

André Du Laurens. *Discours des maladies mélancoliques (1594)*.

Ed. Radu Suciu. La génie de la mélancolie. Paris: Klincksieck, 2012. cxii + 206 pp. €45. ISBN: 978-2-252-03592-4.

Radu Suciu's doctoral dissertation, now published as a book, provides us with a new edition of an early modern text in the history of melancholy: the *Second Discours des maladies mélancoliques (1594)* by André du Laurens. Suciu's edition is the first reproduction since the seventeenth century, as he seeks to bring this important text for medical and moral thought in early modern France back from oblivion. The *Discours* is also the first treatise on melancholy written in French. While *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, by English contemporary Robert Burton, has retained our attention, most contemporary readers are unfamiliar with the *Discours* despite its important contribution to building a conception of melancholy that was at the same time medical, moral, and psychological, and therefore served as a guide to later treatises on illness and its treatments. Suciu observes, at the dawn of classicism, the establishment of a rational perspective of melancholy and the beginnings of a scientific perspective as well as a psychological analysis of that infamous malady. Finally, Suciu seeks to disseminate Du Laurens's *Discours*, because he perceives its importance in the formation of a French national doctrine of melancholy.

Du Laurens's *Discours* scientifically analyzes the origins of melancholy, its manifestations, and the possibilities of treatment, and it also turns to moral and ethical aspects. In a thorough introduction of ninety-six pages, divided into six parts, Suciu introduces the reader to the major key topics, such as Du Laurens's career, the genesis of the text and its sources, the structure of the *Discours*, aesthetic questions attached to it, and different forms of melancholy, before concluding by emphasizing the importance of the text. He stresses the medical doctor's three vocations as mundane practitioner, committed scholar, and scientific writer, and

focuses in particular on the role of the aristocratic Louise de Clermont, who introduced her protégé to important scholarly circles and whose illnesses inspired him to write the *Discours*. While Du Laurens's later career is less significant for the genesis of the *Discours* itself, the author unfortunately does not provide us with an insight into the relation between Du Laurens and Henry IV at court, the contacts the medical doctor established as the king's physician, as well as melancholy as a topic at court.

The next part focuses on the sources and the genesis of the *Discours*. Sources from antiquity, Arabic and medieval works, as well as the canonical text that formed the basis of the medical education at the time are briefly mentioned, as well as compilations written by medical humanists and earlier treatises discussing melancholy. Suciú points out an interesting fact: Du Laurens deliberately omits aspects and forms of melancholy that were under dispute, among them *acedia* or the relationship between melancholy and demonic possession. It is regrettable that he does not investigate any further this important aspect of the *Discours*. By studying this particularity, he would have shed a light on the complexity of melancholy in the early modern period, the international debate that surrounded it, as well as the reasons that might have motivated the doctor to avoid controversy.

Suciú also examines the structure of the *Discours*, in particular the belated introduction of a definition of melancholy. Aesthetic aspects of the text are discussed next. The author does not only study evident references but also successfully mentions more indirect references. The reader will enjoy this part of the introduction, which is well-researched and erudite.

The *Discours's* importance for the formation of a French national doctrine of melancholy is highlighted in the final part, as the author refers to re-editions of the text, and analyzes its influence on both literary and scientific texts, among them John Aubéry's *L'Antidote d'amour* (1599) and Jacques Ferrand's *De la maladie d'amour ou melancholie érotique* (1623).

The investigation closes on an important historical note that sheds new light on the importance of this text. It highlights the tensions of the period between the assassination of Henri III and the coronation of Henri IV, a period that coincides with the writing of Du Laurens's text. Du Laurens's text also played a central role in the philosophical, moral, and literary traditions of the seventeenth century and influenced authors such as Pascal, La Bruyère, Tristan l'Hermite, Molière, Racine, and Lafayette.

Suciú provides his readers with a medical-pharmacological index, two annexes, and a well-researched bibliography containing both ancient sources and critical works. One negligence is the omission of recent criticism written in English, including Bernadette Höfer's *Psychosomatic Disorders in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (2009), Rebecca Wilkin's *Women, Fantasy, & the Search for Truth in Early Modern France* (2008), and Juliana Schiesari's *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (1992).

BERNADETTE HÖFER  
Vienna, Austria