

**“¿Qué bien lo finges!”: On the Performance of Melancholy and Disability
in *El príncipe melancólico***

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Tensions are running extremely high in the Hungarian court of *El príncipe melancólico*, a *comedia palatina* in three *jornadas*. Initially published in the 1916 *Obras de Lope de Vega publicadas por la Real Academia Española*, it was presumed for some time to have been written by Lope de Vega prior to 1603. The attribution to Lope seems highly unlikely, however, and has essentially been disproven thanks to the careful archival work of José Homero Arjona in particular, along with recent stylometric studies.¹ The opening dramatic clash of the play is the contention between the King’s two sons for the hand of the beautiful *duquesa*, Rosilena. The Prince, who has primogenital advantage over his younger brother, the Infante Leonido, wants to marry Rosilena and is not willing to suffer any impediments to his desire. Yet Rosilena is already in a loving, reciprocal relationship with Leonido, and is entirely uninterested in anyone else. Thus, when the titular “melancholic” prince’s plans to marry Rosilena are hampered, he decides to fabricate multiple episodes of extreme melancholy as part of a manipulative strategy to obtain what he desires.

Since the Prince interprets not getting what he wants as a tremendous political and personal affront, he feels entirely justified to carry out what amounts to a “disability imposture” or a “disability con” (Samuels, 18; Row-Heyveld 2018, 1-3)—that is, an elaborate, fraudulent ploy in which he simulates madness and melancholy and counterfeits disability for vainglorious and manipulative ends. While I am foregrounding the Prince’s intentional counterfeit of disability, which is the issue most centered in critical approaches to the play, I concur strongly with Christine Orobítz (1997; 1998) and María del Pilar Chouza-Calo (2020; 2023) that the Prince seems to also experience “real” melancholia as well. To give just one example, although the play passes quickly over the important convergence of the Prince’s fictional performance and his “real” experience, at key moments in which said counterfeit is encouraged by others, he is asked to enact some of the very symptoms of melancholia—from anger and madness to immense fatigue—that he already complains about or references in asides. As such, building from Lindsey Row-Heyveld’s identification of “characters that fake disability” (2018, 1-2), I view the Prince as a performing, “dissembling” character. He fakes melancholy, but also experiences nearly every melancholic symptom; he suffers from bouts of melancholy, its attendant ailments, and additional conditions throughout the entire play, and *also* deliberately fakes disability at strategic points of the play’s intrigue.

Drawing from Stephen Fjellman’s work in the field of cultural studies, in *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*, Ellen Samuels suggests productive taxonomies that can abet an understanding of the competing factors that come to a head in a “disability con” (68-9). Most pertinent for the present discussion are: the “*fake fake*,” which is the “nondisabled actor, on stage or film, who performs disability with the audience’s knowledge that it is a performance”; the “*fake real*,” “the disabled person who deliberately shapes the performance of her disability”; and the “*real fake*,” or “the disability con: the masquerade of a nondisabled person who deceptively and deliberately performs disability, often for material gain” (69-70). Compellingly, depending on the

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¹ See Arjona, 1956; Morely and Bruerton (150), also cited by Arjona; and, more recently, the excellent clarifications that Germán Vega García-Luengos and Álvaro Cuéllar offer with their digital resources *Estilometría aplicada al Teatro del Siglo de Oro* and *Textos del Siglo de Oro*.

prism through which he is seen, the melancholic Prince and his elaborate performances of melancholy conflate and blur the exigencies of each category,² though classification admittedly bears its own limits and challenges as regards disability, in particular (Davis, 56-57; Garland-Thomson 2017, 9). And certainly, as numerous disability theorists have sustained, disability and non-normativity exist on a continuum, with the “extremely contingent nature of disability itself” (Samuels, 58) often obfuscating and preventing easy classification and identification.³

As Rosemarie Garland Thomson posits in her groundbreaking *Extraordinary Bodies*, “[d]isability confounds any notion of a generalizable, stable physical subject (2017, 13). While “disability” has sometimes been regarded as an anachronistic term to attribute to the Early Modern context in which *El príncipe melancólico* operates, and to premodern discussions of bodily and intellectual variance more broadly, what we presently call “disability” is nonetheless centered in the play, even if it was not fully operational as a terminological classification at the time of composition.⁴ As Allison Hobgood acknowledges in an excellent study of *Julius Caesar*, “disability’s shifting terms and conditions in this period did not follow a tidy, teleological trajectory.”⁵ Similarly, Hobgood and David Houston Wood note in “Early Modern Literature and Disability Studies” that during the Early Modern period, “diverse kinds of non-normativity were identifiable upon a continuum ranging from welcome exception to notable deficiency to radical deviancy” (34-35). Thus, particularly given: the fluidity of temporal and identitary categories; melancholy’s intersection with various taxonomies of difference (López González, 2-3; Orobítg, 1998; Atienza)⁶; and a “perceptible” increase in medicalizing language from the late medieval period on (Singer 2011, 7), it becomes clear that the Prince’s decision to counterfeit melancholy is abetted by the ambiguity and interrelatedness of the categories of difference that he enacts. His simulation itself, and the upheaval he intends for his performance to trigger, therefore, hinge precisely on preponderant Early Modern understandings of impairment, mental illness, and human variability that disability-informed approaches can help untangle.

Following scholars such as Hobgood, Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, Irina Metzler, Julie Singer, and Lindsey Row-Heyveld, all of whom have argued for a certain lexical flexibility in assessing premodern disability, I use both “disability” and “melancholy” somewhat interchangeably in my discussion of *El príncipe melancólico*, while recognizing their differences. I also employ the terms flexibly, while acknowledging that their “slippery categorization” (Hobgood; Juárez-Almendros, 5-10), and long and intersected histories exceed the scope of the present essay. Instead, this essay first considers how melancholy dovetails with the “counterfeit-disability” tradition (Row-Heyveld, 2018, 2-3),⁷ theatrical manipulation, and the titular character’s performance of melancholy.

² While Samuels’s focus is the relationship between actor and audience, these delineations can also be applied within a given text, with the audience being replaced by the text’s internal spectators.

³ In their introduction to *A Cultural History of Disability in the Renaissance*, Susan Anderson and Liam Haydon point to the classificatory difficulty surrounding the term “disability”: “Disability is a categorization of human difference that is both highly historically specific and trans-historically observable. It is both socially constructed and rooted in the physical conditions of the real. The challenge for historical disability studies, therefore, is to maintain a stable object of inquiry while also doing justice to the unavoidable alterity of its manifestations in the past” (1). See also Davis (57).

⁴ On how disability was “not an operative category before the eighteenth century” (57), see Davis. See also Metzler (2006, 4-5, 9). Clark also offers a keen breakdown of the discursive tractability of “defecto,” which follows a similar trajectory as do terms like “disability,” “impairment,” and “illness” (103-5).

⁵ Hobgood’s essay, “Caesar Hath the Falling Sickness: The Legibility of Early Modern Disability in Shakespearean Drama,” is published online in *DSQ* without pagination.

⁶ On melancholy’s “overdetermined status, its possession of a sematic excess that is not only capacious but often contradictory,” see Johnson (50); and Orobítg (1998, 269-73). See also Atienza on the “compleja naturaleza” of the “afección contradictoria” that melancholy is (106); and Lyons on melancholy “as an all-embracing word for illness in the Renaissance” (2, 26).

⁷ I find all of Row-Heyveld’s work rigorous and persuasive, and appreciate her signaling of a preponderance of “characters that fake disability”; however, I take exception to the claim that “relatively few genuinely disabled characters appear in early modern drama” (2018, 2, 1).

Then, as “the ailing body can be a charged political site” (Healy, 3), this essay turns to political insolvency as circumscribed by the pervasiveness of melancholic symptoms that are perhaps unexpectedly exhibited by nearly all of *El príncipe melancólico*’s other characters as well, and especially by those in positions of authority.

“Counterfeit Disability” and the Melancholic Theater

The Prince’s performance of feigned melancholy is in line with what Row-Heyveld helpfully identifies in *Dissembling Disability in Early Modern English Drama* as the “counterfeit-disability tradition,” which “amplified suspicion about the authenticity of the non-standard body” (2018, 2). A hugely popular trend across various literary genres, it was especially popular on the Early Modern stage, and the numerous Early Modern plays that exploit the harmful “disability con” stereotype or fit within the trope, range wildly in genre, style, and content (Hobgood, Row-Heyveld 2018, 4). Of these, *El príncipe melancólico* is rather exceptional in that it features a wealthy, royal protagonist who is unambiguous about his exploitative performance of impairment.⁸ While “feigned disability” is often theatrically angled to capitalize on “cultural prejudice about appeals for charitable aid” (Williams, 8),⁹ the prince differs from other “counterfeit cranks” (Hobgood). Certainly, the threat of his brother’s supplantation of his authority notwithstanding, the Prince’s noble station frees him from banal monetary concerns; additionally, he is unequivocal and unabashed in acknowledging his counterfeit to select interlocutors, and fully reveals it to others when he deems the time right. Furthermore, given that the Prince feels that his privilege and rank are not being granted the authority they are due, he believes his manipulation to not only be appropriate, but strategic and politically-savvy *in addition* to offering a means by which an unpardonable personal affront can be rectified. Yet the Prince does remain slightly ambiguous about how he experiences melancholy and how he expects his performance to be perceived by others, for he conflates melancholy’s positive and problematic attributes. He anticipates primarily negative reactions, but contents himself with the idea that however his illness is perceived, he can angle it to his advantage, and thus, his counterfeit of melancholy takes on “una rentabilidad dramática considerable” throughout the entirety of the play (Chouza-Calo 2023, 85).

Orchestrating a metatheatrical performance that brings political, theoretical, medical, social, and moral understandings of melancholy to a head in an escalating portrayal of disability and ailment, the lengths the Prince goes to in dissembling melancholy are therefore tactically managed to force the dramatic reactions of other characters, exploiting his perceived infirmity to unscrupulous, self-satisfying ends. His ambition is to manipulate others into catering to his desires, yet he is less concerned with *how* others react than *that* they react. Tacitly insisting upon the theatricality necessary for his forged melancholy to be successful, and emphasizing how melancholy and disability become “a stage semiotic for theatrical conventions” (Williams, 4), the Prince relies upon his spectators’ varied responses (Lopez, 37-38, 133; West, 151-53; Williams, 24; Paredes Ocampo, 155). He anticipates that they might view his melancholy with wonderment and surprise, considering it the result of divine intervention—either as a positive sign of the miraculous or wonderful, or as a negative indication of punishment, questionable morality, and sin in accordance with the religious

⁸ See Hobgood, on the “challenge of discovering crank disability” as represented in the 1566 *A Caveat for Common Cursetors*, as well as Row-Heyveld’s discussion of this work and attendant class disparities that fueled the association of beggars with “feigned disability” (2018, 3). See also van Elk’s work on vagrancy and rogue literature (121-23, also referenced in Row-Heyveld); on poverty, see Cruz (ix-xi) and Atienza (13).

