

Introduction

Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance

But this love of ours is immoderate, inordinate, and not to be comprehended in any bounds. It . . . is a wandering, extravagant, a domineering, a boundless, an irrefragable, a destructive passion.

—Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

The pathological extensions of love not only touch upon but overlap with normal experience, and it is not always easy to accept that one of our most valued experiences may merge into psychopathology.

—P. E. Mullen and M. Pathé, “The Pathological Extensions of Love”

In his *Discourse of the Preservation of Sight*, first published in 1597, the physician André Du Laurens provides a portrait of what he calls “amorous melancholie” that is representative of the many medieval and early modern treatments of the topic informing his own:¹

[T]he man is quite undone and cast away, the senses are wandering to and fro, up and downe, reason is confounded, the imagination corrupted, the talk fond and senceless; the sillie loving worme cannot any more look upon any thing but his idol: all the functions of the bodie are likewise perverted, he becommeth pale, leane, swouning, without any stomacke to his meate, hollow and sunke eyed. . . . You shall finde him weeping, sobbing, sighing, and redoubling his sighs, and in continuall restlessness, avoyding company, loving solitariness, the better to feed and follow his foolish imaginations.²

This passage vividly captures both the psychological and the physical aspects of the disease: the sufferer’s imagination is corrupted and, likewise, “all the functions of the bodie are . . . perverted.”³ Du Laurens and his medical colleagues describe the effects of this “violent and extreame love” in terms of specific psychophysiological processes, usually beginning with the perception of an object that “setteth concupiscence on fire.”⁴ The overheating of the spirits traveling from heart to brain disturbs the estimative faculty, which is concerned with making judgments about the world. The

hot spirits in the middle ventricle of the brain, where the estimative faculty resides, draw heat from the anterior ventricle, causing the cooling and drying of the imaginative faculty. The fixity of the now unnaturally cold imaginative faculty activates the perseverative focus on the image (or more technically, the “phantasm”) of the beloved that becomes the constitutive feature of the disease.⁵ The weeping, sobbing, sighing, pallor, and agitation that Du Laurens ascribes to the sufferer are the distinctive external symptoms of this internal turmoil. As a melancholic disease, love-melancholy, as it came to be called, is also associated with a preponderance of black bile, although the exact causal relationship between melancholy and the erotic malady is controversial.⁶

As my second epigraph from a modern psychiatric source suggests, it is not always easy to distinguish clearly between “ordinary” love and pathological love, whether we call that pathological love De Clérambault’s syndrome or love-melancholy.⁷ Indeed, the medical writers occasionally seem to suggest that *all* love is a disease. For instance, in his *Treatise on Lovesickness* (1610) Jacques Ferrand writes that “love or erotic passion is a form of dotage, proceeding from an inordinate desire to enjoy the beloved object, accompanied by fear and sorrow.”⁸ This definition implies that the lover’s eventual fall into melancholia is inevitable. But a number of medical texts provide a definition of the malady of love (sometimes called “amor hereos”) that distinguishes it usefully from love that remains within the realm of health, and I will rely on this distinction throughout my discussion. Peter of Spain’s thirteenth century commentary on the key medieval text on lovesickness, Constantine’s *Viaticum*, offers the following distinction. Love falls into two categories: one that is a suffering of the heart (*passio cordis*) and not truly a disease; and one that is accompanied by “melancholic worry and depressed thought and a damaged estimative [faculty], which judges something to surpass all others.” This latter form of love Peter considers “a suffering of the brain” that does constitute a disease.⁹ The question is taken up by a later writer, Gerard of Solo, whose *Determinatio de amore hereos* uses Aristotelian psychology to clarify the significance of Peter’s distinction.¹⁰ As Mary Wack emphasizes, the key issue for Gerard is *time*. It is only when desire for a particular object continues over time without satisfaction that the *actio* of love results in an imbalanced complexion and becomes a *passio*, a disease. “Erotic love and lovesickness are thus the same ‘action’ in the technical sense of the

word; but action becomes passion with time, as the somatic consequences of obsessive desire take their toll on the patient."¹¹ The states of ordinary love (*amor*) and lovesickness or love-melancholy (*amor hereos*) thus describe a spectrum encompassing wholly "normal" experience and extreme, delusional behavior. As we will see, medicine's assertion that a delusional disease lurks beneath the surface of a potentially ennobling passion significantly troubles the development of what Louise Fradenburg calls the "amorous subjectivity of Europe."¹²

