

Gilded Pills: Writing Melancholy and Hysteria in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*

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ABSTRACT

Melancholy appeals to Burton because it is the disease of great men and the secret of his inspiration. Writing melancholy turns out to be a way for Burton to align himself with great melancholic writers in the past, to achieve literary excellence, and to reach aesthetic transcendence. Even in his abject hell, the melancholic symptom is treasured, cherished, preserved, and finally affirmed through literary, cultural, and aesthetic output. The down-and-out situation is always a launch pad for him to approach or approximate the much-coveted laurels. His symptoms are precisely the signs of exceptionality and inscriptions of genius within him. For men of letters like Burton, melancholy becomes a praiseworthy attribute in its own right.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze Burton's aestheticization of melancholy by means of the act of writing and his appropriation of the feminine and hysteria in his encyclopedic and all-inclusive *Anatomy of Melancholy*. It aims to examine the gendered rhetoric and epistemology of Burton's inquiry of melancholy, through close reading of the figures, metaphors, and representations that have always been part of medical discourse. In other words, it seeks to "anatomize" some symptomatic moments in the discursive construction of melancholy. This "anatomical" approach, which parodies that of Burton, mainly draws on theories of feminism and is deployed to lay bare the workings of phallogocentrism in Burton's *Anatomy*. It is our hope that by reading the work more for its cultural rendition than its medical facts this paper will not only alter the way melancholy has been

understood but also expose the hidden agenda embedded in Burton's *Anatomy*.

KEY WORDS

writing

hysteria

The Anatomy of Melancholy

melancholy

Robert Burton



Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

—Polonius (*Hamlet*, II.ii.205–06)

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is an exemplary text on melancholy in the English Renaissance. It testifies to the technology of medicine as a practice of writing—writing aesthetics of sickness, of sign, of cure, of regimen, of solitary life, of moral goodness, and of artistic creation. In his most quoted passage Burton claims that his writing is performed in order to avoid falling ill of melancholy: “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. [. . .] I was not a little offended with malady, shall I say my mistress Melancholy, my Egeria, or my *malus genius* [evil genius]?” (D 20–21).¹ By saying thus, melancholy has become his mistress and his muse goddess with an ambivalent nature, at once evil and inspirational. It is at once his confidante, his alter ego, his sensitive soul, and his feminized other. The overthrow of his masculinity by mistress Melancholy is something to be secretly desired and moaned at the same time. Burton the melancholic man (*homo melancholicus*) relies on the discourse of melancholy to refashion his “male” identity and has a need to be feminized in order to avoid becoming woman-like. Here the logic of Burton's representation of melancholy as destructive feminized other but also an enabling alter ego becomes clear. Namely, that which represents the most powerful threat to the fabric of masculinity must be turned into a feminized other and yet the presence of the threat is also a condition of masculinity. As Juliana Schiesari remarks, “Being born under Saturn, [. . .] Burton both internalizes and incorporates melancholia as that which spurs him on but from which he must escape,

a paradoxical flight from a condition that is the very condition of his creativity” (245). Though with certain risks, Burton invokes and flirts with his muse goddess/mistress Melancholy in order to become more erudite, more knowledgeable. Since melancholy has appeared to Burton as the secret of his inspiration and aspiration, writing melancholy turns out to be a way for him to align himself with great melancholic writers in the past, to achieve literary excellence, and to reach aesthetic transcendence.

Compared with hysteria, melancholy is truly a “conversion disorder,” able to convert madness into the cultural prestige of inspired artistry and genius. This ability to translate negative affects into words is persistently denied to women, whose negative affects are expressed through non-verbal bodily symptoms called hysteria or “Symptoms of Maids’, Nuns’, and Widows’ Melancholy” in Burton’s *Anatomy*.² As Jennifer Radden argues, “the history of medicine suggests that women have long been subject to ideologically colored diagnoses and forms of treatment and these have apparently differed extensively from period to period. But one theme remains constant: medicine’s prime contribution to sexist ideology, as Ehrenreich and English put it, has been ‘to describe women as sick, and as potentially sickening to men’” (“M & M” 246).

It can now be seen that what is at stake in Burton’s *Anatomy* is not so much the subject of melancholy as the “melancholic” search for a new status of discourse for the discourse of melancholy. Through the operation of dialectic *Aufhebung*, this “melancholic” discourse would shrewdly aestheticize melancholy in a language consolidating phallogocentrism and reducing the feminine and hysteria into a melancholic sameness. Even though both hysteria and melancholy have a very long tradition that is virtually coextensive with the history of Western culture, melancholy is always given a status of eminence in the English Renaissance. The notable absence of women as melancholics points to the lack of significance traditionally given to women’s affects in patriarchal culture. Women’s affects are linked to their bodies, especially their wombs, and stigmatized as hysteria.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze Burton’s aestheticization

of melancholy by means of the act of writing and his appropriation of the feminine and hysteria in his encyclopedic and all-inclusive *Anatomy of Melancholy*. It aims to examine the gendered rhetoric and epistemology of Burton's inquiry of melancholy, through close reading of the figures, metaphors, and representations that have always been part of medical discourse. In other words, it seeks to "anatomize" some symptomatic moments in the discursive construction of melancholy. This "anatomical" approach, which parodies that of Burton, mainly draws on theories of feminism and is deployed to lay bare the workings of phallogocentrism in Burton's *Anatomy*. It is our hope that by reading the work more for its cultural rendition than its medical facts this paper will not only alter the way melancholy has been understood but also expose the hidden agenda embedded in Burton's *Anatomy*.

1. Melancholy in the English Renaissance

In the last quarter of the 16th century, melancholy has reached an epidemic proportion.

—Lawrence Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam*

In the English Renaissance, melancholy and its discursive practices were tied to the metaphysics of doubt—the doubt of human position in the universe—that emerged in the English Renaissance. The discourse of melancholy in the Aristotelian vein glorified the frustration and anxiety brought about by this doubt as heroic suffering and consecrated the situation of melancholy as blessed.³ Melancholy eventually became an elite "dis-ease" that afflicted men precisely as the sign of their exceptionality, as the inscription of genius within them. To speak of melancholy, thus, was not only to speak of human condition or human pathology, but also to speak of the masculine condition of excellence.