⁹ Williams is deftly parsing Row-Heyveld, who discusses the “fear of counterfeit disability” that “served as the primary justification for the increasing institutionalization of poor relief throughout the period” in the Early Modern English context that *Dissembling Disability* analyzes (2018, 1-35, at 3). On the complex context surrounding disability “masquerade[s],” see Siebers (2008, 96; 2004), as well as Schweik, on “disability fakers” and “‘sham cripple’ narratives” that occasioned a “tension between languages of care and languages of criminality, and a conflict about authenticity” (111, 132-33). See also Samuels (66-71).

model of disability (Wheatley, 2018, 18-19; Paré, 803).¹⁰ They might respond with fear and worry about his mounting volatility and wrath, and they might also respond with pragmatic concerns about how his melancholy impacts national health and political strength, especially given the assignments of ineptitude, unreliability, illicitness, and other problematic attributions that are often foisted upon premodern disabled bodies in an attempt to disqualify them—concerns that mount even more when said body is in a position of leadership, for example (Domínguez, 2018, 286-87; Orobítz, 1998, 270-74; Kantorowicz, 4-5).¹¹

In her work on the “discursive flexibility” of disability in *Julius Caesar*, Hobgood persuasively signals the “muddled signification as divine, pathological, wondrous, intemperate, heroic, and depraved” that coalesce around the epileptic body.¹² Purposefully drawing from the “muddled signification” and “discursive malleability” that similarly surround disability and the premodern melancholic “bodymind” (Price, 268), in the *Príncipe melancólico*, the Prince is conniving and deceitful in his performance of melancholy. He enacts symptoms such as disorientation, paranoia, extreme lethargy, tremendous rage, and claims that he is bicephalous or invisible, and that he experiences supernatural and infernal visions.¹³ His scheme is that by feigning impairment he can force a heightened concern for his emotional, psychic, bodily, and even spiritual health that will help authorize his union with the Duchess. Finally, eliciting sympathetic investments, pity, and tapping into political concerns and moral quandaries along with an array of horrified, repulsed, and scandalized responses, the Prince’s “enfermedad fingida” is also intended to redouble the spectacular affective reaction of the characters scrutinizing his behavior in the response of audience members as well (Chouza-Calo, 2023, 80).¹⁴

Largely disregarding the problems of belief subsumed within the common Early Modern association of disability and distrust, and performed disability with skepticism concerning the “authenticity of symptoms” (Turner, also quoted in Row-Heyveld, 2018, at 5)—all of which were explicitly dramatized in the “counterfeit disability tradition”—the Prince relies on the reports and assistance of others to help him be maximally convincing about his melancholic condition. Relating the wellness of his body and mind with political wellness in a dramatic negotiation of the primary tenets of the premodern body politic, in which the fitness of the sovereign informs the salubrity of the state,¹⁵ he presumes that others will be politically and emotionally committed to lifting his melancholy to restore calm to the kingdom as well. He is sure that his family, courtiers, and countrymen will be so beset with worry for his health they will comply with any of his wishes to help alleviate his suffering.

As he ultimately explains to Rosilena, for instance, revealing his calculating aims as he manipulatively situates her as cause and catalyst of his poor behavior, she is the person for whom he has gone to such extremes:

¹⁰ In his 1585 *Livre des Monstres & Prodiges*, Ambroise Paré cites the “causes des monstres” [causes of monsters] as many, but due firstly to “la gloire de Dieu” [the glory of God] and secondly, “à son ire” [to his wrath] (802).

¹¹ In a perspicacious article on medicine and politics in the *Quijote*, Julia Domínguez meticulously parses “el marco ideológico entre el cuerpo humano y el cuerpo social y la conexión con la normatividad social”—a “marco” also relevant to the sociopolitical investments of *El príncipe melancólico* (2018, 286).

¹² Additionally, see Williams on “moments of disabling” in *Julius Caesar* that present a type of “embedded formal crux through which to explicate the theatrical, historical, and cultural meanings with which disability is freighted” (4-5).

¹³ Regarding melancholy’s varied manifestations, see Alonso de Santa Cruz’s *Sobre la melancolía* (circa 1569), Juan Huarte de San Juan’s 1575 *Examen de los ingenios para las ciencias*, Andrés Velásquez’s 1585 *Libro de la melancolia*, Timothie Bright’s 1586 *A Treatise of Melancolie*, Miguel Sabuco’s 1587 *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre*, and Richard Burton’s 1621 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, among others.

¹⁴ Row-Heyveld makes the case for the pivotal function that the theatrical “counterfeit-disability tradition” grants to audience engagement and response, and to the keen attention that necessarily falls not so much “on the performance of disability, but, instead, on the reception of that performance” (2018, 2, 39). See Baines (279), also quoted in Row-Heyveld (2018, at 44); Williams (34-35); and Garland-Thomson (2005).

¹⁵ For prime discussions of this analogy, see sources such as Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, Hobbes’s *De cive* (1642) and *Leviathan* (1651) in particular. See also Kantorowicz, Harris, Elliott (48-50), and Barona (175-78).

¿Eras tú la que antes eras,
 por quien fingí estos enredos,
 que causaron tantos miedos
 a mi padre mis quimeras? (III.2690-93)

Stupefied that he would take such drastic action, and interrogating the very connotative underpinnings of melancholy itself, when Rosilena asks if it has all just been a joke (“¿Cómo? Que de burla ha sido/ lo que es la melancolía?” [III.2593-94]), the Prince repeats his performative objective: “[...] por vida tuya y mía,/ todo ha sido fingido” (III.2595-96). Brazenly, he then reiterates his motives once again, situating his dramatic performance of melancholy as a mawkish remedy for the impediments that stand between him and marriage to Rosilena:

Que todo aquello fingí,
porque así te me entregasen
 y contigo me casasen,
 como te lo digo a ti. (III.2597-2600, emphasis mine)

While Rosilena is the etiology of the Prince’s suffering, and therefore his melancholy, his melancholy itself becomes causal as he is sure that his fabricated emotional extremes will become the performative spur to garner him what he wants, setting off a chain of events more favorable to his desires. In the final lines of the play, he admits his pointed stratagem again, this time in a public declaration to the King:

[...] decirlo no me pesa.
 Digo que es pura verdad,
 que cuanto hice fingía,
 porque atraerte quería,
 señor, a mi voluntad. (III.3140-3144)

As he explains, his aim in intentionally enacting melancholy and madness was to be convincing enough in his role to impel others to prioritize his well-being, and consequently, his “voluntad.”

Putting aside the ambiguity surrounding the Prince’s manifestations of illness, and the emotional imbalance that at times he seems to organically exhibit (Orobitg, 1998, 274; Chouza-Calo, 2023, 91), the Prince gives various directives regarding theatrical execution. He also uses words such as “entablar,” “enlabiar,” “traza,” and, as if he were blithely joking about the travails of being a hired company actor (McKendrick, 184-91), he twice complains that the “oficio de fingir” has left him “ya muy cansado” and “muy acosado” (II.1092, III.1960-61). This underscores the artificiality and metatheatricality of his dissimulation while conflating his performance with his “real” corporeal response (Chouza-Calo, 2023, 80, 85; Orobitg, 269-72).

Because of his station in the Hungarian court and proximity to the King, the Prince’s elaborate “disability con” thus also pointedly brings to the fore political anxieties around the question of leadership. To take a few well-known examples from the Shakespearean canon that similarly showcase how political anxieties hover in and around disabled political leaders, we have Titus’s unquittable grief, sustained distractedness, and later counterfeited madness.¹⁶ We also have the extreme “imbalance” that Richard III embodies as a tyrant, with his “physical deformity [...] both the stigma and the stigmatizing force” (Anderson, 145); and the “falling sickness” and bleeding that

¹⁶ On the “performance of madness,” and the relationship between disability and ability in *Titus Andronicus*, see especially Row-Heyveld (2018, 40; 2013, 77), and Rowe (1994, 296-300).

dramatically overtake Caesar in *Julius Caesar* (1.2.252-53; Booth, 72-83).¹⁷ We might also consider Othello's fainting and the various diagnoses that he receives following his trances and falls (Neill, 114-5; Booth 84-91); Lear's madness, stuttering, instability, and the play's focus on "disabled knowledge" (Row-Heyveld, 2019, 157; Neely, 321-23); and the confusion, suspicions, delirious visions, and "apparitions of sovereignty" to which Macbeth increasingly becomes susceptible (Campana, 811). Much like these exemplars, the Prince's dramatic performance of melancholy is explicitly situated along what Katherine Schapp Williams has aptly termed "a trajectory of disqualification" (2). His "infirm" body and mind trouble the desired haleness and solidity of the idealized integral political body. Albeit slightly less explicitly, these issues and the fitness expected of political leaders, are similarly dramatized in plays such as Lope's *El perro del hortelano*, Vélez de Guevara's *Virtudes vencen señales*, Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, and numerous others in which perceptible vulnerability—feigned or otherwise—directly fuels corporeal assessments that attempt to disqualify the body by designating it unreliable, threatening, and incapacitated, and therefore unfit.¹⁸

In *El príncipe melancólico*, of course the Prince is not sovereign, which renders the association of his health with that of the state slightly less problematic, and more of an anticipatory projection that is dependent upon the King's passing. That said, a King is indeed "present" and portrayed as a "living" character in the play. However, his relative distance from governmental matters, his continually anticipated absence, his metaphorical and political incapacitation, and the play's greater concern with his son's health offer a negative commentary on his vigor as potentate, while also shedding light on melancholy's determinative role in political matters, writ large (Atienza, 139).¹⁹ Charting a relationality that persuasively suggests a potential genetic, familial, or environmental transmission of melancholy, the King's questionable fitness and strength consequently put additional pressure on the Prince's health status as direct successor to the throne.²⁰ And yet, a "mad" Prince's ability to rule, especially when he claims to suffer so greatly from melancholy that he is fatally depressed, becomes further problematized by the fraught connection between the integrity of the human "bodymind" and the integrity of the state (Price, 269-70).²¹ This correspondence between the insalubrity of *various* members of the royal family brings two primary and interrelated issues to the fore. One, given how the play's main characters are all concerned with "political fitness" that "wholeness is an aristocratic, not just royal, fantasy" (Jagendorf, 462). And two, that the numerous corporeal, emotional and psychic ailments afflicting various members of *El príncipe melancólico*'s royal family offer larger critiques of the political instability of the Hungarian court while also showcasing a widely-wrought range of melancholic experiences that far exceed what the typical critical prioritization of the play's titular character reveals.