Despite the clinical context of Du Laurens's discussion of amorous melancholy, the medical profile presented above suggests that love-melancholy is as much a cultural and poetic concept as a truly "medical" one.¹³ Du Laurens's melancholic lover is vividly familiar to us from literary sources: Chaucer's Arcite, for example, whose "loveris maladye" is clearly derived in some detail from the medical texts, is also "pale, leane, swouning . . . hollow and sunke eyed."¹⁴ Chaucer indeed actually names elsewhere a number of the doctors whose work was crucial in establishing the disease of lovesickness in the Western medical tradition.¹⁵ This intriguing leakage between the medical and the literary traditions moves in both directions, as the very frequent recourse to Ovid's *Remedia amoris* in the medical texts indicates.¹⁶ Even literary texts that have no pretensions to scientific or didactic status appear as corroborating "evidence" in the medical exploration of the disease of love. In his *Observationum medicinalium libri VI* (1588), François Valleriola begins his discussion of love-melancholy with an actual case study (involving a certain merchant from Arles) but moves seamlessly into an analysis of Virgil's Dido. Read through a Ficinian lens, Dido's erotic madness constitutes for this writer the paradigmatic example of the disease.¹⁷ Virgil's portrait of Dido's madness, in its turn, is clearly indebted to Lucretius's powerful quasi-scientific discussion of the "furor" of sexual love in his *De rerum natura*. Though the exact pathways of influence between literary and medical discourses are difficult to trace, their mutual imbrication is clear. This book seeks to recover the significance of the complex literary/medical discourse of "amorous melancholy," or "love-melancholy," as it concerns the development of early modern romance.¹⁸ I argue, in short, that the psychophysiological conception of love-melancholy available to us in the medical writing of medieval and early modern doctors provides an essential context for understanding the recurring on-

tological and epistemological problems raised by the genre. In particular, I demonstrate that the medical profile of the erotic melancholic, whose judgment is subverted by the obsessive thought patterns (*assidua cogitatio*) and corrupt imagination characteristic of this disease, constitutes a crucial model for the questing subject of romance.¹⁹ The first two chapters provide a historical and theoretical account of the medical and philosophical bases of love-melancholy as a disease of the imagination. Drawing on this detailed historical material, I then turn in chapters 3 through 6 to three early modern romances: Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, concluding with a brief consideration of the significance of this literary and medical legacy for Romanticism.

The guiding theoretical spirit in the pages that follow will be Ficino, whose dual vocation as doctor and humanist philosopher allows him to forge a powerfully syncretic theory of desire. Ficino's *De amore* (1469), which exerted an especially long-lasting influence over the poets of early modern Europe, reveals a thorough knowledge of the medical discourse on love, though it is often necessary to read against the grain of Ficino's own Christianizing/Platonizing agenda to perceive its full significance.²⁰ I take my own cue from the *De amore* in the first two chapters of the book, which establish a clear historical and theoretical framework for the interpretation of romance that follows. Chapter 1 examines the complex medical history that makes possible Ficino's own commentary on love-melancholy; chapter 2 explores the theoretical continuity between Ficino's original insights about the relationship between love-melancholy and grief and contemporary psychoanalytic theory. These two complementary approaches to Ficino's analysis of desire allow me to explore the ways in which this material represents a challenge to certain New Historicist claims about early modern conceptions of selfhood by positing a psychologically *theorizable* self. Nonetheless, as I emphasize throughout this discussion, this desiring self clearly makes sense only in the context of a specific medical and philosophical account of the mind.²¹ My investigation of this material is intended as a contribution to ongoing studies of early modern subjectivity, responding in particular to Michael Schoenfeldt's brilliant study of inwardness, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*.²² Whereas Schoenfeldt focuses on a corporeal discourse of digestion and evacuation, stressing what he calls "a particularly physiological mode of self-fashioning," I consider

more overtly “psychologically minded” texts that develop a discourse of phantasm and “spirit” to create an (albeit still ambiguously material) space of the mental.²³ It will be useful now to sketch briefly the central ideas that emerge from these opening chapters, since they organize my reading of romance as a “melancholic” genre in the remainder of the book.

