed with an awareness of the other, can only ever be a provisional commitment. Swift, Pope and Sterne’s texts invite us to regard this harbouring of Janus-faced thoughts as a necessity of life, one that demands an ironic form of consciousness in which irony betokens provisionality of judgement and the withholding of some part of oneself from one’s every intellectual commitment. We might interpret this predilection for ironic perspectivism as a late fruit of the taste for disputation *in utramque partem*, a manifestation of the Academic scepticism latent in the Ciceronian rhetoric favoured by Renaissance thinkers; or as the flowering of an outlook always residually present in Menippean satire but which the skill and notoriety of Swift, Pope and Sterne brought out of the humanist closet into the public sphere of eighteenth-century literary culture. One might root Scriblerian perspectivism, also, in Restoration libertinism and the literary practice of Rochester, Buckingham et al. (from whom Swift and Pope learned their craft). After all, that libertinism turned upon an aesthetic of performativity developed from the literary ventriloquism prevalent in Civil War parodic

verse.<sup>55</sup> Libertine writers embraced heterodox, iconoclastic attitudes, thinking their way into unthinkable positions, but left it inscrutable (to those outside their coterie) just how deeply or sincerely they were committed to such views.<sup>56</sup> However the kind of labile intellect on which I have focused began though, it produced in the trio of authors discussed here a variety of sceptical perspectivism significantly removed from the standard, Popkin-inspired histories of eighteenth-century scepticism which privilege Pyrrhonism and fideism; an ironic consciousness, too, that might lead us to question how far so-called Romantic irony was really the innovation of the Jena Romantics and how far, on the contrary, it began with Scriblerian intellectual fluidity and with readings of Burton.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988), 201-40.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Ingram et al., *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2011), 13, 40-1, 133-5.

<sup>3</sup> See, for Swift, Phillip Harth, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of A Tale of a Tub* (Chicago, 1961), Thomas Canavan, 'Robert Burton, Jonathan Swift, and the Tradition of Anti-Puritan Invective', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 34 (1973), 227-42, and Angus Ross, 'The Anatomy of Melancholy and Swift', in John Fischer et al. (eds), *Swift and his Contexts* (New York, 1989), 133-58; for Pope, John Sena, 'Belinda's Hysteria: The Medical Context of *The Rape of the Lock*', in Christopher Fox (ed.), *Psychology and Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1987), 129-47; for Sterne, Holbrook Jackson, 'Sterne, Burton, and Ferriar: Allusions to the *Anatomy of Melancholy* in Volumes Five to Nine of *Tristram Shandy*', *Philological Quarterly*, 54 (1975), 457-70, Judith Hawley, 'The Anatomy of *Tristram Shandy*', in Marie Roberts and Roy Porter (eds), *Literature & Medicine During the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1993), 84-100, and Sharon Seelig, *Generating Texts: The Progeny of Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Charlottesville, 1996), 128-54. Madeleine Descargues-Grant's 'Burton and Sons: the Masks of Melancholy' (in Clark Lawlor and Valérie Maffre (eds), 'Figures et Culture de la Dépression (1660-1800)', *Le Spectateur Européen*, 2 vols (Montpellier, 2010), 1.143-66) attempts to offer an overview of Burton's eighteenth-century legacy. However, the argument is more often associative than exact and fails to establish compelling inter-textual connections.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, 1972), 303-52.

<sup>5</sup> I use ‘Scriblerian’ here in the broad stylistic sense defended in Henry Power’s *Epic into Novel: Henry Fielding, Scriblerian Satire, and the Consumption of Classical Literature* (Oxford, 2015), 35-40. The original core of Scriblerian works shared not just Power’s ‘dislike of pedantry’ but a broader suspicion of learning per se (their own included) which at times manifested itself as a parodic magnification of encyclopaedism. This quality is as evident in the encyclopaedic self-indulgences of *Tristram Shandy* as it is in the multiplying self-commentaries of Swift’s *Tale of a Tub*, so much so that, in this respect if not others, it makes sense to think of Sterne as continuing the Scriblerian vein of satire.

<sup>6</sup> Given this description, Jonathan Lamb’s *Sterne’s Fiction and the Double Principle* (Cambridge, 1989) might seem to underpin my approach. However, Lamb’s focus is on ‘double arrangements’ (23), twin lines of thought or implication which proceed in parallel in Sterne’s text to different but not necessarily contradictory effect, whereas my concern is with outright antinomies of perspective.

<sup>7</sup> For the conception of scepticism at work here see Fred Parker, *Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Butler, *Characters*, ed. Charles Daves (Cleveland, 1970), 97.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas Faulkner et al., 6 vols (Oxford, 1989-2000), 1.167. References are to this edition, cited parenthetically.

