A TREATISE ON LOVESICKNESS

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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Galen's diagnosis of amor heros. From a woodcut in Omnia Opera Galeni (Venice, 1546). Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda.
slavery rather than love that emerges, subject always to anger and fighting, in spite of the resemblances of complexion. When the choleric and the sanguine unite, risk is diminished; they are sometimes content and sometimes unhappy. Love between the melancholy and the sanguine creates a healthy and gracious relationship because blood tempers the bad qualities of the melancholy. But if a melancholy person is attached to a choleric one, there is rather a plague than love between them, and they end up, often, in despair, as did Lucretia, Dido, Phylis, and others mentioned above.

I note in the writers on gynecology that there are five very similar diseases that derive from love: the overheating of the matrix, prurient tickling of the matrix, the shameful symptom or distended clitoris, satyriasis and uterine fury [hysteria]. It would be appropriate here to speak of all five, but in order not to be prolix I will discuss only the last two, which are the same in all but certain details. According to Moschion in ch. 128 of his On the Diseases of Women, satyriasis in women (a view Aretaeus denies) is defined as "an itching or tickling of the private parts, accompanied by pain that is caused by an insatiable desire for intercourse: women so afflicted touch these areas with their hands without any sense of shame or bashfulness." This they could not bring themselves to do unless the brain was also affected, because every person of good understanding and a healthy mind is ashamed of all dishonest acts according to the philosophers: "it follows that we are ashamed of all such misdeeds as seem to be disgraceful." But if satyriasis in women affects the brain, in what way does this disease differ from uterine fury? The latter is a raging or madness that comes from an excessive burning desire in the womb, or from a hot intemperature communicated to the brain and to the rest of the body through the channels in the spine, or from the biting vapors arising from the corrupted seed lying stagnant around the uterus. This is the reason such women chatter incessantly and speak about, or like to hear about, sexual matters. They experience strong prurient sensations in the genitals, but without pain, thereby differing from satyriasis, perhaps due to the damage done to the principal faculties of the brain, for as Hippocrates has said: "those persons who have a painful affliction anywhere in the body and are nevertheless insensible of that pain, must also suffer from an intellectual disorder." Because such symptoms are produced by a surfeit of acrid seed and flatulency, they are found only in young girls, widows, or women of a warm temperature who delight in dishonest pastimes and pleasures.
who dine on rich foods, socialize, and think of nothing but satisfying
their sensuality.\textsuperscript{6}

You may read about the nature of this condition in Hippocrates's
tract \textit{On the Diseases of Young Women} where he describes how young
girls on the point of marrying fall into some melancholy madness with
which they are no sooner afflicted but that

\begin{itemize}
  \item the acute inflammation drives them out of their wits, the putrefaction
        makes them homicidal, the blackness of the condition causes frights and
        starts, and the pressure around the heart brings on a desire to strangle
        themselves. The most inward reason, troubled and anguished by the
        corruption of the blood, in turn, becomes perverted.
\end{itemize}

For an appropriate cure he recommends marriage, for otherwise there is
the risk that the woman will, in her madness, hurl herself into a pit or
strangle herself, believing, though in error, that by these means “being
fool-proof and as sure as any” she will put an end to her misery.\textsuperscript{7}
This makes me think that the girls of Milesia were suffering from this malady
who, according to Plutarch,\textsuperscript{8} hung themselves in numbers until it was
ordered that the bodies of those who had so strangled themselves would
remain unburied and would be cast out naked on the dung heaps, seeing
that no other threats and remonstrations would work to deter them
from such suicide.\textsuperscript{9} I would venture the same explanation in the case of
the women of Lyons who threw themselves into wells hoping in that
way to quell their burning lust, just as the pest-ridden of Athens
during the great plague, according to Thucydides and Lucretius, pitched
themselves into rivers or sewers in search of relief from their burning
fevers.\textsuperscript{10}

Clearly, then, there is as much justification for numbering these two
diseases (which in general terms we may call $\phi\kappa\alpha\nu\delta\pi\alpha\nu$ [love for men],
in the terms of Euripides),\textsuperscript{11} among the three kinds of love melancholy
as the priapism or satyriasis in men, even though one of them carries
the name \textit{furor}, seeing that Hippocrates and Galen often use the word
“mania” interchangeably with “melancholy.” They differ from one
another only by degrees, a point already made above, and one that can
be confirmed in Avicenna where he says, in the chapter on melancholy,
“that when melancholy consists of quarreling, brawling, bickering, and
fighting, it changes its name to mania.”\textsuperscript{12} Modern writers subdivide this
condition into five species: madness, rabies, \textit{hydorolcos} or $\lambda\nu\kappa\alpha\nu$ [lycan-
thropic] melancholy, and love—understanding the last to include satyri-
sis and uterine fury.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, I will describe their symptoms and their
cures in conjunction with those of love melancholy and love madness,
referring you for additional information to bk. II, ch. 10, of Mercatus’s
book on the diseases of women; to bk. II and also ch. 10, of Rodericus
\textsuperscript{à Castro who copied from him; to bk. I, ch. 33, of Jean Liébault, and
finally to bk. IV, chs. 9 and 10, of \textit{The Diseases of Women} by the learned
Mercuriale.\textsuperscript{14}}}
troubled by erotic melancholy believe or "imagine they see demons," for he doesn't say that they actually see the evil spirits. And although this disease is caused "by the surfeit of vapors arising from a state of repletion and imperfect concoction that attacks the brain," yet the physicians do not call it incubus or nightmare unless the imagination is also injured (just as in the case of melancholy), a condition that often presages either melancholy or else the falling-sickness. I can attest to having seen in this city of Castelnaudary in Languedoc two young women who insisted that the devil or a magician went to bed with them every night, even with their husbands right there by their sides, whom God has now healed through our remedies, and who now recognize the corruptness of their imaginations and their folly.