Body and Soul: The “Heroic” Passion in Context

The first problem to arise in the medical writing on love-melancholy is the troubled relationship between mind and body, which is a central focus of any discussion of the “psychological” symptoms of the disease. The poetic portrait of love as a melancholic disease in the three poems I explore here intersects broadly with the erotic psychology available in the medical writing. In both contexts, the image organizing this book—the secret wound of love—serves as a figure for the disturbing vulnerability of mental functioning to bodily distemper.²⁴ Broadly speaking, we may understand love-melancholy as emerging from a family of concepts that includes the heated, bodily irritability of melancholia, the “strange imagination” of a quasi-Platonic ecstasy, and the psychiatric understanding of obsession made possible by an Avicennian/Aristotelian theory of the phantasm.²⁵ As this nexus of related “causes” suggests, love-melancholy represents for early modern medical writers and philosophers an often troubling case study in the interdependence of mind and body—or even, more controversially, the subjection of mind to body. Thus in his account of the disease Du Laurens hastens to offer suggestions on the restitution of the proper balance between mind and body when “the bodie bee fallen into such extremitie, as that it compelleth the mind to follow the temperature thereof.”²⁶ We will encounter this basically Galenic formulation throughout the earliest texts on love-melancholy, most pointedly, perhaps, in Constantine’s seminal work known as the *Viaticum*:

Galenus: anime, inquit, virtus complexionem sequitur corporis. Unde si non eriosis succuratur ut cogitatio eorum auferatur et anima levigetur, in passionem melancholicam necesse est incidant.

[“The power of the soul,” Galen says, “follows the complexion of the body.” Thus if erotic lovers are not helped so that their thought is lifted and their spirit lightened, they inevitably fall into a melancholic disease.]²⁷

As Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset note, medieval writing on lovesickness is strikingly important in the history of medicine in part because it “helped to work out the links between mental states and physiological mechanisms.”²⁸ More specifically, the medical reading of the erotic malady suggests that mental functioning is conditioned by, and thus subject to, the temper of the body. Perhaps the clearest literary illustration of this problematic among the works examined in this study is Spenser’s description of Britomart’s “love-sicke hart” (*Faerie Queene* 3.2.48). Chapter 6 explores in detail Spenser’s depiction of the mutual influence of her “bleeding bowels” (3.2.39) and mental suffering, considering the implications of this gendering of love-melancholy as a form of hysteria for the poem’s broader revision of romance.

A closer examination of the medical/philosophical context of early modern romance can illuminate the ways in which the erotic psychology of romance registers the tension between competing discourses of love in its own structure. The medical portrait of love as what Robert Burton will later call a “mad and beastly passion” is, of course, in evident tension with the Platonic view of love as an ennobling force by means of which the soul can transcend the constraints of bodily existence.²⁹ Although the romances I read are clearly saturated with Platonic notions of love (often filtered through Neoplatonists such as Ficino), the very fact that love-melancholy is frequently called “Knight melancholy” suggests that the erotic narrative of romance describes, at least in part, the same obsessive, maddening love that occupies the doctors.³⁰ Although Plato’s transcendent “divine” eros begins in love of a mortal body, it should—as both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* make clear—quickly move beyond love of a beautiful body toward love of an abstract and universal beauty. As Henry Staten trenchantly observes, “Plato binds the question of the sublimating of sexual love very tightly to that of the ascent to the ideal.”³¹ The abandonment of physical love of a particular individual is thus the index of the soul’s ennoblement.

As chapter 1 demonstrates in more detail, the medical/philosophical tradition of love-melancholy engages in complex ways with this Platonic view of love. In numerous medieval texts the condition was called “heroic love” or “heroical love,” in part because it was generally attributed to the nobility, but also because of the idealism implicit in this passionate attachment to the beloved.³² Thus we sometimes find in the medical