Fastened onto the melancholic man's totemic symptom was the anxiety of an age. The English melancholic man, fashioned in the image of its time, combined surface glitter and inner disarray. As

Lawrence Babb writes in his article, "Melancholy and the Elizabethan Man of Letters," there was "scarcely a man of distinction who was not either genuinely melancholy or at least considered as such by himself and others" (261). Obviously, the "dis-ease" of melancholy has become a bitter-sweet fashion among men of letters because there were proper compensations for their distressed condition. Melancholy was truly an "epidemic" "dis-ease" worthy of interest and respect.⁴

In the end, by writing *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton, more than showing the causes, symptoms, and cures of melancholy, reveals much about his time, especially its literature, culture, and attitude toward life. His remarks often explicitly or implicitly echo those of Aristotle, that melancholy men may be witty, and that learned men such as lawyers and philosophers are inclined to be melancholy. Burton says that they are "of a deep reach, excellent apprehension, judicious, wise and witty: for I am of that nobleman's mind, 'Melancholy advanceth men's conceits more than any humour whatsoever,' improves their meditations more than any strong drink or sack" (I: 392). Thirty pages later, Burton continues to elaborate this point: "Why melancholy men are witty, which Aristotle hath long since maintained in his *Problems*, and that all learned men, famous philosophers, and lawgivers [. . .] have still been melancholy, is a problem much controverted" (I: 422). The above passages certainly reveal Burton's general interest in the Aristotelian argument.

Burton often prides himself on his writing on melancholy and seems to be quite pleased to align himself in the tradition of melancholic genius. Melancholy for him is a more sober form of intoxication, devoid of the negative attributes of the wine but capable of inspiring the wit of a noble mind. In addition, the melancholic man, in Burton's mind, seems to possess some feminine qualities and the image of woman could best reveal a melancholic mood and mind: "as Albertus Dürer's paints melancholy, like a sad woman leaning on her arm with fixed looks, neglected habit, etc. [. . .]" (I: 392).

In the English Renaissance, melancholy has become "The English Malady" and this period deserves to be called "the Age of Melancholy." From black-clad Hamlet and "his brooding

melancholy,"⁵ through Jacques with his "melancholy of mine own" (IV.i.15–16),⁶ to that self-reflexive style which was Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Stuart and Jacobean England cultivated the melancholic man as both the man of intellectual inquisition and the malcontent, whose fascination was celebrated by Burton in exuberance. Thus, as Stanley W. Jackson notes, "A survey of Renaissance thought on melancholia is reasonably brought to a close by a consideration of Robert Burton (1557–1640) and his *The Anatomy of Melancholy*" (99).

II. Writing/Aestheticizing Melancholy

I doubt not but these following lines, when they shall be recited, or hereafter read, will drive away melancholy.

—Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

What kind of writing is Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*? A medical treatise? A therapeutic work teaching the reader how to cure melancholy? A general satire on man's folly? A moral sermon? An encyclopedia of melancholy? A collection of anecdotes? A religious polemic? A misogynist pamphlet? A celebration of passion and love? A catalog of universal suffering? Or an ambitious project trying to probe the human psychosomatic condition? Is it serious, amusing, comic, dignified, playful, or skeptical?

With the awareness of the loss of a geocentric and anthropocentric universe as well as the loss of the solace of the center, Burton the melancholic finds the opportunity to re-center himself by means of writing about melancholy. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* witnesses the decline of a theo-centric world picture and the rise of a homo-centric new vision. It was his life's work and the book's popularity was quite phenomenal. It appeared in 1621 and was revised continually until his death in 1640.⁷ As Bridget Gellert Lyons suggests, "The constant, obsessive revisions of this long work give us one important clue about it: it is highly contrived, and, in its author's eyes, a work of art of very large scope indeed" (113). Burton's continuous

act of writing and revising the subject of melancholy not only sustains Burton's identity as a melancholy subject but also weaves an intertwined work of writing and being.

The very premise of his book that "all the world is mad, that it is melancholy" (D 39) and his self-justification that "I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy" (D 20) gave Burton the reasons to write *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and show the close relationship between writing and melancholy. For Burton, melancholy is certainly his symptom and his cure, but melancholy is not a ready cure. It is through the act of writing that Burton is able to make an antidote out of melancholy. Moreover, the act of writing is not only the antidote to melancholy⁸ but also the subject of his book. In this paper, I suggest that Burton's act of translating melancholy into words is the move of aestheticization, to make an aesthetic antidote out of melancholy.

In the *Anatomy*, the first partition is concerned with the causes, symptoms, and prognostics of melancholy; the second the cure of melancholy; the third the topic of love melancholy which he contends is "a species of melancholy, and a necessary part of this my treatise" (3: 4). Through Burton's ambitious treatment of melancholy, his melancholic gaze includes all symptoms and the whole world, becomes encyclopedic, re-interprets himself and the new world, and eventually re-directs the gaze upon himself. It presents a visual "dis-topia" or a "utopia of dis-ease."⁹ His "dis-topian" gaze is associated with the anatomical examination, or the "dis-sectional" or "dis-membering" practice. As Burton writes, "my purpose and endeavour is [. . .] to anatomize this humour of melancholy, through all its parts and species" (D 120), soon after "I have anatomized mine own folly" (D 122). Through his all-seeing and reflexive "dis-topian" gaze, Burton becomes the subject and object of his look.

Being a melancholic, Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* shows exactly his melancholy of anatomy, of analysis, of understanding the pathological sense of being, and of writing an analytico-self-referential discourse. While anatomizing melancholy, Burton melancholizes anatomy and makes anatomy a symptom of melancholy. In other words,

Burton's melancholy is derived from his relentless drive and anxiety to order medical knowledge and to anatomize melancholy into systems, abstracts, indexes, and skeletons.

Burton's "dis-topian" gaze, emphasizing the importance of vision and order, first observes the melancholic world from outside, and then follows his anatomical knife turning his object of knowledge—melancholy—inside out. In the end, his anatomy is performed through scrutinizing inquiry and expressed through written words. This anatomical performance, with several twists and turns, is in due course self-gratifying since to be an anatomist in this sense means to be a gazer with keener perception and sensitivity as well as a writer with superior moral and social sense in a patriarchal society.