Returning to the conflictual amorous drama, even if the Prince's intentions with Rosilena were not preemptively exacerbated by fraternal competition, his feelings for her are not nearly so genuine as his younger brother's. Rather, the Prince's plans are primarily based on greed, his acute preoccupation with hierarchies, and a pressing desire to uphold and increase the "honor" and power to which he believes he has utmost right as direct successor to the throne. Fixated on his status and amorous objectives, the Prince insists upon the importance of his primogenital advantage while giving no regard to the wishes and desires of any of the play's other characters. To wit, in his first on-stage appearances, he claims to have no knowledge of the deeper—and, most problematic to him

¹⁷ See Hobgood on how Caesar's performance of epilepsy confounds "the ableist demand for control over the non-standard body" (2009). See also Kahn (1997); Paster (1989, 286-89); Turner, and Row-Heyveld (2018, 5).

¹⁸ For a curated list of plays that represent counterfeit-disability in the English tradition, see Row-Heyveld's "Appendix" in *Dissembling Disability* (2018, 229-34).

¹⁹ Paredes Ocampo addresses the "political panorama of Lope's time (153-54); Domínguez contextualizes the important connections between political governance, medicine, and the body (2018, 266-87).

²⁰ On fitness, vulnerability, and "the critical concept *misfit*," see Garland-Thomson (2011).

²¹ See also Schalk and Clare, who clarify the "shifting, contentious, and contextual boundaries between disability and ability" (Schalk, 6) and parse the "inextricable relationships between our bodies and our minds" and cure-forward ideologies overly invested in separating the two (Clare, xvi).

personally—*reciprocal* relationship between the Infante and Rosilena. While the Prince is immediately incensed that Leonido should have the audacity to challenge his plans for marriage since he believes Rosilena should “belong” to him,²² the thought of a pre-existing relationship between her and his brother enrages the Prince even further. With his pride deeply wounded by Rosilena’s unequivocal rejection of him (“¿Qué? ¿ya te soy enfadoso? /.../¿Tan malo soy para esposo?” [I.555, 558]), he becomes infuriated that Leonido’s desires should have greater purchase than his own. He then becomes more enflamed still by the fact that his younger, lower-ranked brother has managed to obtain what he himself desires and what he believes he is owed given his power, birthright, and privilege.

And so, dramatically opening *in medias res*, the play commences with this fraternal contention having just come to a head, and precisely as the dispute between the King’s two sons has been discovered:

¿Voces, y en tal ocasión,
y en tan secreto lugar?
Al rey tengo de avisar;
esta, sin duda, es quisión. (I.1-4)

Simultaneously highlighting their disruptiveness and the King’s absence, the Principe and Infante tumble onstage in a full brawl before any type of order can be regained. In this first scene, it is Fabio, the *criado del príncipe*, who rushes off to inform the King of his sons’ quarrel. Situated not only as a disruptive event, but one that is clandestine, illicit, and a clear infringement of courtly protocol, the commotion the brothers create does more than simply bring chaos to the court. Even more egregiously than mayhem and confusion, the fraternal scission ultimately poses a direct threat to the throne, as Fabio’s qualms reveal. In the second *jornada* the Prince first broods, “A ti hincó la rodilla./ (¿Quién te hincara un puñal!)” (II.953-54), before his anger climaxes to the explicit threat “¡Vive Dios, que he de matarte/ y cual traidor castigarte!” (III.3102-3) in the play’s final scene. Surely, although Leonido initially claims that he does not wish to harm his brother (“esta espada no corta/ para ti, que eres mi hermano” [I.47-48]), through his ominous warnings about defenestration, and private and political failure (“la casa se viene abajo;/ guárdate de la ventana/ no caiga” [I.153-55]), he makes subsequent threats that target both the Prince’s life, and “el reino mismo” (Marion-Andrès). Thus, with their animosity, tactics of intimidation, mutual threats and mutual suspicion, weapons exposed at court, and language that reveals fratricidal ideation, the violent exchanges of the King’s two sons have darker political implications.

Certainly, the sons’ hostile behavior, the courtly backdrop of their discord that puts them “en constante oposición al código aristocrático” (Marion-Andrès), and their talk of daggers, revenge, and threats of future harm, might well evoke the fraught relationship between Carlos, Prince of Asturias (1545-1568) and his *hermanastro* (Atienza, 103-06).²³ Their conflict also evokes civil war and the historical mutinous attack of Enrique II de Castilla (1334-1379) upon Pedro I de Castilla (1334-1369). Aptly nicknamed “el Fratricida,” as *hermano bastardo* to King Pedro, who was often represented as a melancholic in his own right,²⁴ Enrique de Trastámara’s direct involvement in his

²² She is a “prenda” (I.173) and “el premio que interesa” (I.12).

²³ Despite *El príncipe melancólico*’s prevalently comic treatment of melancholy (Soufas, 1990, 7-9; Marion-Andrès), the play also makes serious commentaries about perceptions of premodern disability, and the connection between illness and national strength (Johnson, 49). It also obliquely addresses historical events through the filter of the perceived melancholy of political leaders like Felipe II, who “was commonly defined as a melancholic” (Paredes Ocampo, 167), Felipe III (Atienza, 102-6), and Carlos, Felipe II’s son, “otro de los más notorios enfermos de la melancolía en la corte de los Austrias” (Atienza, 103), who, both prior to and after receiving a significant head injury, frequently experienced delusions, was of a mercurial, violent temperament, and often spurned food, much like *El príncipe*’s melancholic prince.

²⁴ Here we might consider the exceedingly melancholic King Pedro that Calderón depicts in his 1637 *El Médico de su honra*. Calderón’s king is “afflicted with hallucinations and plagued by fear and anxiety”; he is suspicious and jealous in

brother's death was a significant event frequently brought to the dramatic stage of 16th and 17th century *comedias* (Valdeón Baruque, 459-63; Rebelo, 21-22; Soufas, 1984, 192).²⁵

In light of this historical clash, it bears underscoring, for example, that when the title character enters upon the scene in *El príncipe melancólico*, he has his “espada desnuda” (*acotaciones*), which immediately heightens the dramaticity of the play's opening moments, while also foregrounding his unorthodox behavior. As the first-born son and immediate successor of the King, the Prince's unchivalrous response to provocation challenges his political fitness, both via the threat his brother poses and the implied future repercussions of their fraternal dispute, and his unprincely, imprudent response to conflict. Certainly, “fitness for the throne”—or perhaps “fitness” more broadly conceived—is the very issue that underlies all of *El príncipe melancólico*'s dramatic action. It is emphasized in the play's opening scene, through the telling absence of the King during his quarreling sons' attempts to harm one another. It is also the focus of later evaluations of the Prince's madness and melancholy as legitimate symptoms of impairment that encumber rationality and hinder the ability to rule. Particularly during a period in which didactic tools such as conduct manuals and *speculum principum* literature offering propaedeutic advice proliferated—as in the case of Antonio de Guevara's 1529 *Relox de los principes*, to give but one example—one's political aptitude, acumen, and fitness also tellingly broached larger questions about the thorny distinction between genuine suffering and troubling political behavior, and the difficulties of diagnosis and the occasionally performative symptomology of disease.²⁶ Similarly, the problem of “fitness” in performative and medicalized contexts simultaneously suggests the theatrical concerns of verisimilitude and credibility, performativity and dramatic legerdemains in the dissimulation and manifestation of illness.

The grave political implications of *El príncipe melancólico*'s fraternal row only intensify when Leonido wins in the game of love over his brother. Refusing to believe that Rosilena prefers Leonido, the Prince is incredulous and hostile, making his brother corroborate his relationship with the Duchess time and again, while rejecting the confirmations he is given: “No te ensorbezas tanto,/ que no por ser tú te admite” (I.107-108). By continuing to “probe” and “investigate” an issue that is clear and confirmed, the Prince's “impertinence” borrows the grave undertones and fatalistic, uxoricidal language of fidelity tests,²⁷ while displaying additional melancholic symptoms related to suspicions and doubt. Leonido makes sure to insist upon the magnitude of the situation a final time,

accordance with Burtonian descriptions of melancholy; he creeps around in the darkness and appears to “suffer from melancholy insomnia”; he suffers greatly after “a suspicious, melancholy vision of death” that distracts him from his royal duties (Soufas, 1984, 195), for instance.

²⁵ Of especial note, among many others, are Lope's “eight King Pedro plays” (Exum, 432, n.1), of which, *La niña de plata*, *El rey don Pedro en Madrid y el infanzón de Illescas*, *Audiencias del rey don Pedro*, and *El médico de su honra*, stand out in particular, as well as Calderón's *El médico de su honra*, Luis Vélez de Guevara's, *Más pesa el rey que la sangre y blazon de los Guzmanes*, and many of Alarcón's works. On this rich theatrical legacy and the controversies surrounding portrayals of King Pedro, see Casadero; Fox (28-29); Lomba de la Pedraja (279); and Watson (326); on King Pedro in Alarcón, see Gilmour.

²⁶ Recalling Michel de Montaigne, who, in essays like “De la force de l'imagination” and “De ne contrefaire un malade,” insisted upon the dramatic transmissibility of the signs of illness as well as the contagious role that imagination plays in generating impairment, Row-Heyveld discusses illness and performativity in the context of “medical authorities” who thought that “madness could be called by simply pretending to be mad and could be cured by similarly theatrical means” (2013, 75).

²⁷ On this inability to be satisfied with concrete proof, we might think of Cervantes's “Curioso impertinente,” wherein the protagonist Anselmo's fatal persistence leads him to directly to what he does not wish to find, with the “dolor que le causó su curiosidad impertinente” (I.35) ultimately killing him. This is also akin to the vain pursuit of “proof” and relentless attempts to eradicate every possibility of doubt frequently staged in the uxorial tests of epic literature and wife-murder plays. Suffering from the deleterious effects of the melancholic imagination, “[b]asta imaginarlo” laments Gutierre, Calderón's suspicious and ailing “médico de [su] honra” (III.39, II.851). “[L]ed to erroneous beliefs by his melancholy” (Soufas, 1984, 194), Gutierre's “pathological obsession with the notion that his honour is sick” makes his wife the innocent “victim of a wrong diagnosis” (McKendrick, 148); see also Carrión (85-88), and Amezcua (89-92).

by assertively “translat[ing]” Rosilena’s rebuke of the Prince in politically-significant terms that the Prince should understand:

No vale, príncipe, aquí
tu grandeza y rico estado,
porque no es interesado
lo que se hace por mí. (I.149-52)

Dispelling the importance his brother grants to hierarchies, Leonido casts his lower rank as directly advantageous to his relationship with Rosilena. Surely, his relative “baseness” in comparison to his elder brother, confirms that the Duchess loves him genuinely even when he does not have the same power and prestige that the Prince can flaunt. With this, Leonido finally disabuses the Prince: “pues ya llegó el desengaño/ que tan ciego te tenía” (I.159-160).