texts language that would not be out of place in a Neoplatonic treatise: “[S]ometimes the cause of this disease . . . is the delight of the rational soul in a beautiful object. For if it contemplates beauty in a form similar to itself, a rage to unite with it is kindled.”³⁵ Despite this Platonizing language, however, the result of this “rage” (“furor”) to unite with the beautiful object is not the transcendence of the body but rather a growing sexual obsession that embrutes the rational soul. The term “heroic love” thus reveals the double-sided nature of love-melancholy, which both participates in a Platonic eros that strives toward the beautiful and also remains focused on the *individual* as the source of beauty. Burton’s language captures this duality nicely: “[T]his mad and beastly passion, as I have said, is named by our Physicians Heroical Love, and a more honourable title put on it, Noble Love, as Savonarola styles it, because Noble men and women make a common practice of it.”³⁴ In a sense this tension within love-melancholy between a “mad and beastly passion” and a “noble love” highlights a contradiction within Platonic love itself, which, though it advocates a move beyond the mortal body, always begins there and may pull the lover back down toward the body.³⁵ The tension implicit in the medical notion of “heroic love” frequently subtends the central crises of romance. The “rage” of an Orlando or a Tancredi or even a Britomart to “unite with the beautiful object” threatens to become a potentially deadly madness that can (in Du Laurens’s words) “tyrannize in commanding both minde and bodie.”³⁶

Fin’amor and Love-Melancholy

The connection between “heroic” love and a degrading disease of body and soul in the medical writing on love-melancholy not only suggests the danger implicit in Platonic love but also unearths the shadow side of the idealization of the beloved so central to courtly love or *fin’amor*. This shadow darkens the portrait of the lover in romance, which offers in some instances a forceful indictment of Petrarch’s expansion of *fin’amor* themes in his *Canzoniere*.³⁷ Chapter 3 demonstrates that Orlando’s descent into madness through a stylized Petrarchan dream of Angelica constitutes a critique of the deliberate choice of a phantasmic *dolce error* (sweet error) over bitter reality, which characterizes Petrarch’s emotional stance in the

Canzoniere.³⁸ Similarly, chapter 6 interprets the house of Busirane as an allegorization of the most sinister aspects of Petrarch's poetic legacy, and in particular of the *atra voluptas*, or "dark pleasure," that he addresses directly in his *Secretum*.³⁹

Though it would be unwise to generalize too freely about the diverse body of literary material that makes up the courtly love tradition, one can say with Staten that "with the *fin'amor* discourse of the troubadours, we are launched on the distinctively modern quest for the reconciliation of (hetero)sexual love with the protocols of idealism."⁴⁰ For Staten this reconciliation rests on the idealization of sexual love itself, or more precisely on the *foudatz* or *joi* that becomes "the highest goal of aspiration."⁴¹ Thus, rather than encouraging a Platonic move away from the individual beloved—who can be nothing more than a mere stepping-stone toward closer contact with the divine—*fin'amor* establishes an "erotic discipline that makes a mortal beloved the untranscendable condition of joy."⁴² Furthermore, the pursuit of this (sexual) joy is the "sufficient condition for the ennoblement of the self."⁴³ Staten thus sees this idealization of *foudatz* as a radical departure from Plato, as indeed it is. But he does not sufficiently address the continuing role of sublimation in the discourse of courtly love; though the beloved may be in herself the highest goal of aspiration, she is nevertheless by and large an object of continuing, unsatisfied *desire*. This is, as Stephen Jaeger argues, "a love with an endlessly receding goal, which finds fulfillment only in longing, striving, aspiration."⁴⁴ The joy of consummated love is not much in evidence even in Bernard's poems, which Staten takes as his point of reference. More typical is the frustration evident in a poem such as "Can vei la lauzeta mover," in which the lover compares himself to Narcissus: "I lost myself the way / Handsome Narcissus lost himself in the pool." By the poem's close, the speaker is "downcast," in "exile," and "hiding . . . from love and joy."⁴⁵ In the strain of troubadour poetry that cultivates *amor de lonh* (love from afar), this frustration is exacerbated to such a degree that the speaker's desire seems to exceed the corporeal *foudatz* of Bernard, becoming something more akin to a Platonic striving for transcendence of the mortal body.⁴⁶

As Mary Wack has shown, the medical and "courtly" conceptions of love probably exerted a mutual influence, most evident in the crossover between medical definitions of erotic obsession (*assidua cogitatio*) and