<sup>10</sup> Angus Gowland’s *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge, 2006), 33-97, examines melancholy’s aetiology.

<sup>11</sup> Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus (1662)*, ed. M. V. DePorte (Los Angeles, 1966), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> On melancholy, enthusiasm, and dissent’s inter-relationships, particularly as described by More and Meric Casaubon, see Harth, *Anglican Rationalism*, 68-74, 103-11, John Sena, ‘Melancholic Madness and the Puritans’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 66 (1973), 293-309,

and Michael Heyd, *'Be Sober and Reasonable': The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995), 44-108, 191-210.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, *Selected Poems*, ed. Denys Thompson (Manchester, 1987), 40.

<sup>15</sup> How far early modern melancholy was a literary construction is discussed in Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing, 1951), 73-101, and Bridget Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (London, 1971), 17-57.

Eighteenth-century perceptions of melancholy as a fashionable, factitious condition are charted in Ingram et al., *Melancholy Experience*, 25-53, and sourced in William Temple's analysis of the disease in Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), 154-73.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge, 2010), 84. References are to this edition, cited parenthetically.

<sup>17</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. David Womersley (Cambridge, 2012), 396. References are to this edition, cited parenthetically.

<sup>18</sup> *The Twickenham Edition of the Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt et al., 11 vols (London, 1939-69), 2.180-94.

<sup>19</sup> Burton, *Anatomy*, 1.402; Sena, 'Belinda's Hysteria', 137.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, 'Anatomy and Swift', 134.

<sup>21</sup> Harth, *Anglican Rationalism*, 54-5, 68-75, 103-20. For another clear Burtonian allusion see *TT* 385, n. 36.

<sup>22</sup> See Brean Hammond, 'Scriblerian Self-Fashioning', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 18 (1988), 109-11, 113, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Clive Probyn's 'Swift and the Physicians: Aspects of Satire and Status', *Medical History*, 18 (1974), 254-5, argues that, although Swift knew of Willis's iatromechanics, Galenism (my focus here) always remained his primary interest.

<sup>24</sup> Compare Michael DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses: Swift, Sterne, and Augustan Ideas of Madness* (San Marino, 1974), 60-6, and David Bywaters, 'Anticlericalism in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), 590-3.

<sup>25</sup> *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford, 1999), 63-70.

<sup>26</sup> See further Christopher Tilmouth, 'Rochester and the Play of Values', in Matthew Augustine and Steven Zwicker (eds), *Lord Rochester and the Restoration World* (Cambridge, 2015), 150-1.

<sup>27</sup> Prem Nath notes a possible Burtonian source for this image in 'The Background of Swift's Flayed Woman', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 20 (1984), 363-6.

<sup>28</sup> Claude Rawson, 'Order and Cruelty: A Reading of Swift (with Some Comments on Pope and Johnson)', *Essays in Criticism*, 20 (1970), 26-7.

<sup>29</sup> For the Tory variation on Swift's putatively Old Whig allegiances see Ashley Marshall, "'*fuimus Torys*": Swift and Regime Change, 1714-1718', *Studies in Philology*, 112 (2015), 537-74.

<sup>30</sup> Ronald Paulson's *Theme and Structure in Swift's Tale of a Tub* (New Haven, 1960), 183-8, and Frances Louis' *Swift's Anatomy of Misunderstanding: A Study of Swift's Epistemological Imagination* (London, 1981), 73-9, trace a univocal view of Swift as uncompromising rationalist. An alternative view, supported here, emphasises the *Tale's* oscillatory perspectives: see David French, 'Swift, Temple, and "A Digression of Madness"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 5 (1963), 47-57, Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge, 1996),

120-3, and William Freedman, 'The Grotesque Body in the Hollow Tub: Swift's *Tale*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 51 (2009), 295.

<sup>31</sup> The allusion here is probably to Glanvill (*TT* 434, n. 27), the idea in play being a traditional one of musical sympathy rather than (as might be thought) a iatromechanical image of the nerves figured as strings.

<sup>32</sup> A chasm having appeared in the Forum, oracles prophesied that Romans must cast what they cherished into the hole. Marcus Curtius leapt in and the city was saved. Empedocles, by contrast, threw himself into Etna; why is disputed.

<sup>33</sup> See Ian Higgins, *Swift's Politics: A Study in Disaffection* (Cambridge, 1994), 114-15.

<sup>34</sup> *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974). Walsh notes the allusion (*TT* 445, n. 75) but does not pursue its implications. Swift would have found the quoted lines in the 1685 Folio (rather than in Tate's edition).

<sup>35</sup> *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald McKerrow, 5 vols (Oxford, 1958), 2.219.

