

Luis López González. *The Aesthetics of Melancholia: Medical and Spiritual Diseases in Medieval Iberia*. Oxford UP, 2022. ISBN 978-0-19-285922-8. 259 pp.

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Melancholy is a condition that curiously appears in liminal moments, that is in occasions of extreme crisis, understanding the latter as a historical (or personal) period in which the mental paradigm and status quo is questioned, and the conceptualization of the world (or the self) is then subjected to extreme analysis. Melancholy has a very relevant role in the analysis of medieval (and Renaissance) Spanish literature, since the *sentimental* mood which pervades late medieval works such as *Celestina* or *sentimental fictions* and Renaissance oeuvres leading to and including *Don Quixote* must be explained with reference to a discourse on love in whose conceptualization the medical condition called *melancholia* plays a paramount role that came to define obsessive love as *lovesickness*. Melancholy (*malenconia*, *atrabilis*) also has a long history of analysis in western thought as well as it has been part of medical and scholarly discussion throughout the ages, including the university milieu of the Late Middle Ages. It was thought that a preponderance of black bile (μέλας – χολή) predisposed a person to a saturnine and autumnal condition (hesitant, elayed) paradoxically characterized by both *abulia* and *mania/irritability*, as well as (a happy addition due to Hippocrates-Galen) by *delusional* and *obsessive* behavior. The irritability part of the equation represented by the connection of Saturn with poetic inspiration also assimilated melancholy to the overall condition of *μανία*, a combination of *madness* and *irrationality* that bespoke of uncontrollable elements inside the human psyche, which were attractive as well as dangerous as later rediscovered by Romanticism.

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In his excellent book, López González begins by delving (in depth and masterfully) into the medical theories by Galen, Hippocrates, and Maimonides, among others, as well as into the analyses of diseases closely associated to melancholia such as *madness*, *rabies*, *lovesickness*, and *acedia* (spiritual melancholia). He does so with the goal of explaining works by Alfonso X, Juan Manuel, and Juan Ruiz such as *Cantigas de Santa María*, *Conde Lucanor*, and *Libro de Buen Amor*, the main purpose of his study. *Adust melancholia* is analyzed in chapter 2 through a study of examples 46 and 53 in *Conde Lucanor*, as well as the role of doctors in curing it by prescribing baths, medications, diet, and sleep. Chapter 3 focuses on the medieval analysis of *rabies* or *hydrophobia*, and analyzes examples of them in *Cantigas* 393, 372, 319, 275, and 223 as manifested in the canine behavior of its victims and their fear of water, mixing medical practise and miraculous interventions. Also focusing on *rabies*, chapter 4 analyzes Juan Manuel's example 47 which includes a Moorish women afflicted by melancholy and *rabies* and who is terrified of water. The example is based on some of Alfonso X's *cantigas* and includes as sources writings by Galen, Averroes, Maimonides, Ibn Quzmān, etc., analyzed with precision by the author. Chapter 5 focuses on the *malencholy* of *lovesickness* and the remedies offered by doctors, chief among them *sexual intercourse* as indicated by Galen, Hippocrates, and Avicenna, as many as many literary works. Chapter 6 includes an analysis of melancholia in the episode of

Don Melón and Doña Endrina in *Libro de Buen Amor*. López González posits Juan Ruiz's knowledge and use of medical and philosophical treatises to portray those two characters as suffering from lovesickness as demonstrated by symptoms such as trembling, downward gaze, hand on cheek, blushing, and yellow complexion, and their wanting to cure it by having sexual relations. He explains that Doña Endrina's lovesickness is caused by a potion given to her by Trotaconventos. Chapter 7 focuses on the spiritual world and *acedia*, and studies the monks who have lost interest in monastic life as depicted in Cantigas 88, 254, 365, and 274, and the use that Alonso X does of the writing on *acedia* by ecclesiastical writers such as St. Jerome, Evagrius, Ximénez de Rada, etc. *Acedia* in the *Libro de Buen Amor* is the focus of chapter 8, where López Ruiz posits that the Arcipreste-the-character needs to constantly satisfy his sexual appetite as a reflection of his *acedic* condition and compares it to that of San Manuel in famous eponymous character by Unamuno. Lovesickness again occupies chapter 9, this time through a comparison of mystical lovesickness in Alfonso X's Cantigas 188, 251, and 353, and the writings of San Juan and Santa Teresa, for all of them depart from the same literary and medical traditions.

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López González's analysis of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> c. medieval Spanish literature through the analysis of *melancholia* leads him to conclude that it reflects a society that is becoming more akin to scientific discourse. We can agree with the general premise that this society is on its way to increasingly enter modernity and the scientific discourse, particularly since the introduction of Aristotelian and medieval discourses in the university milieu of the new cities and universities of the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.. An analysis of these social conditions as well as the incorporation of women to culture and literature in general (at the very end of the medieval times and the beginning of the modern period) made of love one of the most (if not the most) favored topics in literature and even a frequent topic of analysis for academic analysis. Liminality, as indicated at the beginning of these brief notes, applies to the late medieval times when a critical (questioning) mentality paved the way for an imminent change of paradigm. Love in general became at this moment a favored topic of discussion because it allowed for a reflection on emotions and the inner self which had been absent from previous discourses, thus reflecting the preoccupations of male and female writers / readers who wanted to be represented as characters in the books they read and in their plots, and who wanted to see their emotions and thoughts reflected in those works. The inner thoughts on love of many of these characters (from Calixto to Don Quixote including the protagonists of sentimental, Byzantine, pastoral, and chivalric novels) let us see the emergence and constitution of the individual *self* as constructed at this moment in what was indicative of the new period we call modernity. The discourse on love, including love's melancholic condition, was essential as a harbinger of a new epoch. And Luis López González has written a superbly excellent monograph on the topic that elucidates many of the complexities (and imbrications) of the medical, psychological, and literary texts of the period.