Capellanus's description of the lover's "continual imagination of his beloved."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, as the foregoing description of the troubadours' idealization of the beloved primarily as a source of continuing, anguished desire suggests, medical and literary treatments of such love sharply diverge in their judgment of this obsessive love. While the rarefied love of a poet like Rudel suggests—as Staten himself admits—"a sophisticated strategy of idealization and interiorization" that will ultimately ennoble the soul at the expense of the body's physical desires, the medical doctors not only predict death as the telos of love-melancholy, but a death that necessarily degrades the rational soul.⁴⁸ Asserting the untranscendable nature of the body, the medical discourse of love-melancholy interprets any form of obsessive love as a blockage of the body's natural desires and advocates resolving this blockage by any means possible, including intercourse outside marriage.⁴⁹ This highly unsentimental corrective to the "spiritualizing" tendencies of courtly love arises from the focus in the medical writing on the physiological underpinnings of mental activity, and offers as it were a newly somaticized view of desire.⁵⁰ The true counterdiscourse to Platonic eros is thus not the sexualized love of the troubadours, but the medical discourse of love in which the tense dialectic between body and soul unmasks a problematic tension within Platonism itself. The medical interpretation of desire as potentially harmful and degrading resonates with the portrait of eros in the romances, which permit the forces of time and mortality to precipitate the psychic crisis occluded by the atemporal illusions of lyric. We need think only of the gradual disintegration of Orlando's mind, a disintegration that culminates, fittingly, in his destruction of the *locus amoenus* inscribed with Medoro's Petrarchan lyric. The *joi* that appears to transcend the teleological medical narrative of love-melancholy (melancholia-madness-death) collapses under the pressure of time not only on the lover's mortal body but on the beloved herself as mortal creature.⁵¹

Romance and the Phantasms of Desire

A central feature of this psychosomatic medical portrait of love-melancholy that informs my reading of the psychological structure of the romance quest is the internalization of the beloved as a mental phantasm. The involvement of the phantasm in medical theories of desire arises from

the complex amalgamation of an Aristotelian conception of the “image” or phantasm and the Stoic system of “spiritual” or “pneumatic” circulation responsible for conveying the image to the various parts of the brain.⁵² As a result of the cooling and drying of the spirits in the imaginative faculty, the phantasm remains unhealthily tenacious, eventually securing all the powers of thought to itself until it finally blocks the process of sublimation so central to rational thought for writers such as Plato, Avicenna, and Ficino. The appeal of the internal phantasm directs the mind inward toward itself rather than outward toward the beloved in a turn that becomes constitutive of melancholia. The object of love, as Giorgio Agamben argues, is “not an external body, but an internal image, that is, the phantasm impressed on the phantastic spirits by the gaze.”⁵³ The pertinence of this discourse of phantasm and spirit is apparent in all three romances but is particularly clear in Ariosto’s depiction of Atlante’s palace, the labyrinthine structure that has often been read as a microcosm of the poem’s romance narrative. As we will see in chapter 3, the palace generates the object of desire as a phantasm that lures the lover out of the real world in an increasingly frantic search for what can never be grasped.

The corruption of the lover’s ability to judge correctly the object of desire results in an improper attachment of infinite desire (a Platonic eros striving for the Good) to a particular, material object (the phantasm) that remains lodged in the imagination. As Massimo Ciavolella puts it, “[T]he Good, which should be the only true object of man’s desires, is identified with the phantasma, with the image of an object of sensual desire.”⁵⁴ This turn away from the actual beloved as a distinctly existing being toward a phantasm within the lover’s mind is a central theme in many of the texts on love-melancholy that I examine. In Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, for instance, the deluded lover takes in the “simulacra” of the beloved in a feverish desire to internalize the beloved as a kind of food. Unlike the desire for bread and fluid, Lucretius writes, the desire for the beloved can never be fulfilled by this process of internalization but leads instead to what he calls *dina cupido* (dreadful desire). This relationship between an illusory form of “devouring” and intense love clearly has implications for a theoretical reading of the phantasmic nature of desire.