<sup>36</sup> On this point and the ensuing discussion of the *Anatomy*'s dialogic qualities see at more length Christopher Tilmouth, 'Burton's "Turning Picture": Argument and Anxiety in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*', *The Review of English Studies*, 56 (2005), 538-41, 543-9.

<sup>37</sup> *The Guardian*, ed. John Stephens (Lexington, 1982), 474.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 475-6. Compare Stuart Tave, *The Amiable Humourist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Chicago, 1960), 91-104.

The Temple/*Guardian* stance did not go uncontested: see Roy Porter, 'The Rage of Party: A Glorious Revolution in English Psychiatry?', *Medical History*, 27 (1983), 35-50.

<sup>39</sup> *Works of Pope*, 3(ii).15-38.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3(i).52-90.

<sup>41</sup> Dustin Griffin, *Swift and Pope: Satirists in Dialogue* (Cambridge, 2010), 166. Compare *Epistle to Cobham*, l. 121: 'While one there is who charms us with his Spleen', commonly understood to mean Swift.

<sup>42</sup> *Works of Pope*, 5.1-245.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.161-87.

<sup>44</sup> For a wider account of such sceptical thinking in Pope's verse see Parker, *Scepticism and Literature*, 86-137.

<sup>45</sup> Swift's scalar interests have been variously discussed in, for example, Frederik Smith, 'Science, Imagination, and Swift's Brobdingnagians', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 14 (1990), 100-14, Deborah Armintor, 'The Sexual Politics of Microscopy in Brobdingnag', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 47 (2007), 619-40, and Kristin Gerten, 'Mingling with Matter: Tactile Microscopy and the Philosophic Mind in Brobdingnag and Beyond', *The Eighteenth Century*, 54 (2013), 497-520. The possible link to Sextus Empiricus is my own suggestion.

<sup>46</sup> Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge, 1987), 49-53.

<sup>47</sup> Stanley Jackson's *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven, 1986), 110-29, records this narrative.

<sup>48</sup> *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New et al., 3 vols (Gainesville, 1978-1984), 1.106. References are to this edition, cited parenthetically. For allusions to Whytt and Cheyne see, for example, 3.197, 462. For the novel's relationship to Swift's *Tale* see DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses*, especially 127-8, and Tim Parnell, 'From Hack to Eccentric Genius: *Tristram Shandy* and *A Tale of a Tub*, Again', *Swift Studies*, 22 (2007), 146-60.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew Bell, "'More than Tears and Moonlight": Forms of Melancholy Mimesis After Burton', in Lawlor and Maffre (eds), 'Figures et Culture', 2.59.

<sup>50</sup> Tave, *Amiable Humourist*, 189-90; Roy Porter, 'Against the Spleen', in Valerie Myer (ed.), *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries* (London, 1984), 84-98.

<sup>51</sup> See further Tilmouth, 'Burton's "Turning Picture"', 541-3.

<sup>52</sup> Jackson, 'Sterne, Burton', 458-63.

<sup>53</sup> For discussions of Sterne's satire on learning see D. W. Jefferson, 'Tristram Shandy and the Tradition of Learned Wit', *Essays in Criticism*, 1 (1951), 225-48, Jack Lynch, 'The Relicks of Learning: Sterne among the Renaissance Encyclopedists', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 13 (2000), 1-17, and Christopher Fanning, "'This Fragment of Life": Sterne's Encyclopaedic Ethics', *The Shandean*, 13 (2002), 55-67. The scepticism to which such satire tends has been analysed in Donald Wehrs' 'Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne: Fideistic Skepticism and the Rhetoric of Desire', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 25 (1988), 127-51, and Parnell's 'Hack to Eccentric Genius'.

<sup>54</sup> Compare Seelig, *Generating Texts*, 135-7.

<sup>55</sup> Margaret Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 1985), 30-56.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford, 2007), 280-4.

<sup>57</sup> The prevailing emphases in the history of eighteenth-century scepticism are evidenced in Richard Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (eds), *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1993), Richard Popkin et al. (eds), *Scepticism in the Enlightenment* (Dordrecht, 1997), and Sébastien Charles and Plínio Smith (eds), *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung* (Dordrecht, 2013). Douglas Muecke's *The Compass of Irony* (London, 1969) and Claire Colebrook's *Irony* (London, 2004) articulate the received view that irony shifted from being a way of using language to a means of abstaining from belief or commitment only in the late 1700s. For *Tristram Shandy's*

anticipation of Romantic irony see Verena Lobsien, ‘The Ruins of Melancholy in *Tristram Shandy*’, in Klaus Vieweg et al. (eds), *Shandean Humour in English and German Literature and Philosophy* (London, 2013), 42.