A Performative Body Politic: Political “Fitness,” the “Disability Con,” and the “Head” of State

Constituting the body of the play, what follows the confirmation of Leonido’s advantage in love, is the Prince’s exploitative performance of melancholy, his “disability con” (Stone 23; Samuels, 18-19; Row-Heyveld, 2018, 38-39).²⁸ After first sulking about not being in a relationship with Rosilena, “pues que la merezco,/ que a la pena que padezco/ no hay recompensa más plena” (I.528-530) and using a rhetoric that emphasizes his suffering while reifying her, the Prince unsuccessfully attempts to intimidate Rosilena by threatening to kill Leonido if she does not cede to his advances:

Si yo le diera la muerte
al infante, me enemigo,
yo sé que blanda estuvieras
y que me favorecieras
y estuvieras bien conmigo. (I.562-66)

The Prince is confident that his intimidations will not be in vain, but Rosilena’s sense of honor and commitment to Leonido are unimpeachable²⁹:

¿Soy yo de las mujercillas
de poco valor y peso
que tú, cual mozo travieso,
por mí al infante acuchillas? (I.575-78)

Pre-emptively blaming her for the death of the Infante by grammatically foisting responsibility for his death upon her, the Prince then redoubles his threats: “Pues yo *te* le mataré,/ por el desdén que me has hecho” (I.579-80, emphasis mine). Yet Rosilena remains just as unmoved as she was before: “No le echarás de mi pecho,/ porque, aun muerto, le amaré” (I.581-82).

²⁸ On the “disability con” in other contexts, see Samuels (19, 51-62, especially). On the “social expectation” to provide proof of one’s disability and “overcompensate in public” due to ableism and the ways disability is habitually overlooked, see Siebers (2008, 107-9). See also Row-Heyveld (2018, 18), and Garland-Thomson 2011, 596-99).

²⁹ In many regards, Rosilena is a paragon of female constancy, as her protofeminist repudiation of the Prince’s manipulative strategy in this scene suggests. She is entirely committed to Leonido, although her propensity to joke about her fidelity or entertain conversations about how she has *not* been faithful—even going so far as to claim she is pregnant by the Count—serve to heighten and somewhat validate the male insecurities represented in the play and the dramatic tensions surrounding her agency, fidelity, and honor.

Not only do Rosilena's solidity, faithfulness, and profeminist invective embarrass the Prince, he is additionally mortified when his wheedling for her affections and threats against his brother's life are overheard by the King.³⁰ With the Prince's vility thereby exposed, the King is newly—and rarely—unequivocal and firm in his assessment of his first-born as a “descomedido rapaz.” “Desvergonzado, atrevido,” “indigno y incapaz,” the Prince has provided his father with enough reason to fully support Leonido's plans to marry the Duchess, and the King claims that it is his “gusto” to do so (I.615-18). Categorizing the Prince as a “loco” whose head is full of contrary winds that metaphorize his imbalance,³¹ the King then gives the Prince the embarrassing order to repair to his room,³² while requesting of the Infante that he delay marriage and promise to “no aceptar casamiento” (I.650) until he first sanctions it. The Infante “agrees” to the King's conditions, already machinating ways to circumvent this impediment to his intentions,³³ while the Prince, routed and furious, skulks away.

Demonstrating how his intentions are not only arbitrary, but often realized solely for his own entertainment, to the point of being rather cruel, Leonido is already plotting devious ways to manipulate the situation so that he can marry Rosilena when he likes: “[...] es un gallardo cuento/ el que hacer agora intento,/ y te has de morir de risa” (I.752-54), he says to the Count. His stratagems continue with his purposeful building of suspense for no ostensible reason. In fact, he intentionally shirks the Count's pointed inquiries: “¿Para qué es esa premisa?” “¿Qué es lo que piensas hacer?” and “¿Piensas casarte en las nubes?” (I.751, 756, 758) in a ploy to garner additional attention through deferral and delay: “Ha de ser cuento extremado,/ y hasta el fin no lo sabrás” (I.759-60), he quips.

The next time the Prince's behavior comes up in the play, it is introduced through the relayed “concerns” that Fabio narrates. With another discussion that begins *in medias res*, recalling Fabio's opening dilatory role as the relayer of information to the King,³⁴ at the beginning of *jornada II*, Fabio

³⁰ Spotlighting the King's illness and corporeal vulnerability, the weakness of his body is again brought to the fore when his coughing alerts the Prince to his presence: “¿Qué tos es esta?” “Una tos/ que os ha de ahogar a vos” (I.584-85).

³¹ Susceptibility to “wind”—from the “classic melancholic symptoms including wind, pain around the area of the spleen, hypochondria, and even fearful delusions” afflicting scholars and melancholic geniuses to more generalized takes on “the wind colike” or flatulence as prevailing signs of melancholy (Sullivan, 100, 130)—was a frequently cited complaint of melancholic patients. Here, the author of *El príncipe melancólico* suggestively proposes a certain playful overlay of the discomfort suggested by bodily winds and corporeal melancholy with the atmospheric wind and geohumoral symptoms frequently associated with madness in Early Modern texts. See, for example, Orobítz on air and indigestion (1997, 101-2); as well as “hypochondriacal or windy melancholy” in Burton (1.3.4, 112); and Paracelsus on the fragility of the “geohumoral body,” susceptible to and controlled by “forces like wind, water and the cosmos” (quoted in Hobgood). See also Velásquez's *Libro de la melancolía* on the proximity between melancholy and “locura” (Fol. 57); Huarte (38-40); Arellano (15); Nadeau on “creative activity” and melancholy (46-47); Atienza on the “vocablo ‘loco,’” as informed by Covarrubias (1-16); and Montaigne in his essay “Des coches,” on the discomfiting, corporeally destabilizing ramifications of the “trois sortes de vent” [three types of wind] that humans produce (III.6,113).

³² The “cárcel metafórica” (Marion-Andrès) that the Prince's room represents, recalls the similarly imprisoned Carlos II, while also invoking the traditional melancholic thematics of exile, isolation, and imprisonment in love.

³³ If one gives credence to the longstanding Lopean attribution of the play, the characteristic of taking pleasure in deceit for the sheer entertainment, pleasure, and self-indulgence of deceit could chart a potential link to the Leonido of Lope's *La fianza satisfecha* (≈1612-15), who offers an even more extreme example of deceit for deceit's sake. During another intense familial contention, *La fianza's* Leonido sins “out of the sheer love of sinning” (Rank and Morgan, 38-39). In the opening scene of this play, for instance, Leonido boldly articulates his perverse desires to “afrentar [su] linaje” and “gozar [de]” his sister, no matter their relation, for the “mayor brio” that possessing her will give him (I.4, 3, 9). Horribly, as he explains to *La fianza's gracioso*, “te quiero avisar,/ que no la quiero gozar, porque la tengo afición./[...] sino solo porque quiero/ dár a mi sangre esta afrenta” (I.34-36, 43-43). See Wardropper, on sin and the challenging authorship of the play (201-06).

³⁴ In addition to creating an awareness of the failed hypervigilance that prevails at this court—much like King Pedro's “habit of prowling the city at night to spy and eavesdrop upon the citizens” in *El médico* (Soufas, 1984, 195), Fabio's “dilation” evokes “the multiple senses of opening and informing, discovery and indictment, of bringing forth to ‘show’ something privy or ‘close,’” situating him as a “‘secret’ or ‘privie’ informe[r],” as Patricia Parker has expertly shown in an essay addressing *Othello* (61-62, especially). See Dopico-Black on Pedro's extravagant methods of surveillance (141), and Botelho, on “masculine informational authority” (2-7).

warns that the Prince is in a dramatically altered state.³⁵ Surely, it would hurt the King were he to witness it directly: “Causárate gran dolor/ si le vieses cuál está” [II.765-66]). More than the haughty diffidence the Prince typically shows, Fabio reports that he is vertiginously swinging between affective extremes (Burton, 3.2,110-12; Bright, 111; Soufas 1984, 184), exhibiting a mercurial irritability that he relates back to his unending suffering:

A ratos vocea y grita,
y otros está sosegado,
diciendo que está cargado
de una pena infinita. (II.771-74)

After additional details about how the King’s heavy-handed interference in the Prince’s plans to marry Rosilena caused the Prince an anguish so intense there might be no remedy,³⁶ Fabio then pronounces the play’s first explicit mention of melancholy. He categorizes the Prince’s convoluted ravings about fire and suffering, as the result of his prolific bouts of melancholy:

Y cuando está en más sosiego,
como que se está abrasando,
le verás, mil voces dando,
hablar con el recio fuego.
[...]
Y otras mil melancolías
en que, a ratos, se entretiene. (I.779-82, 795-96)

As the audience at this point of the play would have no specific way of anticipating the Prince’s counterfeit of melancholy, the focalization on the Prince’s behavior both via Fabio’s report of his “strange” emotional alterations and the King’s request that Fabio narrate and expound upon what he has seen only draw additional attention to the Prince’s passionate imbalance.³⁷ Furthermore, not only does the intense, ocular focalization on the Prince situate him as both spectacular and as spectacle (Río Parra, 127-28; Garland-Thomson, 2005; 2006, 174), Fabio’s narration also rhetorically accentuates what is ultimately revealed to be the Prince’s fabrication of melancholy, dramatically communicated first through the *criado*’s asides, and then his own.

Indeed, the Prince’s symptoms are both self-reported and relayed by Fabio and others who are either genuinely concerned for him or willing to facilitate his dissimulation. The story goes that he vacillates dramatically between emotional extremes: he shouts, then is instantaneously quiet; he is first exuberant, then disconsolate or overcome with anger. He is described as speaking to inanimate objects and he apostrophizes fire, enjoining it to consume the entire palace. As if in a parody of the “excessive distemper of heat” from which melancholics suffer (Bright, 111; Huarte, 52-54), he claims to want the edifice, and everyone within, to burn and suffer, just as he does: “Conjúrote, fuego, aquí,/ por la pena que padezco [...]/ que salgas luego abrasando/ todo aqueste real palacio/[...]/ cual a mí me vas quemando” (II.787-88, 791-92, 794). Additionally, in a performative evocation of the “monstrous child” trope, he claims that he is bicephalous.³⁸ This poses a particular

³⁵ On “alteration” and “physiological and psychological” signs of “the self under strain,” see Hampton (272-75); on “strange alterations,” see Bright (3, also quoted in Hobgood and Wood 37).

³⁶ “Señor, a lo que yo entiendo,/ no hay remedio” (II.805-06), Fabio later cautions the King.

³⁷ Like the “inability of Othello, Macbeth and Hamlet to attain humoral control” which brings about “far-reaching consequences that fundamentally alter the political construction of the state” (Streete, 233), the Prince’s passionate responses and “strange alterations” pose an explicitly political threat, even when the King does not fully grasp their grave implications (Bright 3; Hobgood and Wood 37; Hampton).