1. Writing Melancholy:

Gilded Pills, Disguising Mask, & Aestheticized Text

These my writings, I hope, shall take like gilded pills, which are so composed as well to tempt the appetite and deceive the palate, as to help and medicinally work upon the whole body.

—Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

As Burton confesses in the above quotation, his writings are like gilded pills whose purpose is to help achieve therapeutic effects. The gilding or aestheticizing practice is accomplished in a number of ways. Most obvious and successful is Burton's ability to draw from a wealth of amusing anecdotes and to use them to illustrate some cause, symptom, or cure of melancholy. Burton also gilds or aestheticizes with quotations, which are drawn starting from the word of God in the Bible, down to the words of innumerable classical, medieval, and contemporary writers.

Weaving together discourses from ancient to modern time, the *Anatomy* is a vast compilation of other texts on the subject of melancholy. It is a restless inter-textual knowing machine in accumulating knowledge. More than any book one can think of, the

Anatomy is composed of all kinds of texts. Intertextuality is its very being, its only reality. According to O'Connell, "It has been estimated that he [Burton] refers to some 1250 authors, not including biblical writers, in the course of the *Anatomy*. Fewer than two hundred of these are medical authorities. [. . .] The frequent *et ceteras* imply the open-endedness of his discourse but also impatience and an awareness of the impossibility of fixing any limits" (59, 91). Burton has absorbed almost everything that his cultural milieu has to offer. That is, the *Anatomy* includes the whole corpus of literature inherited from antiquity to the Renaissance: from poetry, philosophy, theology, history, natural science, to medicine. Opening the *Anatomy* we enter a vast library or a comprehensive encyclopedia, a discursive space where writings and words convey virtually the only reality.

Such writing practices gild the subject of melancholy with a literary and aesthetic coating. As Ruth A. Fox perceptively comments, "Robert Burton forged the *Anatomy* out of his Renaissance scholar's familiarity with the literature of Western civilization, working centuries of authors into a compendium of science, philosophy, poetry, history, and divinity which contains examples of numerous literary genres yet remains *sui generis*, the singular expression of its author's humane knowledge" (1). Though framed by a most strict plan with the elaborate and scholastic subdivisions of the synopses, Burton's notion of melancholy is carried away and transformed by his labyrinths of digression and quotation. Likewise, his subject of melancholy is like gilded or aestheticized gendered medicine whose purpose is to help recuperate the male ego from the bottomless pit of dis-ease.

Another writing strategy employed by Burton to gild his bitter pill is to assume the persona of "Democritus Junior." "Democritus to the Reader," the 120-page preface Burton added in the second edition, appeals to readers something other than can be defined in a medical treatise. As O'Connell shrewdly remarks, it "pretends to introduce the book but [. . .] in its manner becomes something of an epitome of the whole" (55). In "Democritus to the Reader," O'Connell claims, "Melancholy is transformed from a specific disease to human folly; the general satire of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* becomes the closest

analogue of Democritus's satire. Because folly is a moral state rather than a physical one, this melancholy includes all professions and human institutions, "kingdoms, provinces, and politic bodies" (56).

Disguised under the mask of "Democritus Junior," the ancient anatomist and "laughing philosopher," Burton writes in the tradition of a very special genealogy.¹⁰ The mask allows him "to assume a little more liberty and freedom of speech" (D 19).¹¹ Wearing this mask, Burton writes with satirical humor and with profound pity for men. He not only laughs with Democritus at the folly of the world, but also weeps with Heraclitus over the suffering of mankind.¹² What makes this life, at once laughable and lamentable, endurable, and even agreeable, is the voice behind the mask that engages us, takes us into its confidence, makes us secret sharers in the process. While satirical and tongue in cheek, "Democritus to the Reader" is in a way most rich, warm, and humane, signaling an affirmation of life in the Nietzschean fashion.

Besides his subtle dramatic sense of when to assume different masks and voices, Burton displays superior talents in literary style to gild his pill. His remarks about his own style, like those on the subject of melancholy, are extremely intriguing. He confesses to write in "an extemporean style" (D 31): "[I poured out whatever came into my mind], out of a confused company of notes, and writ with as small deliberation as I do ordinarily speak" (D 31).¹³ A page later, Burton compares his style to a river which runs sometimes swift, sometimes slow; sometimes direct, sometimes winding: "So that as a river runs sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then *per ambages* [winding]; now deep, then shallow; now muddy, then clear; now broad, then narrow; doth my style flow: now serious, then light; now comical, then satirical; now more elaborate, then remiss, as the present subject required, or as at that time I was affected" (D 32). Burton's style overflows his claim to "call a spade a spade" (D 31). It always exceeds the facticity of the disease called melancholy. Its exuberance enacts at once the aesthetic struggle against and reinforcements of the symptoms of melancholy.

Burton writes in mixed styles: satirical, jesting, lyrical,

argumentative, and expository, etc. It is this discursive practice that sustains the reader in so long and scholastic a book as the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Although Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* contains a scientific discourse treating a medical subject by means of traditional methodology in a traditional schema, it still can be accounted primarily an artistic and literary creation. Intending to write a medical treatise, Burton aestheticizes melancholy and turns his *Anatomy* into a work of art by his peculiar rhetorical drifts, moves, and styles. His "melancholy" is allusive, very much like a "melancholic mosaic" through which Burton constructs a unique melancholic point of view about love, dis-ease, study, and life.

Fox insists that Burton's work is a cure for melancholy because it is "art" that bestows on its parts an "organic" unity (9, 272). In our view, however, what is remarkable about Burton's *Anatomy* is not its attempt to organize "human knowledge," or to give the reader an orderly account of an unruly subject, or to bestow on its parts an organic unity, but his discursive strategies to link melancholy with a variety of styles, genres, and literatures making his topic an intertextual writing site. Burton, by following his melancholic whim, has built for himself as well as his readers, a "dis-topia" of writing in which he delights in playing the ruler: "I will yet, to satisfy and please myself, make an Utopia of mine own, a New Atlantis, a poetical commonwealth of mine own, in which I will freely domineer, build cities, make laws, statutes, as I list myself. And why may I not? [. . .] you know what liberty poets ever had" (D 97).