According to the teachings of Galen, there can be no doubt that the hot complexion, or the dry and hot, is more inclined to rampant love than all the other complexions and temperatures. From that, I would also infer that these complexions must experience more violent loves, and that by consequence men must be more often and more grievously tormented by this madness than women—who are endowed with a temperature less warm and dry, because nature never creates the female except through a lack of heat, for which reason the Philosopher [Aristotle] calls her the defect and imperfection of nature: "the female appears to be the product of nature's deficiency.

But Galen relates to us a view contrary to that of the philosopher Chrysippus who, without going into his reasoning, teaches that love is a movement of the soul opposing the reason, a view approved by Aristotle and the entire school of medicine. We can conclude, then, that without doubt the woman is more passionate in love and more frantic and rash in her folly than man ("by nature the woman possesses weaker spirits and less courage than the man, and her reasoning is not as strong," says the Father of Medicine) since the woman does not have the rational powers for resisting such strong passions, as Galen says, and which the beautiful Hero confesses to her dear Leander:

I love with an equal fire, but I am not your equal in strength.  
The natural constitution of men is stronger, I imagine.  
While women's bodies are more tender, their minds more slight.

This opinion is confirmed by daily experience which reveals to us a greater number of women witless, maniacal, and frantic from love than men—for men are far less often reduced to such extremities, unless they are effeminate courtiers, nourished on a life of riot and excess and on the breast of courtesans.

Whether love in women is greater and therefore worse than in men
In us desire is weaker and not so frantic:
The manly flame knows a lawful bound.\(^7\)

This view can be further strengthened by reasons out of natural philosophy drawn from the teaching of Aristotle in his works on animals where he shows that nature gave straight intestines without convolutions to all gluttonous and voracious animals such as the wolf and birds of prey, but that she has diversely folded around and artistically interlaced the guts of those for whom it is expedient to be sober and temperate, such as man.\(^8\) From this example we would teach that the same nature "that does nothing that is superfluous or pointless, that chooses what is best for each class of animal"\(^9\) has placed the spermatic vessels in the woman very close together, joining the horns of the uterus—which can be verified by autopsy and anatomical dissection—and that contrariwise in the man she has pushed them a fair distance outside the abdomen, for fear that the principal faculties of the soul, the imagination, the memory, and the judgment, would be too inconvenienced by the sympathy and proximity of these genital parts\(^10\) ("the organs adjoining and common to the affected regions are the first and most grievously affected").\(^11\) Therefore, it is to be judged that the woman experiences more violently this brutal desire, and not unreasonably so, since nature owes her some compensating pleasures for the suffering she endures during pregnancy and childbirth.\(^12\)

If men seem at first more given to incontinency, we should not exempt women from the same desires, who disguise them as much as they can. Their outward features are like the alembic quietly sitting on its tower-like support, covering up the fire. But if you look underneath the alembic and place the hand over the heart of a woman, you will find great charcoal burners in both places.\(^13\)

On the prevention of love and love melancholy

Of primary importance for the prevention of all diseases is the removal of the [offending] disposition of the body, according to Galen, which is nothing other than the interior cause of the illness.\(^1\) But it cannot be uprooted without first banishing the external causes that feed and preserve it. Therefore, he who would undertake to cure or prevent love melancholy must, as the Father of Medicine says, be very well acquainted with the natural constitution of his patient so that he can "employ those remedies proper to the disease, fitted to the nature and age of the patient and to the times and seasons of the year," for otherwise he combats the disease blindly in the manner of the andabatæ.\(^2\)

Because this carnal love makes its attack upon the brain (the divine fortress of Pallas) by the windows of the eyes, you must make sure that no inciting object happens to come into view. You should never make any mention whatever to the patient about when you intend to discharge him, for fear that the same thing will happen to him that Galen describes happening of yore to Menelaus who, deciding to slay his adulterous wife, no sooner saw her white breasts and her neck of snow but the sword fell from his hand, whereupon he kissed her and by such means saw his fury turned into love\(^3\)—although the Scholiast of Stesichorus reports this rather of the soldiers that Menelaus sent to stone Helen.\(^4\) How often it happens that the quarrels of lovers rekindle their love:

The spats of lovers bring renewed affection.\(^5\)

Just as a half-stifled torch flares up again more brightly when it is laid on its side and made to lean downwards however little, so a half stifled love, if it is inclined and bent ever so little toward the beloved, catches flame again.

One word can easily placate a lover's anger.\(^6\)