

Carine Luccioni. *Les rencontres d'Apollon et Saturne*.

Lire le XVII^e siècle 17; Voix poétiques 3. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012. 988 pp. €67. ISBN: 978-2-8124-0796-3.

In this absorbing and well-researched study, Luccioni contends that melancholy, as defined by philosophical and especially medical tradition, was the “sentiment poétique dominant” (26) of the period from 1580 to 1640, translating a *mal du siècle* during which poetry lost the prestige and power it formerly enjoyed (754). Thus, for Luccioni, melancholy is not merely a single theme of Baroque poetry, but rather a pervasive anthropological vision that encompasses easily recognizable tropes of lovesickness, solitude, and sterility, as well as themes less often brought under the banner of melancholy, such as spiritual exaltation and artistic creation. Accordingly, Luccioni’s corpus is vast and varied, counting minor poets alongside such major figures of the French Baroque as Tristan l’Hermite, Saint-Amant, and Théophile de Viau, and including a wide range of genres, some of which — satire, bacchic poems, Psalm paraphrases — are not usually read as examples of melancholic poetry. Such breadth is indeed among the book’s merits, for it allows us to better see the ways in which melancholy comes to characterize an entire period, regardless of genre. Throughout the book, Luccioni ties these various authors and genres together by putting them into dialogue with philosophical and medical texts on atrabilious malaise. Unsurprisingly, Robert Burton serves as an inevitable point of reference, but Timothie Bright as well

as André Du Laurens, Marin Cureau de la Chambre, and others contribute to a more complete and nuanced portrait of melancholy.

The book is arranged thematically into four parts that build upon one another. The first examines the pathological imagination characteristic of both the lyric subject and the poetic landscape in which he appears (although female poets, for example Gabrielle de Coignard, and questions of sexuality are occasionally addressed, there is no sustained analysis of gender in the book). Luccioni argues that poets drew upon medical models of melancholy to infuse existing poetic tropes — solitude, savage landscapes, languor, and dreams and nightmares — with new sensibilities to express “the anguish of a tormented period” (233). In the second part, Luccioni turns toward love poetry and the pessimism with which poets colored their Petrarchan heritage, arguing that they oscillated between violent erotic furor and despondent lassitude.

The third part of the book offers an intriguing account of religious poetry that, in spite of the promise of redemption, was not immune to pervasive effects of the *mal du siècle*. An obsession with sin, temptation, and penitence; a link between melancholy and original sin; and the increasingly medical interpretations of demonic afflictions all contribute to an original synthesis of religious, medical, and poetic discourse (581). This fusion of religion and pathology, Luccioni argues, also created a space for the redemptive value of melancholy (538). Thus the spiritual anguish of religious poetry was not an expression of sterile *acedia*, but of a salvific activity. Indeed, the writing (and reading) of Psalm paraphrases was believed to have therapeutic value, as Luccioni demonstrates at the close of this part. In the fourth and final part of the book, the author picks up the therapeutic value of poetry and proposes that the figure of the poet is an incarnation of the melancholic *homo duplex*: at once possessed of sterile disenchantment and fertile inspiration and thus of the disease and the remedy. This “physiology of inspiration” (675) transforms doleful expressions of poetic sterility and impotence into a cathartic exercise that protects the melancholic poet from debilitating sickness (887).

Ultimately, *Les rencontres d'Apollon et Saturne* reveals that melancholy, as defined in medical and philosophical discourse, is essential to the construction of the Baroque lyrical subject. The author persuasively argues that melancholy plays a wide-reaching role in the cultural landscape of the period, paving the way for studies on the drama or perhaps even the novel. This book would be of interest to scholars of early modern French literature, especially to those who concentrate on the literature of the first few decades of the seventeenth century, and to anyone interested in the intersection of literary and medical discourse. Finally, scholars working on later incarnations of the melancholic poet, such as Rimbaud, will discover a fascinating predecessor.

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