Burton certainly believes in the melancholic's imaginative power by alluding to the tradition of Utopia. In contrast to Plato's Republic, where a philosopher-king reigns, in his poetical commonwealth of melancholy, Burton is the poet-king who can wield all of the figures of speech at will to create whatever satisfies or pleases his melancholic whim. Thus we can say that his poetical wit is shaped by the workings of his imagination of melancholy, and his "dis-topian" flight of the imagination is part of the melancholic condition. Eventually, Burton's *Anatomy* attains a "dis-topian" mode of writing never quite achieved by its predecessors. It is a mode of writing that supported the

development of a male discourse that enables a male ego to inhabit a haven in a world of uncertainty and excess.

By turning melancholy into words, rhetorics, styles, and figures of speech, the “chaos of melancholy,” yielding more symptoms than the confusion of tongues caused by the tower of Babel, is in the end textualized and aestheticized in the *Anatomy*.¹⁴ Language still outdoes the various symptoms yielded by the chaos of melancholy. It is impossible for Burton to exhaust all the symptoms. What he can do is to employ language as the therapeutic medium. As O’Connell writes, “Though the body may be treated in various ways, with diet, psychic, surgical remedies, the principal therapy comes through words [. . .]. Language is the truest antidote, the best physic to melancholy. Talk, whether counsel drawn from the ancients or ramblings among contemporary pharmacopia, has an efficacy in itself for one tempted by solitary silence and self-absorption” (62). The true therapy of melancholy rests in the act of writing. Through language comes a process of aestheticizing melancholy.

The chaos of melancholy is transformed into a swirling world of language, if not a prison house of language. Although Burton claims that “I respect matter, not words” (D 31), in fact, through his writing practice, he sanctions the efficacy of words, of its therapeutic power, and of writing about melancholy because language excess is characteristic of melancholy. As Burton asserts, “I doubt not but these following lines, when they shall be recited, or hereafter read, will drive away melancholy” (D 38). Much like Freud’s talking cure the purpose of which is to translate affects into words. Thus to translate melancholy into words not only witnesses the inherent bookishness of his project but also is the truest antidote to drive away melancholy.¹⁵

Burton dotes on words. His book’s linguistic abundance and the diversity of his style contribute to his attempt to aestheticize melancholy. As Devon L. Hodges writes, “Burton’s technique generates more and more words: with each new edition the *Anatomy* grows. It grows because Burton believes that knowledge comes from the books he quotes even though he also fears that too much learning may lead to madness” (117).¹⁶ This quality of inexhaustibility, either of

words or of discourses, testifies to the quality of Hegelian *Aufhebung* that, at every turn, glorifies words, language, learning, knowledge, male subjectivity, and eventually patriarchal structure.

Burton's pride in writing melancholy is strengthened by his conviction that learned men are creators of and sufferers of melancholy.¹⁷ Much of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* demonstrates the pleasure of a discourse freed from the desire to manifest the truth but addicted to the desire to create, to write: "I will be honest, and admit that nothing of what I am about to relate is true; I shall relate things which never have happened and never will happen, merely to show my literary skill [. . .]" (II: 2.58). Burton believes in the power of anatomy as writing. As Breitenberg writes, "There is an unmistakable sense in reading *The Anatomy of Melancholy* that Burton derived a good deal of pleasure and satisfaction not only from his own experience of melancholy but, perhaps even more, from the inscriptive act of dissecting and describing its multifarious forms of self-consuming anxiety and suffering—after all, he wrote and re-wrote the book for over twenty years" (35). Through writing about melancholy or writing as melancholy, Burton not only overcomes his illness—but also turns his *Anatomy of Melancholy* into a work of art.

Burton's melancholy is narcissistic or self-reflexive in its orientation because the flow of the desire always feeds back or returns to the melancholic subject. In other words, Burton the melancholic makes himself a prisoner in the prison house of language and then reemerges from the down-and-out situation as a man of letters. As Foucault argues in *Madness and Civilization*, "Language is the first and last structure of madness, its constituent form; on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature" (100). In Burton's *Anatomy*, in the name of articulating melancholy, art or poetry in its broadest sense is invested with redemptive nature. The more the melancholic writer suffers, the more he becomes emblematic of superior aesthetic virtues. The deeper he sinks, the higher he will soar.

Burton's text demonstrates its power not by imposing order, but by its dialectic movement. The discourse of melancholy trails on a

dialectical trajectory and creates an aesthetic space that traces a dialectical operation. Swinging between order and chaos, between reason and madness, between science and theology, between totality and fragmentation, between the carefully structured tables and disorderly prose, the *Anatomy* achieves its synthesis through the text's most significant preoccupation—writing melancholy and melancholic writing.

The male whose identities are formed and supported by the assumption of male privileges must also have incorporated varying degrees of melancholy. Thus the move for melancholy to emerge is a specific way to negotiate masculinity by imagining and representing its own dissolution. It is a dialectical strategy of sublimation, experiencing the process of the potential loss, preservation, and gain of that privilege. In other words, the male melancholic plays out this model of otherness by living in a state of perpetual psychic and physical conflict and, in so doing, dramatizes and exacerbates the unavoidable tensions and anxieties of masculinity.

Burton's *Anatomy* is a hybrid text of masculine pathologization that involves himself and his readers within the shared plight of male gender. "In other words," as Breitenberg forcefully argues, "Burton stages the most dire visions of anxious masculinity in order to dispel them through an articulation and experience of melancholy" (67). Burton's text is a mask that disguises the cultural basis of masculine identity in the black cloak of melancholy. Melancholy reveals both the contradiction inherent in Renaissance patriarchal culture and the ways that culture smoothes over those contradictions. In other words, melancholy is the negative condition against which the Renaissance Englishman defines himself.

As Burton suggests in his discussions of the melancholic's mental fantasies and delusions, melancholy is essentially self-referential. Under the influence of Saturn and the dark humor, writing was the prerogative of Burton, the melancholic man. It is both the cause and the effect, the symptom and the cure, the poison and the remedy, and the means and the end. The writing of melancholy is always the writer's *pharmakon*.¹⁸ Burton's sense of writing melancholy resembles the

Derridean *pharmakon* which cannot simply be assigned a site within what it situates, nor can it be subsumed under concepts whose contours it draw. The *pharmakon*, as pertains to Burton's textual practice, is the movement, the locus, and the play of difference within Burton and his text.