³⁸ Perceived to be aberrant due to their abilities, skin color, corporeal variance, apparent gender nonconformity, prodigality, miraculous origins, and unusual birth stories, the “monstrous child” trope proliferated in the literature of the

threat to political solvency and integrity while literalizing the contentious fraternal scission of the play, since clashing “heads” of state must “compete” against one another.³⁹ Exploiting notions of prognostication and divine punishment that were frequently attached to exceptional premodern bodies (Paré, 802-08; Montaigne III.11, 245; Hobgood), the Prince rails against the heavens for the “cruzas” that occasioned such bodily difference, moving others to pity and causing his father “infinito dolor” (II.815-20). The Prince becomes violent and enraged if his complaints are disputed, yet his claims of bicephaly also reiterate the political problem that ruling divisively and *dividedly* presents⁴⁰: “¿Cómo ha de poder reinar,” he sardonically asks the King, whom he blames for letting Leonido have too much control and privilege, “tu hijo con dos cabezas?” (II.845-46). Then, in a literal take on the expression “perder la cabeza” (Marion-Andrès), he asserts that he has lost his head, before later being called an “hidra,” the famous mythological monster with seven regenerating heads. Along with the convoluted claim that he has never been seen because he is invisible (II.898), which offers a brief yet mordant take on the “glass delusion” and larger issues of political transparency,⁴¹ he insists that no one can fully “see” his intentions since his suffering has rendered him “casi divino” (II.912) and “un fiero gigante” (II.1076). Likewise, in addition to referring to himself as already dead or existing in hell, he pretends to have visions in which he again critiques the favorable treatment Leonido has unfairly received from the King by mocking his brother, hyperbolically calling him a “paraninfo del Cielo,” and the “semejanza de dios,/[...] beatico y bello” (II.945, 947-48).

In the Prince’s various enactments of dysregulation and illness, he further draws from popular conceptions of melancholy. For instance, much like the alimentary difficulties that wore away the bodies of real melancholics, exacerbating their melancholia (López González, 6; Kallendorf, 112-16, 129-30; Nadeau, 46; Teixeira de Souza, 604), the Prince claims that his emotional hardships prevent him from feeding himself. Following the melancholic example of Carlos of Asturias (Atienza, 145-6),⁴² the literary lore surrounding extreme gauntness and lack of appetite as standard melancholic indicators (Huarte, 54-57), and the unusual alimentary habits of devoted swains afflicted with lovesickness (Vélez-Sainz, 103-4; Orbitig, 1997, 125-30; Valencia

period. Consider the exceptional children said to have been born after prognostications, curses, miracles, and intromissive gestational marvels like Segismundo in *La vida es sueño*, or Filipo and Leda in *Virtudes vencen señales*. See also Paré; Burton’s “Of the Force of Imagination” (3.2.158-62), and Montaigne, in his essays “De la force de l’imagination” (I.21) and “D’un enfant monstrueux” (II.30), which bring together oral and medical traditions in compelling discussions of “monstrous” births and bodily variance, of “early-modern medical specimens to be closely observed and marvels to be read” (Hobgood and Wood, 36).

³⁹ While I take the Prince’s claims of bicephaly as a negotiation of “monstrosity,” the “monstrous child” trope, and the fraternal clash and related political division, Paredes Ocampo offers a compelling reading of the Prince’s “dos cabezas” as a reference to “the two most celebrated types of melancholy”: “lycanthropic and hot,” and “contemplative and cold” (156, 163). See also Chouza-Calo (2023, 83-84).

⁴⁰ As Alfonso X, Machiavelli, Guevara, and others advise, power and control should be concentrated in one individual, though that individual should receive adequate council. In *El príncipe melancólico*, both the Prince and the King are repeatedly confronted with various fractures of their power, along with repeatedly receiving poor council.

⁴¹ A famous sufferer of the “glass delusion,” whose “maladie” left him intermittently unable to reign, was Charles IV (1368-1422). The lore around Charles IV’s illness fueled its popularity in the literary imaginary, as evidenced in texts such as Cervantes’s *Licenciado Vidriera*, whose protagonist believes he is made of glass and must be surrounded with straw, since straw provides the “más segura cama que podían tener los hombres de vidrio” (54). See Autrand, Schnapp, and Speak.

⁴² As recounted by the chronicler Cabrera de Córdoba and others, after Felipe II found Carlos of Asturias’s temperament ill-suited for governance, and ultimately imprisoned his son, the famously melancholic “heredero de la corona” became even more melancholic (Atienza, 103). As Atienza explains, expounding on this situation that fueled “la leyenda negra antihispánica,” “en su desesperación [Carlos] se niega a comer, lo que provocará su muerte” (103-06). A similar series of rebellious and punishing events is also charted in *El príncipe melancólico*. After threatening his brother’s life, the Prince is “recluido en su cuarto por desobediencia y conducta indigna, y finge una melancolía extrema” (Marion-Andrès), which partially consists in his (feigned) rejection of food.

130),⁴³ the Prince pretends to eschew all food and drink, while entertaining conversations about eating “yeso,” “rejalgar,” and “cornuzuelos.”⁴⁴ This gives the King, in particular, great cause for concern (Chouza-Calo, 2023, 85). But of course, the Prince is not really starving himself as others have been led to believe; rather, he secretly gorges himself so that he can continue satisfying his hunger yet maintain the semblance of abstaining from nourishment. As such, his efforts to conceal the stratagem behind his “starvation con” while continuing to feed himself, indicate another sign of imbalance: rather than an equilibrated, compensatory response to his public fasting, the appetite the Prince satisfies in private is voracious, animalistic, uncontrollable, and even lascivious (Huarte, 462; Marion-Andrés; Atienza, 155, 205; Paredes Ocampo, 158).⁴⁵ Fabio can hardly believe how he wolfs down a “medio pernil y un capón” (II.1177). Later, when the Prince is caught feasting by Leonido and the Count, they too are stupefied by his magnificent appetite. “¡Oh, hideputa, ladrón,/ cómo come!” (III.2867-68), Leonido exclaims, and then again: “Conde, ¿no ves cómo come?” to which the Count replies “(¡Que esto supo este animal!)” (III.2875-76). Fulfilling his earlier categorization as a “lobo hambriento” (I.497), and the deictic, emphatic signaling of how shockingly he eats with a repeated “cómo come,” the Prince’s excessive, bestial appetite becomes another sign of passionate imbalance, vice, and disorder.⁴⁶

In addition to displaying a vast repertoire of melancholic symptoms that seem fully convincing to others, the Prince’s performance of melancholy has a generative, accretive effect. For instance, although passionate imbalance and intense rage are markers of melancholy, elements of the Prince’s behavior that are distinct from his manipulative choreography and instead constitute his “genuine” feelings or responses, are taken by others as additional symptoms of melancholy. When the Prince rages against Leonido, threatening him in an aside, for example, the younger brother narrates the atrabilious intensity the aside conveys, but does not recognize that the Prince’s grumbled threats are angry intimidations directed towards him. Rather, Leonido offers a simple description of the Prince’s imperceptible speech and downcast head (the posture of melancholia per antonomasia) that is commensurate with melancholy’s codified iconography (Orobitg, 1998, 269): “Agora habla entre dientes/ y la cabeza bajada” (II.1043-44), he explains. Using repetitive language to heighten dramatic effect, it is only once Leonido has discovered the Prince’s counterfeit that he finally recognizes the melancholic impostures as part of his brother’s performance (III.2941-44).

The King is an especially poor reader of the signs of melancholy as well. Once he has been told that his son suffers from melancholy—“(¡Qué entero está en su dolor!)” (III.2039), he laments—he takes every movement and reaction of the Prince as melancholic. Just as the enactment of the “counterfeit disability tradition” on the theatrical stage often served to highlight the naivety and gullibility of unsophisticated “dupes”—as the “shrewd interpreters” and rarer skeptical characters who did not fall for the “disability con” were those most frequently rewarded (Row-Heyveld, 2018,

⁴³ The Prince’s “starvation con,” so to speak, draws from the symptoms of melancholy (Burton I.I-III), *aegritudo amoris*, and from the various alimentary implications of jealousy, specifically. See Domínguez on the disciplining and normativizing aims of “tratados de dietética e higiene” (2018, 285-86), and Orobitg (1997, 301-305).

⁴⁴ Poisonous, but also used medicinally, “cornuzuelos,” the highly noxious “rejalgar,” and “yeso,” inedible materials the Prince discusses, are frequently ingested when one is “vicioso de amor,” as the Count explains (II.981). This is a topic also taken up in Cervantes’s *Curioso impertinente* when Anselmo narrates how he struggles with “la enfermedad que suelen tener algunas mujeres, que se les antoja comer tierra, yeso, carbón y otras cosas peores, aun asquerosas para mirarse, cuanto más para comerse” (I.412). Similar to how the Count’s need for such cures gestures towards his own insubricity, the alignment of this “appetitive perversion” with women’s behaviors, is another sign of illness and imbalance, as explained by Huarte. See Sieber (3-4), Wey-Gomez (818), and Harris (14).

⁴⁵ On the many references made in the play to the prince’s animality and ferocity, see Paredes Ocampo, who details the direct relationship between lycanthropic allusions and “melancolía no natural” and “wolf-madness” in Andrés Velázquez’s 1585 *Libro de la Melancolía*. See also Burton (156-63); Kallendorf (294 n.15); and Paster, on the connection between animals and “early modern taxonomies of the passions” (2004, 125).

⁴⁶ On the efforts taken to “corregir” the Prince’s “trastorno alimenticio,” and the importance of diet in the prevention of melancholy and overall promotion of health, see Chouza-Calo (2020, 229); Teixeira de Souza (604-5); Atienza (115-17); Orobitg (1997, 301-10); and Domínguez (2022, 16-17).

4)—the King’s ingenuity aligns him with the credulous, undiscerning masses. Finally, the Prince performs melancholy so successfully and compellingly that not only are those who witness his troubling state deeply concerned for his wellbeing, he convinces *himself* with his farce as well. By way of illustration, when he balks about “traidores” gathering around him “como junta de doctores” (II.1002), he gives prominence to the amazement, surprise, and perhaps even fear of the crowded group, asking Fabio to “[m]ira /[..]/ cómo se están santiguando./ Mi enfermedad consultando” (II.1000-1). In this case, the Prince is not referencing the counterfeited symptoms he presents in his performance of illness, but the deleterious effects that melancholy caused him, resulting in the illness that “*mi enfermedad*” allows—that is, the “legitimate” illness he unequivocally attributes to himself.