In chapter 2, I trace some of the continuities between classical and ear-

ly modern theories of desire and contemporary psychoanalytic thought.⁵⁵ The notion that, as Ficino puts it, the melancholic lover continually strives to embrace something that can never be grasped resonates with the psychoanalytic view of the object of desire as intrinsically phantasmic.⁵⁶ Jean Laplanche's influential account of sexuality as a phantasmic derivative of the vital function of feeding constitutes a particularly rich point of contact between early and contemporary theories of desire: "For sexuality, it is the reflexive (*selbst* or *auto-*) moment that is constitutive: the moment of a turning back toward the self, an 'autoerotism' in which the object has been replaced by a fantasy, by an object reflected within the subject."⁵⁷ My focus beyond these theoretical texts is, of course, the role of the phantasm in the romance quest, in which the knight errant typically, like the melancholic lover, "prefer[s] the shadow to the thing itself."⁵⁸ The ambiguous ontological status of the beloved in romance—the quasi-phantasmic quality of an Angelica or a Clorinda, or indeed a faerie queene—likewise engages the romance subject in a potentially endless, inwardly directed quest whose telos seems to be less the object itself than the phantasm within the lover's own mind. This phantasm often seems to occupy the position of the lost maternal object and thus to suggest a connection between the primitive mirroring relationship between child and mother (Lacan's Imaginary) and the regressive orality characteristic of love-melancholy. The association between the fantasy object and the mother is borne out in the early texts not only by the frequent retelling of case studies involving forbidden love of the mother but also by the way in which the object is often cast as strangely mysterious or forbidden.⁵⁹ Du Laurens is once again helpful here in his casual use of the metaphor of "weaning" to depict the lover's obsession with the "speciall object" of his affection: "[T]hey invent continually some one or other strange imagination, and have in a maner all of them one speciall object, *from which they cannot be weined* till time has worne it out" (italics mine).⁶⁰ I consider the implications of the uneasy fusion between the beloved and a lost maternal figure in detail in chapter 4, which explores the association between the dead Clorinda, Tasso's own dead mother, and the Virgilian nightingale who mourns her lost offspring. The song of the nightingale becomes, I argue, a trope for the distinctive voice of romance in the poem—plangent, seductive, and maternal.

Love-Melancholy and the “Revolt against Mourning”

My discussion of the psychoanalytic material on melancholia in chapter 2 focuses on the relationship between love and loss. Although our own automatic association between melancholia and grief is not prominent in early writing on the topic, the connection between love, loss, and melancholia finally emerges in Ficino’s *De amore*.⁶¹ In his casually brilliant interpretation of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, Ficino uses the story of Artemisia to illustrate not only Lucretius’s point—that lovers wish metaphorically to “devour” the beloved—but also, incidentally, that pathological love is linked to unbearable grief, either present or projected into the future.⁶² I employ the theories of mourning and melancholia developed by Freud, Julia Kristeva, Nicolas Abraham, and Maria Torok to emphasize the useful theoretical connection between the psychoanalytic concept of melancholic “incorporation,” which emphasizes the subject’s inability to process fully the loss of the object, and earlier writers’ emphasis on the fantasy of devouring the beloved.⁶³ Working between this theoretical material and the recurring patterns of romance, I argue that love-melancholy manifests itself in both contexts as an often heavily disguised resistance to mourning a lost (or inaccessible) beloved. The lost object is, as mentioned earlier, frequently cast as a version of the original lost object, the mother.⁶⁴ By contrast, Plato’s doctrine of erotic transcendence urges against the exclusive love of the individual and constitutes in its most vigorous form an elaborate ritual of mourning.⁶⁵ If the lover’s focus gradually moves away from the individual toward the beauty of the forms, the beloved’s mortality—and thus the transitoriness of human connection—will cease to pose a continuous threat to the lover’s happiness. The melancholic lover’s fixation on a single beloved bespeaks a stubborn attachment to a particular, unique individual and a concomitant refusal to participate in this sublimatory form of mourning. Filone’s position in Leone Ebreo’s third dialogue on love (ca. 1502) may be taken as paradigmatically “melancholic” in the sense in which I use that term here: “Not the present possession [of the object], *but its continuation, is lacking*” (italics mine).⁶⁶ Love is always haunted by present or future loss and is thus never fully distinct from grief and desire.