While melancholy is deemed as the most profound crisis to the masculine subject, as Burton fervently proclaims, it is a necessity and enabling condition of masculinity. Also, "The melancholic," as Schiesari notes, "stands both in reaction to and in complicity with patriarchy" (14). Likewise, Burton's discourse of melancholy that operates in the mode of Hegelian *Aufhebung* is a restless and reflexive desiring machine. As Burton writes, "'Desire hath no rest,' is infinite in itself, endless, and, as one calls it, a perpetual rack, or horse-mill, [. . .] still going round as in a ring" (I: 280). This model of melancholic desire risks destroying itself by transgressing the masculine boundaries represented by masculine reason, moderation, and self-control. It flirts with femininity and appropriates female otherness. However, it will eventually recuperate and sublimate itself through words, writing, and discursive practices. Even in its Galenic state of physical suffering, the melancholic desire always tries to assert itself through the aesthetic drive. Burton's conception of melancholy as a discourse of masculinity incorporates, valorizes, and aestheticizes the very contradictions and tensions that otherwise threaten the masculine subject.

The male melancholic plays out this masculine dialectical struggle to maintain reason and rationality in the face of the irrationality and femininity, in the negotiation with passion and desire, represented as the unruly flow or imbalance of his humoural fluids. To a certain degree, the dialectical struggle is between masculine and feminine elements within men, and its sublimated moment of synthesis or resolution involves some form of appropriation or purgation of the feminine, or of recuperation of the feminized masculine subject. Burton's conception of melancholy as an inevitable part of the discourse of masculinity allows us to see more clearly its function in the construction and privileging of masculine subjectivity.

Burton's *Anatomy* further reinforces the fact that melancholy is

largely a discourse articulated and played out between men, a way for men to confirm their identity through a shared language of suffering, grief, and sorrow. As the pages turned, distinctions between background and foreground, depth and surface, medical and literary, scientific and fictional, truth and myth in Burton's *Anatomy* begin to slip and slide and then to blur, but something gradually emerges. This something is the face of a discourse in the image of a man, an intellectual, as well as a scholar.

2. Melancholic Writing: A Product of Sensibility

While based on the humoral theory, Burton's use of melancholy as a cultural manifestation of either personal, contemporary, or universal temperament reinforces language's metaphoric significance, aesthetic dimension, and gendered implication. Although his discursive practices constantly shift along metaphorical, medical, literary, and philosophical dimensions, Burton obviously is more inclined to the Aristotelian dictum. In fact, he approves the dictum by engaging in writing the *Anatomy*, by his love of overmuch study, learning, and writing, and by being a melancholic. His approval explicitly and implicitly implies that masculinity is inherently melancholic. Thus, Burton's conception of melancholy is simultaneously symptomatic and constitutive of male subjectivity. His writing of melancholy that functions as representation within the discourse of masculinity is never independent of its culture.

Foucault, in his discussion of melancholy in *Madness and Civilization*, insists that it is "the phenomenology of melancholic experience" (122) which gives the concept of melancholy its coherence: "A symbolic unity formed by the languor of the fluids, by the darkening of the animal spirits and the shadowy twilight they spread over the images of things, by the thickening of vapors that have become blackish, deleterious and acrid, by visceral functions that have become slow and somehow slimy—this unity, more a product of sensibility than of thought and theory, gives melancholia its characteristic stamp" (124). Thus, in the light of Foucault's observation, we could argue that Burton's *Anatomy*, rather than a system of thought or theory, is, as

Foucault notes, “a product of sensibility” (124). By writing “the phenomenology of melancholic experience” with a unique style and sensibility, Burton demonstrates some sort of agonizing sublime and a touch of aesthetics. The unity of the *Anatomy*, if there is one, is by no means a structural or thematic unity. Rather, it is the unity of sensibility, of the encyclopedic melancholic experience, of the dark mood of black bile as metaphor, and of melancholic writing as an act of aestheticizing melancholy. The purely affective qualities of melancholy that Burton has painted for us, nevertheless, have achieved more than just a “phenomenology,” as Foucault names it, can contain. The surplus of the dark feelings can only be grasped by “the aesthetics of melancholic experience” and realized by aestheticizing male experiences.

The *Anatomy* explores how male melancholic experience is implicated within the rise of melancholy as a specific cultural as well as pathological phenomenon. “The aesthetics of melancholic experience” is always a gendered one. It is an eroticized nostalgia that recuperates fear, sorrow, and loss in the name of an imaginary unity and order, and that also gives to the male melancholic a privileged position within literary, philosophical, and artistic canons. On the other hand, women cannot become a “real” melancholic for melancholy is tightly connected to discursive and cultural practices that have given men a cultural privilege in displaying “dis-topian” gaze and representing “dis-ease” so as to convert the “dis-ease” into a sign of privileged subjectivity. In the *Anatomy*, melancholy is available for a wide and often contradictory range of cultural and aesthetic purposes: instrument of misogyny, agent of sexual differentiation, major diagnosis of society’s multiple ills, gilded pill of dis-ease, emblem of creative frenzy, and act of writing as self-fashioning. While revealing the fissures, contradictions, and antitheses of patriarchal systems, it is a necessary and inevitable condition that operates on the mode of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. In its dialectical move, it paradoxically enables and drives patriarchy’s reproduction and continuation of itself. Thus melancholy is not only a negative or antithetical symptomatic state, which is a constituent element of masculinity, but also a positive, and recuperative state. It is at once an illness and a cure, a poison and a

remedy. It is so endemic to patriarchy that the issue becomes not so much its anatomy, diagnosis, and cures, but rather its writing, aesthetic sublimation, and discourse formation. In other words, it is both a negative effect that shows patriarchy's own internal discord or crisis, and an instrument of its perpetuation. In the end, we witness that melancholy and masculinity are curiously wed to form a privileged interest group which sustains itself by the writing of the melancholy.

III. Writing/Appropriating Hysteria

Among his many varieties of melancholy, Burton included hysteria, which he colorfully called "Maids', Nuns' and Widows' Melancholy.

—Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*

Hysteria and melancholy have an affinity; they are both an effect of madness—the madness of meaning, of reason, and of facing an uncertain world. They are not only clinical/medical constructs but also cultural/gendered practices, implicated in all kinds of relations between power and knowledge. Melancholy as a cultural category for the exceptional man appears concomitant with a stigmatization of women's own claims to represent their affects within culture. Unlike the melancholic man, the hysterical woman does not have the same cultural tradition to rely on, to accredit herself, and to turn negative affects into something positive.

While hysteria is considered a typical female malady in the history of medicine, melancholy is oftentimes taken as a highly valued male malady. In the discursive practices of the English Renaissance, hysteria, as compared with melancholy, is deemed the less noble and glorious double of melancholy. The purpose of this section is to tease out the relationship between hysteria and melancholy, and explore the reason why the feminine condition of hysteria is displaced by the female melancholy in the *Anatomy* and devalued by melancholy's status as an extraordinary male cultural condition. Hierarchically

superior to hysteria which afflicts women, by the time of the Renaissance melancholy is more than just an undesirable disease based on humoral medicine and diagnosed as caused by an excess of black bile. It has come to be perceived as an eloquent form of mental disturbance and deemed as a special gift. Thus, in contrast to the distinguished epithet “melancholic” by which dis-eased men are called, women who fall into the excess of emotions are often stigmatized as “hysterical.”

In the *Anatomy*, Burton simply dispenses the obvious polarity between hysteria and melancholy. His discourse of melancholy incorporates and appropriates the discourse of hysteria by relegating women to the rubric of “Maids’, Nuns’, and Widows’ Melancholy.” Hysteria becomes the melancholic other. The reason why the subsection—“Symptoms of Maids’, Nuns’, and Widows’ Melancholy”—is included is because other famous physicians in Burton’s time dutifully and conscientiously mentioned in their treatises and treated the symptoms of this particular group as “a particular species of melancholy [. . .] distinct from the rest” (I: 414). Thus, it is impossible for Burton to ignore or exclude these particular signs in his comprehensive study of melancholy. Also, Burton’s treatment of these symptoms as a distinct group and with a special eye reflects the culture’s construction of woman’s sexual errancy and her terrifying reproductive powers.

In this subsection, Burton expounds the Platonic and Hippocratic connection between hysteria and sexual disturbance by tracing *melancholy adust* to “those vicious vapours which come from monstrous blood and infect the brain” (I: 414). Furthermore, Burton explicitly equates the female melancholy with “the fits of the mother.”¹⁹ By subsuming hysteria under the title of “female melancholy,” Burton is asserting his all-inclusive act of writing an encyclopedia of melancholy. As David F. Hoeniger writes, “One needs to be careful when using Burton and popular contemporary psychological or medical tracts for evidence linking the ‘mother’ or similar falling sickness to hypochondriacal melancholy. Burton and others were eager to be all-inclusive in the listing of symptoms and

effects" (330).

Yet Burton is not alone in subsuming hysteria under the umbrella of melancholy. A similar move also appears in Freud's treatment of narcissistic identification of melancholia and hysterical identification in his "Mourning and Melancholia." As Freud writes:

The difference, however, between narcissistic and hysterical identification may be seen in this: that whereas in the former the object-cathexis is abandoned, in the latter it persists and manifests its influence, though this is usually confined to certain isolated actions and innervations. [. . .] Narcissistic identification is the older of the two and it paves the way to an understanding of hysterical identification, which has been less thoroughly studied. (*SE* 14, 250)

Both Burton and Freud, while prioritizing melancholy, reinforces the gender dichotomy between male melancholy and hysteria/female melancholy. Like Freud's approach, Burton's "anatomical apparatus" is a gendered apparatus and his writing on melancholy always concerns the gendered intersection of language, subjectivity, and sexuality.

The major difference between hysteria and melancholy lies in the verbal and discursive representability of the affect itself. The question of verbal and discursive representability is a question of who holds the key to the means of expression and who has the right to the "coming of signifiers" (Irigaray 71). Like the inarticulateness of Breuer's Anna O. and Freud's Dora, two of the most renown hysterics in psychoanalysis, Burton's hysteric/female melancholic is also unable to articulate or translate her desires or needs into words, and can only rely on her limited resources and her much feminized and pathologized body language. As Burton writes,

Many of them cannot tell how to express themselves in words, or how it holds them, what ails them, you cannot understand them, or well tell what to make of their saying;

so far gone sometimes, so stupefied and distracted, they think themselves bewitched, they are in despair [. . .]; Mercatus therefore adds, now their breasts, now their hypochondries, belly and sides, then their heart and head aches; now heat, then wind, now this, now that offends, they are weary of all; and yet will not, cannot again tell how, where, or what offends them, though they be in great pain, agony, and frequently complain, grieving, sighing, weeping, and discontented still, *sine causa manifesta* [without apparent cause], [. . .]. (I: 416)

The hysteric/female melancholic remains an outsider to words, to language, and to a signifying economy. There is simply no outlet for her to express her deeply felt affects. As Luce Irigaray insists, women do not have “access to a signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers” (75). Obviously, for Burton, the ephemeral affects of a female hysteric/melancholic do not bear the same weight of aesthetic seriousness as those of a male melancholic. While the female hysteric/melancholic is confined to the semiotic cave of inarticulation, barred from the world of representation, the male melancholic is able to leave the cave and express the experience of the world below and beyond with the divine “Word.” What is denied to the hysteric/female melancholic is not only access to the signifying economy but also the legitimacy of aesthetics, which is the discursive privilege of the male melancholic. As compared with melancholy, hysteria or female melancholy has always been a devalued form of affect. To speak of hysteria or female melancholy is to speak of something that is historically mute.