Projecting a sickly and volatile body politic, the Prince’s dissimulation of melancholy and the threat to political strength and continuity that his troubled mind and ailing body ostensibly represent take over the unsettled court of *El príncipe melancólico*.⁴⁷ As if a type of pathetic fallacy were applied to the courtly ambiance, an undisputable melancholic symptomology is reflected in the court itself, with its troubled internecine relationships that inaugurate the play’s action and the fractured political situation and obsession with power and control that ensue. Yet with so many eyes fixed on the feigned performance of the melancholic prince and his strategic “disability con,” the counterfeits and experiences with melancholy of other characters go largely overlooked. The foremost character who seems to suffer the most genuinely and acutely from melancholy in the play and whom the play most explicitly casts as a melancholic, is the King himself. Although the play’s attentions are more firmly turned towards the titular “melancholic prince,” it is the King’s health and fitness for the throne that are repeatedly called into question, in regular, albeit subtler ways. Although some view the King’s confusion and inappropriate responses as purely ludic in nature (Atienza, 248-49; Marion-Andrès), his affliction manifests itself more broadly than does the “melancholy” of his son, and his symptomology is ultimately more troubling as well. As a potential precursor to the Prince’s own struggles with despondency that bode poorly for the political strength and continuance of the Hungarian line, the King’s pathological gloominess has vaster implications, and coincides with premodern theorizations of melancholy’s medical, sociopolitical, religious, and theoretical embrace to a greater degree. It also points more directly to the political harm that melancholy can catalyze.

Aligning the nuclear royal family with the larger implications of the nation, as mentioned above, the opening moments of the play present a troubled kingdom in which secrecy and the internal division between brothers symptomizes larger problems that plague the court, and by extension, the Hungarian nation (Chouza-Calo, 2023 82). Surely, there are various signs of madness and melancholy that precede and succeed the Prince’s decision to counterfeit his emotional extremes. Both of the King’s sons are irascible, violent, and prone to the sort of despotic, “torticero” behavior that often characterizes the melancholic reactivity of tyrants, for example.⁴⁸ Similarly, despite the Infante’s insistence upon reason and his clear skills in rhetorical manipulation, his own rationality is countered by his propensity for rash behavior. This emphasizes the waywardness of *both* of the King’s sons, and the prevailing unruliness of *El príncipe melancólico*’s court. Indubitably, it also helps emphasize how the play’s primary political figureheads all lack good reasoning and tend away from courtly behavior that follows standard protocols and norms. Furthering theoretical discussions of the “contagious affects of a humoral body” (Rowe, 2004, 176) and melancholy’s communicability, the chaotic ambiance of the court thus provides a transmissive space propitious for the development and aggravation of the Prince’s disequilibrium, be it entirely feigned or not.

Regarding the King’s lack of political fitness, he is emotional and mournful throughout the entire play. Chiefly, he is sluggish where his sons rush to respond. He is avoidant where his sons

⁴⁷ Huarte insists upon the relationship between health and the republic (149).

⁴⁸ With “torticero,” I am citing Alfonso X’s cautions in the *Siete partidas* about political leaders who use their power improperly and become tyrants. “Ultimately, if the king “usasse mal de su poderío,” then people are completely correct to consider him a tyrant: “[...] en esta ley que pueden dezir las gentes tirano: e tomarle el señorío que era derecho, en torticero” (Fradejas Rueda, 275; Hicks-Bartlett, 99; Orbitg, 1998, 272).

force confrontation and resolution; confused and passive where his sons are shrewdly manipulative and assertive; indecisive and nervous, where his sons are swift and resolute. Since the King is absent from the fraternal brawl that inaugurates the play's action, which takes place "en tal ocasión," and "en tan secreto lugar" (I.1-2), his power and authority are already implicitly being called into question by the very occurrence of inappropriate action that at best is uncourtly, and at worst, illicit, usurping, and mutinous. In the very words of the King, the fighting between his sons is not just potentially fratricidal, but patricidal and regicidal. Moreover, even though Fabio does promptly run off to inform the King of his sons' fighting, the initial delay in relaying information, the King's necessary reliance on the *criado*'s delation, and his removal from the opening scene all gesture towards the absence, impotence, and ignorance that continue to challenge his capacities as a ruler throughout the play, and which reiterate his melancholic orientation.

The threat of political "headlessness" that the King's fragile leadership represents is further accentuated when his quarreling sons preempt his appearance in the play by citing his weakness, advanced age, and looming death. Certainly, Leonido uses the King's age in an attempt to manipulate his brother into desisting. After warning his brother about his own boundless wrath, ("no hay reparo al furor/ si a mi razón no te allanas" [I.33-34]), the Infante insists that it is only their genitor's age—specifically his "blancas canas"—and the implied respect that senectitude demands, that have helped mitigate his fury:

y solo las blancas canas
del rey, mi padre y señor,
los aceros de mi pecho
mitigan, dando a mi fragua
tanta cantidad de agua
que lo tienen hielo hecho. (I.35-40)

Thus, it is both due to and on behalf of their father's age that Leonido attempts to use reason to negotiate with his brother. Drawing attention to their father's snowy hair once again, Leonido grants an explicitly agential function to their father's advanced age:

Por las cuales te amonesto,
y, como hermano, te pido
que de su vejez movido
te apartes y dejes de esto. (I.41-44)

Advocating for his father where his father cannot advocate for himself, Leonido thus brings even more attention to the debilitating implications of "vejez" and the play's insistence upon insufficient kingly power. Just as he claims that the "blancas canas" have softened the "aceros" of his own heart, Leonido wants his brother to tone down his reaction, and entreats him to "apartarse" and "deja[r] de esto" out of a similar respect and familial duty.

In an early conversation with Rosilena, Leonido's citation of old age then becomes even more disempowering of the King, for, in addition to aligning his father's maturity with the respect that is due to him, Leonido bleakly aligns his senescence with death. He first explains to Rosilena that in order to quash the troubles between himself and his brother, he needs the Prince to realize "cómo vivía engañado" (I.182). Yet the Prince persists in his antagonizing behavior and tries to continue claiming that Rosilena is in love with him, as Leonido reports to his beloved:

Que me ha querido matar
diciéndome que le quieres
y que por su gusto mueres,

y que él solo te ha de amar. (I.185-88)

Accentuating the gravity of the situation by linking his own death with the Prince's fabrication of his beloved's fatal affection, Leonido feels "forced" by his deference to their father ("cuyo respeto me fuerza" [I.190]) to act more peacefully than he would like. Evoking death again, if the fraternal argument continues to intensify, Leonido warns, it could have casualties. He parenthetically encloses his elderly father's literal insouciance—"Ya no mirará mi padre" (I.189)—with his projected decrease and the end of his reign; it will end up leaving the King "a quedar por fuerza,/ tan muerto como mi madre" (I.191-2). Leonido then pairs his father's imagined, anticipated death with a retrospection on maternal absence that further problematizes themes of fragility, genealogical permanence, political headlessness, and the troubling material ends of the royal body (Kantorowicz, 30; Nardizzi, 457).⁴⁹

Affliction at Court: On Kingly Melancholy, Volatility, and Vulnerability

Unlike the manipulative dramaticity of his performative, first-born son, there is no subterfuge or artifice in the King's brand of patently more genuine melancholy. However, given that he is not calculating in his expression of suffering and does not draw such dramatic attention to his feelings as does his son, his melancholy is continually dismissed or overlooked by *El príncipe melancólico's* other characters, just as it has been minimized and overlooked in critical approaches to the play. Offering another point of distinction between his empirical experience of melancholy and his son's dramatic enactment of it, therefore, the King makes no manipulative appeal to the empathetic responsiveness of others, as does his son, nor does he connive so that his feelings trigger a certain behavior in others.

Instead, in a truer reflection of the introversion and introspection that exemplify the standard negative representations of premodern melancholy, the primary reaction the King typically forecasts is one of suffering, affliction, and self-effacement. Presenting himself as an enduring victim, even from the very first lines that he proffers in the play, the King emphasizes his fragility and susceptibility to his sons' disgraceful behavior: "¡Que mis dos hijos desean/ que muera del mal que muero!" (I.215-16). The King's lugubrious stance is not solely a metaphorical conceit. Anticipating the melancholic Prince's paranoiac sensitivity towards slights and perceptions of being unfairly targeted by hierarchical injustices and political affronts, in addition to having to contend with the corporeal weakness already flagging his ailing body, the melancholic King sees himself in a seditious rapport vis-à-vis his very own sons. Indeed, he interprets their lack of regard for him and his court as tantamount to dethroning him and "desiring" his death, while their fratricidal impulses bode poorly for any hope of genealogical continuance (Nardizzi, 461-63).

The King's reiterative and self-diminishing laments compound throughout the play. He complains that political matters often seem murky to him ("¿Sabes algo, por ventura, / que a mí oscuro me parece?" [I.439-440]) and frequently signals the fatal undertones of his prevailing confusion and fatigue:

¡No sé en qué ha de parar
aquesta extraña caída,
y esta mi cansada vida
no sé cuándo ha de acabar! (II.1700-03)

⁴⁹ Nardizzi's article focuses on *Richard III*, but offers an especially astute reading of "genealogical crutches," "genealogical futurity," and the lack thereof, which proves very helpful in considering this additional aspect of the King's preoccupations—one that situates genealogical failure as potentially "disabling" (457-59).

Reprising the same funereal association that his sons project for him with their references to his senectitude and death, and spotlighting his impotence, the King often rather histrionically links his confusion, indecisiveness, and impotence, to his own imagined end.⁵⁰

Not only is the King frequently ignorant of or confused about the details of the strife that divides his family and thereby threatens the nation, even when he is more aware that trouble is afoot, he shirks his political duties all the same. In fact, again casting his frustration and fatigue as so incapacitating they have fatal implications—“(¡Oh, qué terrible dolor!)” he exclaims twice, “¡No te acabo de entender!/ (¡Mi vida se va acabando!)” (I. 827, 900, 905-06)—he largely leaves decision-making to others. At a pivotal moment when he discusses with the Count possible arrangements that could quell his sons’ anger, the King ends up leaving all plans to his advisor rather than making any conclusive pronouncement himself:

Todo lo dejo en tu mano,
y adiós, pues ya [me] voy quieto
de la pena que me daba
lo que mi muerte causaba,
y salí de aqueste aprieto. (II.1783-87)

As with the Count, so too with others. The King accentuates his retreat from political action and evaluation by leaving most problems entirely unresolved, truncating deliberative conversations, disregarding good council while accepting the bad, and departing *in medias res* during nearly every occasion of conflict. Whenever he is confronted more directly with evidence or news of strife, he becomes immediately overwhelmed and complains that he feels victimized and surprised by the very issues of which he has long had notice: “¡Oh, terrible pena fiera!/ ¡Tan mal me estaba guardado!” (II.783-84). Much like his rash conclusion that his “dos hijos” have no regard for his life and “desean que muera” (I.215) from the forecited “mal” that has long been afflicting him, instead of prioritizing their reconciliation, he worries about himself. Woeful, febrile, and introspective, he deprioritizes the immediate political and familial difficulties at hand to circle back to his greatest concern: how his wellbeing is threatened by external difficulties, and how his fatigue and unhappiness, his weakened body and spirit, and the looming specters of political decrease and death proleptically announce his mortal end.

On the infrequent occasions in which the King does attempt to intervene, he does so maladroitly. He misconstrues both the sequence of events that fuels his sons’ dispute and the root of their contention, yet decides to “desterrar” the Infante. By forcing Leonido into a pseudo-exile, the King hopes to “mitiga[r]” the “fuego” that rages between his sons and regain control of the wilder prince:

Quitando aqueste de en medio
será fácil de apagar,
y así podré castigar
a aqueste por este medio.
Yéndose en esto a la mano,
estando de Hungría ausente,
domaré aqueste valiente. (I.321-27)

In addition to presenting this conclusion as a poorly founded, emotional decision that is far too conditioned by the King’s frustration—“No hagáis más resistencia. /[...] yo quiero que partáis

⁵⁰ The King’s dramatic “hysteria,” dark visions, and projection of his own death, draw another telling parallel between how the weakening of political control is portrayed in this play and Calderón’s *El médico de su honra*.

luego,/ porque no tendré sosiego/ si estás un hora en la corte” (I.349, 350-52), the King’s rare and sudden decisiveness draws even more attention to the negative example that the disunity of the atrabilious royal family represents. Since the King has already complained about the division between the brothers, who, “habiendo de estar conformes,” have become “como enemigos disformes” (I.270-71),⁵¹ his decision to further divide them when their improper behavior is already being scrutinized by the public eye, becomes a convoluted and foolhardy plan. Indeed, although the King is hoping that his choice to separate his sons will serve as a corrective, their troubled relationship has already started tarnishing their reputation: “¡Por cierto, muy buen ejemplo/ daréis al pueblo que os sigue!,” the King grumbles (I.277-78).

Not only do the King’s judgments often need to be adjusted since he has typically misunderstood the issue at hand, the actions he proposes similarly need to be repaired, attuned, or implemented by others. Since his infrequent suggestions typically consist of evasive methods of avoiding problems, rather than dealing with matters straightforwardly, his interventions only occasion more chaos and conflict. Yet again, this highlights the royal leader’s lack of fitness and the implied larger danger such insolvency represents politically. Somewhat paradoxically, however, evaluative problems still come to the fore even when the King receives council. Suggesting for him a sort of ineluctable interpretive failure—he is unable to reason correctly even when his adjudication is abetted by the advice of others—the King’s deliberative weakness is aggravated by the fact that his judgement is frequently (and purposefully) warped and led astray.

Even though Leonido appears less problematic than his more capricious brother, when the Count, to the King’s surprise, takes up Leonido’s defense (“fio/ que el infante no es culpado” [I.433-34]), he nonetheless does so less to defend what is right, and more in the interest of personal gain: “(Coyuntura se me ofrece:),” the Count admits in an aside, “(bueno es gozar de ventura.) [...] (¿No soy yo su amigo, el conde?/ Pues yo salvaré al infante.) (Ya se me ha ofrecido traza)” (I.441-42, 445-46, 450). That the King is entirely trusting of the Count, yet so oblivious of his manipulation, and completely unaware of the Count’s greater allegiance to his son,⁵² flags the various ways in which the King’s ingenuity wrecks his discernment both in terms of his plan of action, and the counsellors in whom he puts his trust. Similarly, the fact that the King’s assessment of the familial and political issue and rare attempt at evaluation are frequently corrected and rerouted by others, additionally confounds his aspirations to correct his sons’ behavior while challenging his judgment and political acumen all the more. Even though the King’s blame initially falls more heavily on Leonido since the Infante—whom he calls a “bajo,” “desvergonzado,” “descomedido,” and an “escudero pelón”⁵³—is spurning the hierarchical privilege so important to the Prince, to their father, and to standard courtly priorities, the Count revises the King’s judgment. He corrects the King’s rare moment of active and decisive engagement in political and familiar matters by informing him that Leonido’s exile is unjust: “digo que sin culpa/ va el infante desterrado” (I.491-92). Rather, “el príncipe es el culpado/ y el infante está sin culpa” (I.493-94). It is the Prince who bears all the blame, and the conclusion the King reached independently is faulty.

The Count often finds himself in the position of needing to urgently correct the King’s various poorly-conceived plans. To resolve the uxorial problem over which his sons are fighting, at one point the King rather incoherently decides to wed Rosilena himself. Citing “una invención” that came to his mind,⁵⁴ the King announces to the Count his plans for marriage:

⁵¹ See Williams, on the terminological force of “deformity,” particularly when considered alongside theatrical form (17).

⁵² Exposing some of the internal fissures at the King’s court, the case is much the same for Fabio. Despite being prompt to tattle to the King in the play’s opening scene, the *criado* becomes easily swept up in the Prince’s farce, even going so far as to promote the Prince’s interests to the King’s explicit detriment. Fabio is completely aware of the Prince’s deceit, yet takes every measure to fuel the counterfeit by corroborating and even exaggerating his melancholic actions.

⁵³ On the “calificativos infantilizadores” that the King uses in insulting his sons, which amplify the “desajuste” between both, see Marion-Andrès.

⁵⁴ Gesturing towards the imaginative and the capricious, “invención” and “imaginación” also bear direct links to how melancholy manifests itself. As van den Doel explains, the “melancholic’s imagination and the faculty of phantasy” are

Y es que pretendo casarme
 con la duquesa sin falta,
 y solo tu voto falta,
 para poder desposarme.
 Y con esto quietaré
 al príncipe y al infante,
 y quitada de delante,
 mi pecho aseguraré. (II.1724-31)

Although the King later reiterates that he did realize that his proposal to marry the lady desired by both of his sons would cause additional turmoil, he believes tensions would be somewhat mitigated by his authority and the continued “gloria” that marriage and continuance imply. Moreover, he nonetheless finds it easier to dream up this third union in which his intentions would outrank those of his sons than to quash the contention through reason or less drastic means. Though it would anger both sons, it would at least do so equally, the King rather heedlessly presumes.

While the King’s hasty decision to marry Rosilena and confession that his “edad, helada y fría” (II.1774) is just one of the reasons for which he is actually uninterested in marriage, the problematic dénouement of his plan is coupled with his rapid, negligent departure and the chaos that ensues. Again demonstrating the lack of thought that the King puts into his decisions, his lack of resolve and sudden haste should be cause for concern since he is usually sluggish (Burton 2.6,152-54; Hampton, 276-77). Moreover, the Count easily corrects and reroutes the King’s plan—albeit for slightly devious ends that further his and Leonido’s particular interests. Attempting to pass off his strategic manipulation as “la ciencia/ y el hacer por un amigo” (II. 1732-33), the Count plots to protect Leonido’s future marriage by telling the King that *he*, the Count, has already secretly married Rosilena, since this ensures that the King could not orchestrate a second marriage: “digo que soy su marido/[...] y que estoy/ tres años ha desposado/ con ella, aunque de secreto” (II.1738-41). As is typical for the King, however, rather than attempting to fully understand the situation, and rather than being suspicious (or even curious) about a multi-year marriage of which he had no knowledge, he precipitously abandons the conversation and departs: “‘Todo lo dejo en tu mano,/ y adiós,...’ (*Vase el REY.*)” (II.1783-84). Having resolved nothing at all, the King leaves “todo” for another to worry about and fix, thus dramatizing how he shirks his responsibilities by preferring for political control to literally be in other hands than his own.

Meanwhile, since Leonido is unaware of Count’s arbitration on his behalf, he feels betrayed both by the woman he thought was his beloved, and by his close confidant. Again signaling the chaos that the King’s poorly-timed intervention and overall disengagement have wrought, Leonido’s volatility and propensity for violence speak to the larger political instabilities. Leonido is so angered by the Count that he ends up hurling homicidal invectives at him:

Da disculpa, oírte quiero,
 que no te pienso matar
 hasta oírte disculpar.
 ¿Y te ríes, lobo fiero? (II.1804-07)

Though Leonido is treated by other characters as more reasonable and less problematic than his older brother, and though he has commonly been understood by critics as the better-natured and even jovial brother of the royal pair given the Prince’s more blatant moodiness and anger, Leonido’s

key to Ficinian (and thus, Aristotelian) discussions of the complex relationship between the overactive imagination of melancholics and their greater access to “imagination as a faculty of knowledge” (109-110). On “lovesickness as a disorder of the imagination akin to melancholy,” see Valencia (25).

threats towards the Count nonetheless betray a shockingly violent mentality. Thus providing another example of vertiginous affective alteration, the Infante's "emotional vacillations," with his "disorderly perturbations" ranging from mirthful, playful humor to unpredictable cruelty, betray his coincidence with the prime indicators of melancholy (Bright, 249-51; Burton, I.5.94; Soufas, 1984, 184; Hampton, 273-74).

With the explosiveness and rage that the mercurial Infante so instantaneously feels towards his erstwhile confidant, his derangement and anger somewhat legitimize the Prince's hostility towards him, even if they do not justify the more nuanced marital problem that divides them. When Leonido turns ferociously against the Count, for example, it is not just that he is threatening to kill him. Rather, perversely gesturing towards torture and inquisitorial dynamics while reiterating the same hierarchies of power that plague Leonido in his dealings with others,⁵⁵ he presents his murder of the Count as something that he will not do *until* the Count asks for forgiveness. As such, the Count faces an impossible situation. Apologizing—or more literally, showing that he is not to blame, exonerating himself, and "palliating" a fault in the fuller etymological sense of "disculpar" (Covarrubias, s.v. *disculpar*)—brings with it no assuagement or peace. Instead, with a somewhat temporally convoluted condition, Leonido orders the Count to "da[r] disculpa," yet will not murder him until he has asked for forgiveness: "no te pienso matar/ hasta oírte disculpar" (II.1804-06). Not only does this threat render the Count's anticipated speech act completely ineffectual, it situates death as the end result whether forgiveness is solicited or not. Accordingly, if the Count does successfully excuse himself, Leonido's avowed murder of him becomes even less coherent.