For Burton, the hysteric/female melancholic suffers from either lack or loss—a condition known as nymphomania or erotomania: lack of sexual gratification in the case of maids and nuns or loss of husband/penis in the case of widows. In treating hysteria/female melancholy, Burton simply summarizes the older methods. Like his many predecessors, he thinks the surest remedy is to see them married to good husbands and to have regular sex and pregnancy. As Burton

suggests “But the best and surest remedy of all, is to see them well placed, and married to good husbands in due time; [. . .] that’s the primary cause, and this the ready cure, to give them content to their desires. I write not this to patronize any wanton, idle flirt, lascivious or light huswives, which are too forward many times, unruly, and apt to cast away themselves on him that comes next, without all care, counsel, circumspection, and judgment” (I: 417). In short, the best remedy is to submit to the yoke of patriarchy and to the production of mothering. Burton’s construction of female sexuality is best exemplified by Irigaray’s critique of phallogocentrism:

She functions as a hole—that is where we would place it at its point of greatest efficiency, even in its implications of phobia, for man too—in the elaboration of imaginary and symbolic processes. But this fault, this deficiency, this “hole” inevitably affords woman too few figurations, images, or representations by which to represent herself. (71)

The Burtonian hysteric/female melancholic, far from being inspired to express herself in some heightened artistic way, lapses into utter inarticulateness and finds no access to the symbolic order’s prime system, language. She is far from a self-sufficient subject. She depends on a male subject or a phallus to gratify or pacify her restless and wandering womb/desire. On the other hand, the Burtonian male melancholic is oftentimes a loner who seeks recognition by building up his narcissistic reserves, his books, his knowledge/power, his library, and eventually his Tower of Babble. The discourse of melancholy has designated a channel of expressibility for men and has accordingly given them a means to express their sorrows in a less alienated way, while relegating the hysteric/female melancholic to an inexpressive babble whose only sense is her need for a phallus.

Burton’s inclusion and representation of hysteria/female melancholy in the *Anatomy* only serves the function as a backdrop and contrast of male melancholy. Hysteria/female melancholy is

considered undesirable not only because of its link with the womb, with female sexuality, but also because it is not entitled to the name and the right of artistic creation. As Stephen Orgel argues, “this [the English Renaissance] is an age in which sexuality itself is misogynistic” (14). Obviously, the ephemeral affects of a hysteric/female melancholic do not bear the same weight of aesthetic seriousness as those of a male melancholic.

Burton’s *Anatomy* simultaneously appropriates and excludes hysteria/female melancholy. After confessing that he himself is an unfit person to address the topic and apologizing for his transgression into female sexuality, Burton cannot resist his own desire to justify his own cause self-righteously and on behalf of the “distressed” women: “[I will check myself]; though my subject necessarily require it, I will say no more. And yet I must and will say something more, add a word or two [. . .] [in favour of maids and widows], in favour of all such distressed parties, in commiseration of their present estate” (I: 418). In a word, the hidden agenda embedded in the *Anatomy* is that Burton attempts to elevate himself through the act of writing above the place of female sexuality he assigns to women and the hysteria/female melancholy. It is intended not only to purge the male melancholic of the melancholy disease but also of the feminized state of the existence, in spite of the fact that the feminized symptomatic state is what they seek in the first place. To link women to womb, to hysteria, to base corporeality, or to figure women as sexual objects is Burton’s gendered writing strategy to distinguish and to justify the effeminized state of melancholy in himself and men.

IV. Conclusion

Burton, then, offered a book on melancholy to a melancholy generation.

—Lawrence Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam*

Burton performs his appropriation of hysteria/female melancholy

through his act of writing, namely his discourse of melancholy. Throughout the *Anatomy*, Burton's emphasis on women as melancholic centered on women's bodily and, particularly, reproductive organs and functions. The female melancholic, in the scheme of Burton, is subject to gendered diagnoses and forms of treatment. Burton's *Anatomy* functions at the expense of women and femininity. It encourages an analysis of melancholy as the site of gendered interpretation.

The present study is a cultural and literary study elaborating upon the gendered forces and practices which shape the creation and aestheticization of the *Anatomy*. It stems from our conviction that Burton's act of writing the cultural and medical representation of fear, sorrow, and loss, known as melancholy, is an act of poetic and cultural aestheticization through his prism of gendered rendering. As the sign of sickness and genius, Burton's melancholy is at once a curse and a blessing. As the very signifier of cultural or aesthetic superiority, it exemplifies the patriarchal gendering machine of words and the signifying economy of loss and then gain. It is a discursive practice of narcissistic desire. To sink in the abyss of loss, fear, and sorrow is only an overture for the melancholic to achieve the finale of victory. Burton's claim for the universality of his subject matter is at once a claim for the universality of masculinity. The melancholy we come to understand in the *Anatomy* is not only a specific form of mental and physical suffering, but the very condition of masculinity. For Burton, language, far from repressing male melancholic desire, fulfills it by carrying it to its metaphysical or aesthetic gratification.

In Derridean deconstruction, to write is to deface, to forget, to erase. It is a perpetual contesting and canceling of its own meaning. Unlike Derridean deconstruction, the writing of melancholy in the *Anatomy* is an act of aestheticizing melancholy. That is, to transcribe physical and mental diseases into words with various styles, to relate melancholy with the act of creation, and to make melancholy a topic of cultural cult for aesthetics through writing. To aestheticize melancholy also means to create order out of disorder and to project the image of the aesthetic sublime onto the image of the melancholic disorder.

To be melancholic is to be endowed with access to cultural production and literary ability to translate affects into words. Words, the *Anatomy*'s seemingly ceaseless and inexhaustible flow of words, are not only the antidote to melancholy but also the means of aesthetic transcendence. Through writing, Burton's male melancholy is translated, transcended, and aestheticized as a privileged affect and suffering which carries in itself a rightful desire for a transcendent relation with the biblical Word, the world, the sublime, and the Platonic Idea. The end result of the melancholic transcendence is always shown in artistic creativity, heightened sensitivity, and conscientious morality.

In Renaissance England, the hysteria/female melancholy portrayed by Burton shows only women's exclusion from the public sphere. It is not so much that it is impossible for women to contract melancholy, but that the hysteria/female melancholy is assigned to a marginal status and enveloped by the all-inclusive discourse of melancholy that honors male subjectivity. In Burton's *Anatomy*, hysteria, rather than a female melancholy, is not even a devalued form of melancholy. It simply does not exist in the melancholic economy. Burtonian melancholy is never a site of feminine resistance to the specific domestic, political, and religious enclosures.²⁰ On the contrary, it is a privileged state of inspired melancholic men from which women are explicitly excluded.