Instead of providing an image of a more stable son who stands as foil to the melancholic title character, therefore, Leonido's instability, the violence that he is threatening to carry out, the doubly fatal condition he sets before the Count, and the murderous turn that could transpire if the Count is not able to defend himself,⁵⁶ signal an aggregated problem. Emphasizing the amount of performativity, deception, and manipulation that nearly every one of the play's characters engages in, the risky turn also holds true for what Leonido perceives to be his threatened relationship with Rosilena. Leonido's rage towards the Count and perceptions of betrayal intensify when Rosilena responds to his accusations of infidelity by playing into the fabricated marriage the Count has dreamt up, and adding pregnancy to the mix, as payback for her lover's original accusations. In response, Leonido immediately meditates revenge. Melding with the Prince's disequilibrium and the havoc that the King's indolence and paltry attempts at resolution trigger, Leonido's affective imbalance and rash behavior are in concert with the changeability and instability that melancholy exemplifies. Taken together, the symptoms plaguing the entire royal family again instantiate the turmoil, precarity, and melancholic orientation of *El príncipe melancólico's* court.

Melancholy, Affliction, and the Performance of Decline

Despite being head of state—or, more precisely, as the ailing head of state who arbitrates insufficiently—the King refers to himself multiple times throughout the play as a "rey afligido y triste" (I.800) or a "triste viejo afligido" (III.2849). Just as Burton situates "old age a cause" of melancholy (I.5, 132-33), the King decries his "cansada vida," weariness, shaky political control, and clouded mentation in repeated complaints targeting his great fatigue, confusion, age, and physical weakness (Huarte 51-52). Bringing his melancholy even more explicitly to the fore, as well

⁵⁵ On melancholy as not only "la enfermedad del perseguido sino también la del perseguidor," see Atienza, referencing Bartra (141). See Carrión (80-83) and Dopico-Black (115-17) on inquisitorial hermeneutics and practices.

⁵⁶ Insisting on the veracity of her confession ("que es verdad te prometo" [II.1750]), Rosilena decides to make Leonido suffer. Recalling the discomfiting joy that the Prince takes in his trickeries and the pleasure that Leonido takes in forcing rhetorical errors and creating suspenseful havoc, Rosilena takes perverse pleasure in her own theatrical performance. She pretends that she is married to the Count and lies about being pregnant by him simply to see Leonido's reaction: "(Quiero probar al infante/ por solo ver su semblante.)" (II.1745-46).

as his susceptibility to distraction, pessimism, and repeated self-banishment from courtly contexts over which, as King, he should have full mastery, the majority of his lines are delivered as asides that go unheard by other characters: “¡Oh, qué terrible dolor!/ Ya mi tormento está llano.)/[...]/(¡Casi muerto me imagino!)” (II.827-28, 847). When he is able to directly communicate with others, he still primarily voices gloomy complaints that reiterate his suffering, and the confusion and considerable emotional pain that he believes imperil his life and weaken his political control:

¡Sin duda, del cielo viene
por que se acaben mis días
y se pierda aqueste Estado!
¡Oh, rey afligido y triste! (II.797)

Suggesting that he is being victimized by the heavenly scourge that his invectives about the “cielo” represent, the King’s continual repetition of identical terms and the emphasis he puts on affliction further connect his self-perception to the symptomology of melancholy:

¡Oh, qué terrible tormento!
¡Oh, rey afligido y triste!
¡Ah, cielo, pues me le diste,
remedia este mal que siento! (II.1167-70)

While some critics have taken the unsophisticated style and preponderance of repetition in the play as a convincing sign of the playwright’s lack of skill (Morley and Bruerton, 150-51; Arellano 23-24; Arjona 43-46), the reiterative function and frequent truncation of the King’s speech also evidence how he meets other diagnostic criteria frequently associated with melancholy. Foregrounding his political and rhetorical inefficacy, for instance, he recurs to repetition and laments more than any other character; he proffers a large number of asides that go unheard; and, as Paredes Ocampo has noted, he sighs excessively—with habitual sighing being one of the “most common symptoms of melancholia” according to Burton (166-67).

Additionally, in his dealings with the Prince, the King is called a “médico inhumano” who applies “remedios muertos” (III.2052, 2049). Along with highlighting the distorting effects of the King’s atrabilious state that align him with inhumanity, this insult borrows from the “mal médico” and “invective against doctors” traditions. It equates the King’s ineptitude and lack of discernment with the diagnostic and rehabilitative failure that risk the health of the individual patient as well as that of the populace. Yet more than simply a quack doctor (“Que lo enfermo no repara/ y fortalece lo sano” [III.2053-54]), the King’s problematic “remedies” also suggest magic and necromancy, torture, and disequibrated behavior ill-fitting for diagnosis, medical treatment, and political rule, while reprising the disqualificatory connotations of disability elaborated therein (Snyder and Mitchell, 125).

Nameless and somewhat acephalous in a play in which every other character is named,⁵⁷ the King is also repeatedly described as a melancholic by others, even though his melancholy gets countermanded by his son’s. In addition to his constant laments and self-disparaging remarks, however, others also voice concerns that the King’s suffering will lead him down the same pathway

⁵⁷ Taking “headlessness” as a larger premodern trope frequently evoked to indicate political failure, often in sacrificial, rebellious, and revolutionary contexts, here I use “acephalous” to gesture to the proliferation of material about “prodigios” and “monstruos” in the late 1500s (Vega Ramos, 226), and the connection between to monstrosity and prodigality in historical discussions of acephaly (Paré, 816). It also gestures to the King’s political acephaly and failure to maintain control of his family (and thus the Hungarian nation), and to the on-stage representation of the potential monstrosity that a melancholic, indolent King with a host of corporeal complaints and his own marked bodily difference suggests. See also Harris (11).

as his agonizing son. The Count, for example, advises him to steel himself: “No tanto el dolor te apriete,/ que te vayas tras el hijo” (II.1199-1200). Yet the Count’s advice is completely in vain, for the King *already* exhibits much of the derangement that his son performs, and he is *already* entirely consumed with thoughts of his own mortal end: “un triste fin me promete” (II.1202). Fabio then chimes in to reiterate the Count’s concerns, and again explicitly describes the King as a weeping melancholic:

(¡Qué melancólico está
y estase el otro holgando,
y estalo él acá llorando.) (II.1203-05)

The King’s genuine grief is thus starkly juxtaposed to the superficiality of the Prince’s performative fits of melancholy, since the Prince rejoices in his moments of dissimulation as the King, glum and gnawed by worry, continually languishes.

Despite the titular focus that directs attention to the Prince, and despite the misguided focalization on the Prince’s behavior and health, the King is designated as a melancholic who suffers more acutely than his “healthier” son throughout the entirety of *El príncipe melancólico*, as Fabio exclaims in another aside: “(El rey qué afligido está!/ que no se te morirá,/ que más sano está que yo.)” (II.1217-19). Namely, while the Prince immediately becomes joyful once he thinks he will get what he wants before falling melancholic again, the King’s lassitude, despair, and the problems the King has managing his own melancholy are unshakeable. Indeed, while his sons’ emotional extremes were common symptoms of melancholy, a continued susceptibility to “obsession,” “delusion,” “repetition,” “mania,” and “convoluted speech” was also characteristic of the premodern melancholic (López González, 6-11; García Santo-Tomás, 13; Arellano, 14-15; Soufas, 1990, 8-10). The King’s invocation of divine agency further corresponds to premodern investigations of melancholy’s origins while also recalling the problematic language of the “religious model” often centered in premodern theorizations of disability, illness, and bodily and intellectual difference (Metzler; Wheatley, 2010 10-16, 180; Eyer 6).

The fear of degradation and the chaotic state of the nation that the King’s own despondency fuels, thus create an auspicious environment for the Prince’s performance of melancholy. Charting a potential path of transmissibility and reflexivity, the paternal example is coupled with additional instances of political fragility. Ranging from the familial to the political, these are situated in the play such that they circumscribe the Prince’s easy adoption of melancholic symptomology in his attempt to further his own manipulative aims. In turn, the Prince’s melancholy directly spotlights the precarious emotional state of numerous characters in *El príncipe melancólico* who exhibit symptoms of illness and express complaints about impairment that are identical to or even more pointed than his own.

Finally, with the exception of the King, all of the play’s main characters are expressly—and intentionally—performative at one time or another, and they reference their “performances” unequivocally. In fact, they alternately serve as dramaturgs creating plots, directors offering acting instructions, actors indulging in the pleasures of performance before a committed audience, and upon occasion, they are sometimes even “espectadores, en ocasiones fingidos y en otras engañados” (Choza-Calo, 2023, 85). For instance, in addition to “relaying” some of the Prince’s private moments of agony to others and taking complete dramatic license to do so, Fabio frequently makes theatrical commentary and gives performance advice: “(Señor, mira en lo que das,/ que ya no vale esa treta.)” (I.897-99) and “(¡En qué zarza te has metido!)” (II.959). Meanwhile, the Count offers precise directions on how the (meta)theatrical space should look; two *criados* must emerge, he instructs,

por una grande abertura
que en el suelo del palacio

ha de haber de tanto espacio
cuanto de una sepultura. (II.1228-31)

As for Rosilena, in addition to critiquing of the performance of others, which she does frequently, she encourages her own theatricality, giving herself advice about the body language that will make her performance the most impactful and effective: “Aquí fingir me conviene,/ para salir con mi intento/ mostrando el rostro contento” (III.2553, 2555). And finally, as previously mentioned, Leonido delights in rather cruel performative experiments. In one instance, when he sees Rosilena approaching, he announces the performance he is planning to carry out to the Count, and asks the Count to join him in dissimulation:

[...] ya la duquesa viene.
Disimula por tu fe,
y verás que la haré
una burla muy solene. (III.2223-26)

Along with their frequent comments about needing to “fingir” and “disimular,” and their repeated dramatic evaluations—“(¡Qué bien lo sabe enlabiar!) “¡Qué bien lo disimulabas!” (III.2614), “(¡Qué bien lo finges, oh, fuego!)” (III. 2904), for example—they all insist that a marked degree of theatricality is necessary in their dealings with others and in their management of courtly concerns.

Yet while these characters all metatheatrically share some hints of the Prince’s self-serving joy in proffering their convincing performances, they are still more frequently exempt from the intentionally theatrical, belabored tactics of manipulation in which the Prince indulges. Ultimately, the pervasive melancholy of most of the play’s characters, and especially that of the King, generate and symptomize the precarious state of *El príncipe melancólico*’s court. With nearly every character enacting or experiencing melancholy, attracted to it or repelled by it, the continual intersection of theater and illness, performance and melancholy throughout the play troubles the boundaries between “real” and “fake,” or between “fake real,” and “real fake,” to return to the taxonomy posited by Samuels (69-70). Certainly, the entwined strands of: political and amorous frustrations; counterfeited melancholy and genuine atrabiliousness; manipulative performance and more innocent theatrical negotiations; visible symptoms and hidden illnesses, all combine in *El príncipe melancólico*. Thus, the play offers a far wider perspective on melancholy and premodern impairment, health, and disability than is typically attributed to it, and this broader representation of melancholy is one that often goes overlooked in critical approaches focused exclusively on the performative drama that one troubled Prince so glibly enacts.

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