NOTES

¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. & introd. Holbrook Jackson, new introd. William H. Gass (New York: New York Review Books, 2001). Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the *Anatomy* are to this edition. Since reference to the *Anatomy* are quite frequent, the citations are included in the text. The alphabet "D" refers to the part "Democritus Junior to the Reader," the Roman number (I, II, or III) to the volume which corresponds to Burton's partition, and the Arabic to the page^s in that volume.

² As Ilza Veith notes, "Among his many varieties of melancholy,

Burton included hysteria, which he colorfully called ‘Symptoms of Maids’, Nuns’, and Widows’ Melancholy’” (126).

³ Originally a Latin translation of a Greek word meaning black bile or *atra bilis*, melancholy, the body fluid whose excess is deemed responsible for the melancholic temperament, was understood by Aristotle as an unfortunate malady that invariably affected “all” great men: “Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that are infected by the disease arising from black bile, as the story of Heracles among the heroes tells” (155)? Among other great men mentioned by Aristotle were Ajax, Bellerophon, Empedocles, Plato, and Socrates. Aristotle’s *Problems* XXX, 1, has long been recognized as the most important source text for the linkage between melancholy and genius as well as between melancholy and aesthetic creation.

⁴ In *The Elizabethan Malady*, Babb asserts the same view: “The principal reason for the popularity of melancholy, however, was the general acceptance of the idea that it was an attribute of superior minds, of genius. The Aristotelian concept had invested the melancholy character with something of somber philosophic dignity, something of Byronic grandeur” (184).

⁵ King Caludius’s full comment on Hamlet’s feigned madness is thus: “Love! His affections do not that way tend; /Nor what he spake, though it lack’d form little, /Was not like madness. There’s something in his soul/O’er which his melancholy sits on brood [. . .]” (III.i.164-67). Hereafter all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from the Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982).

⁶ The full context of Jacques’s speech is thus: “I have neither the scholar’s melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician’s, which is fantastical; nor the courtier’s, which is proud; nor the soldier’s, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer’s, which is politic; nor the lady’s, which is nice; nor the lover’s, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, which, by often

rumination, wraps me in a most humorous sadness" (IV.i.10–19). William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Agnes Latham (London: Methuen, 1975).

⁷ Begun in 1620, the *Anatomy* continuously swells and bulges through its five editions during Burton's lifetime; a posthumous edition (1651) includes additions made up to his death in 1640" (Breitenberg 35). Until 1676, the book "went through eight editions" (O'Connell 34).

⁸ It is through writing that Burton is able to "make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease" (D 21).

⁹ O'Connell argues that Burton—as a cure for the melancholy and as the logical conclusion of the design of reform he postulated in his diagnosis of universal madness—"creates his own version of another humanist genre, the utopia" (56). I will call this version of utopian genre a dis-topia or a utopia of disease.

¹⁰ As Burton writes, "About him lay the carcasses of many several beasts, newly by him cut up and anatomized; not that he did contemn God's creatures, as he told Hippocrates, but to find out the seat of this *atra bilis*, or melancholy, whence it proceeds, and how it was engendered in men's bodies, to the intent he might better cure it in himself, and by his writings and observations teach others how to prevent and avoid it" (D 20).

¹¹ urton further explains the advantage of the mask: "If I have overshot myself in this which hath been hitherto said, or that it is, which I am sure some will object, too phantastical, 'too light and comical for a divine, too satirical for one of my profession,' I will presume to answer, with Erasmus in like case, 'Tis not I, but Democritus, *Democritus dixit*: you must consider what it is to speak in one's own or another's person, an assumed habit and a name [. . .]" (D 121).

¹² Burton mentions both Democritus and Heraclitus in "Democritus to the Reader": "Heraclitus the philosopher, out of a serious meditation of men's lives, fell a-weeping, and with continual tears bewailed their misery, madness, and folly. Democritus, on the other hand, burst out a-laughing, their whole life seemed to him so

ridiculous, and he was so far carried with this ironical passion [. . .]" (D 47).

¹³ In another context, Burton uses even wilder and yet equally fascinating rhetoric to describe his "extemporean style": "And for those other faults of barbarism, Doric dialect, extemporean style, tautologies, apish imitation, a rhapsody of rags gathered together from several dung-hills, excrements of authors, toys and fopperies confusedly tumbled out, without art, invention, judgment, wit, learning, harsh, raw, rude, phantastical, absurd, insolent, indiscreet, ill-composed, indigested, vain, scurrile, idle, dull, and dry; I confess all ('tis partly affected), thou canst not think worse of me than I do of myself" (D 26).

¹⁴ As Burton writes, "The tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues, as the chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptoms" (I: 397).

¹⁵ As Burton writes, his purpose is "to ease my mind by writing [. . .] & for that cause [. . .]. I would [. . .] make an Antedote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease" (D 20–21).

¹⁶ O'Connell offers us some concrete facts of Burton's discursive practice: "He frequently speaks a thesaurus of words, spinning out a list that moves from the colloquial to inkhorn. His discourses on a given subject have a similarly inexhaustible quality to them; he can go on for pages of examples, proverbs, quotations, finally interrupting himself but persuading the reader that he could have continued almost indefinitely" (51).

¹⁷ Burton keeps on writing, knowing that he might also crack his head and wit: "Bale, Erasmus, Hospinian, Vives, Kemnisius, explode as a vast ocean of *obs* and *sols*, school divinity. A labyrinth of intricate questions, unprofitable contentions [. . .] [an incredible doting] one calls it. [. . .] Much learning [. . .] hath cracked their sconce" (D 111–12).

¹⁸ In his playful reconstitution of the chain of signification of the *pharmakon* (at once signifying disease and remedy), Jacques Derrida writes: "It partakes of both good and ill, of the agreeable and the disagreeable. Or rather, it is within its mass that these opposites are

able to sketch themselves out" (99). See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 63–117.

¹⁹ As Burton writes, "the most ordinary symptoms be these: [. . .] a beating about the back, which is almost perpetual; the skin is many times rough, squalid, especially, as Arateaus observes, about the arms, knees, and knuckles. The midriff and heart-strings do burn and beat very fearfully, and when this vapour or fume is stirred, flieth upward, the heart itself beats, is sore grieved, and faints [. . .] like fists of the mother" (I: 415).

²⁰ For French feminists such as Irigaray and Cixous, hysteria is an essential site of feminine resistance.

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