The notion that what Freud will call a “revolt against mourning” is

at the heart of the melancholic structure of romance is especially clear in chapter 5's exploration of Spenser's revision of romance.⁶⁷ Alcyon, the despairing lover from Spenser's short poem "Daphnaida," acts as a type for both Red Crosse in his despairing mode and Despair himself, who represents the telos of Red Crosse's melancholic quest. Alcyon's attitude toward the loss of his beloved Daphne exemplifies the eroticized *acedia* that imperils Red Crosse's soul: "For all I see is vaine and transitorie, / Ne will be helde in anie stedfast plight / But in a moment loose their grace and glorie" (496–68).⁶⁸ This melancholic response to beauty perceived to be "vaine and transitorie" recurs throughout the texts I examine, both theoretical and literary.⁶⁹ An inability to accept that death is the telos of any love-relationship shapes the structure of the romance narrative, which is often marked by the deliberate choice of a Petrarchan *dolce error* over bitter reality. Chapters 5 and 6 argue that Spenser explores the "melancholic" structure of romance he inherits from his Italian precursors in terms of an impulse toward despair—or, in Britomart's case, hysteria—that must be converted into a mournful purposiveness. By giving his narrative a typological structure, he elegizes it, converting the melancholic circularity of Tancredi's or Orlando's quests into a teleological process of mourning that provides what I call "figural consolation." Thus, although the poem's telos (the Glory figured by Gloriana) is beyond the scope of earthly fulfillment, the introduction of figural consolation into the narrative rehabilitates romance as a genre by deftly avoiding the tension between epic and romance that polarizes the treatment of love in Ariosto's and Tasso's poems.

Atra voluptas: The Dark Pleasures of Poetry

This complex medical/philosophical view of love as a dark, bodily force threatening to overwhelm the sovereignty of the lover's reason intersects in early modern romance with the enormously influential treatment of love in the work of Petrarch. In this book, I will focus on a particular strain of Petrarch's writing on love that appears in both the *Canzoniere* and the *Secretum* and is itself informed by the literature on love-melancholy. In the *Canzoniere's* narrative of the speaker's tortured love for Laura, we find a delight in suffering, indeed, a willful exacerbation of grief that informs Petrarch's characteristic oxymoronic style. In his study of the re-

relationship between the *Canzoniere* and the *Secretum*, Piero Boitani notes a detailed correspondence between the philosophical treatment of Petrarch's *acedia*-like illness in the latter and the bittersweet quality of the lyrics.⁷⁰ The deadly sin of *acedia* was particularly associated, as Siegfried Wenzel demonstrates, with the pitfalls of monastic life and denotes a spiritual lassitude, a falling away from the service of God.⁷¹ In book 2 of the *Secretum*, Petrarch describes his sickness of the soul as a paradoxical affliction that is both tormenting and pleasurable:

[H]ic autem pestis tam tenaciter me arripit interdum, ut integros dies noctesque illigatum torqueat, quod michi tempus non lucis aut vite, sed tartaree noctis et acerbissime mortis instar est. Et, qui supremus miserarium cumulus dici potest, sic lacrimis et doloribus pascor, atra quadam cum voluptate, ut invitus avellar.⁷²

[But this disease holds me so tenaciously sometimes that it ties me in knots and torments me for days on end. During this time, I do not see or live, but I am like one in the darkness of hell, and seem to die the most excruciating death. And the critical time of the disease could be said to be this: I so feed on the tears and pain with a kind of black pleasure that I resist being rescued from them.]⁷³

The melancholic humor was sometimes thought to be a partial cause of *acedia*, and the resemblance between melancholic symptoms and the various attributes of *acedia*—including torpor, mental and bodily instability, sadness—presumably encouraged the association.⁷⁴ Wenzel sees Petrarch as a pivotal figure in the gradual association of the two illnesses, arguing that Petrarch's analysis of “what [he] calls ‘accidia’ has been accepted as the first articulation of that bitter-sweet disgust with the world and with life which the Elizabethans were to call melancholy and the Romantics, ennui or Weltschmerz.”⁷⁵ The more specific diagnosis of this malady's roots in love of a mortal woman in book 3 confirms, as George McClure suggests, the fusion of the sin of *acedia* with the disease of lovesickness.⁷⁶ Petrarch never calls his illness “melancholy” in the *Secretum*, but his interlocutor, “Augustine,” does refer to him as a new Bellerophon—a figure familiar from Aristotle's list of melancholy heroes. This Bellerophon, though, is plagued by a *funesta voluptas* (morbid pleasure) that bestows on the sufferer all the symptoms of love-melancholy:

Cogita nunc ex quo mentem tuam pestis illa corrupuit; quam repente, totus in gemitum versus, eo miserarium pervenisti ut funesta cum voluptate lacrimis ac suspiriis pasceres; cum tibi noctes insomnes et pernox in ore dilecte nomen; cum rerum omnium contemptus viteque odium et desiderium mortis; tristis amor solitudinis atque hominum fuga; ut de te non minus proprie quam de Bellerophonte illud homericum dici posset.⁷⁷

[Think of the time when that plague first entered your soul. Think how suddenly you gave yourself over to grieving and became so unhappy that you fed on tears and sighs with a morbid pleasure. You spent sleepless nights, with the name of your beloved always on your lips. You scorned everything, hating life and desiring death; and with a melancholy love of solitude, you kept yourself from other men. Homer's description of Bellerophon could just as appropriately be said of you.]⁷⁸

This concept of *atra voluptas* (dark pleasure) or *funesta voluptas* (morbid pleasure) provides a key to the particular kind of sorrow that generates the *Canzoniere*, as Boitani argues. Certain central topoi in the *Canzoniere* take on a fuller resonance against this background; for example, the motif of “feeding on tears,” found in both the passages quoted above, also makes its way into the poems (see poem 134, “Pascomi di dolor”).⁷⁹ Poem 35 also deploys the myth of Bellerophon, who, as in the passage from the *Secretum*, is clearly beset by a specifically erotic form of melancholia. The influence of Petrarch's fusion of the language of *acedia* and the symptoms of love-melancholy in his description of *atra voluptas* is pervasive in the romances studied here. In chapter 3 I consider Orlando's quest for Angelica in terms of a Petrarchan choice of a *dolce error* that perpetuates and intensifies his fixation on a phantasmic object. Orlando's refusal to accept the loss of Angelica produces an obsessive rage that seems to come to a symbolic end only when, through the mediation of Virgil's elegiac sixth eclogue (*solvite me*), his quest turns toward the accommodation of death. The elegization of the erotic imagination coincides, I argue, with a shift toward epic closure, a shift signaled by Ariosto's brilliant use of the Virgilian topos of the *mors immatura*, or untimely death of young warriors. In chapter 4, I argue that the language in which Tancredi's awakening to Erminia's embrace is couched suggests not (as in Ariosto's poem) that the warrior-lover will renounce the *atra voluptas* of romance for the harsh rigors of epic, but rather that romance has triumphed over epic. In Spenser's poem, Timias

and Scudamour are mired in precisely the kind of erotic despair that is the object of Augustine's critique in the *Secretum*. Finally, chapter 6 interprets the house of Busirane as a complex allegorization of Scudamour's *atra voluptas*—a willfully indulged erotic suffering that holds the beloved (Amoret) prisoner by stripping her of any reality outside her lover's obsessive mind.

All four chapters on romance demonstrate that the choice of *atra voluptas* over the elegiac forms of epic is symptomatic of the “revolt against mourning” at the heart of both the psychic structure of love-melancholy and of the quest structure of romance. Petrarch's exploration of *atra voluptas* in the *Secretum* confirms the connection between erotic fixation and a refusal to acknowledge the “vaine and transitorie” nature of mortal beauty. Augustinus urges his suffering interlocutor to choose the path of Platonic transcendence, precisely in order to counteract the torment that the death of the beloved will ultimately cause him:

[N]ecdum intelligis quanta dementia est sic animum rebus subiecisse mortalibus, que eum et desiderii flammis accendant, nec quietare noverint nec permanere valeant in finem, et crebris mortibus quem demulcere pollicentur excrucient?⁸⁰

[Do you not understand what folly it is to subject your soul to things of this world, things that kindle the flames of desire, that can give you no peace and cannot last? They offer the promise of sweetness but torment you with constant agitation.]⁸¹

It is precisely the consequences of our human tendency to love the “things of this world” too much that are exposed both in the medical writing on love-melancholy and in the *dolce error* of romance. My goal in these chapters is to explore the philosophical and medical subplot of romance's story of *atra voluptas* and its attendant torments, paying due attention to the way in which this subplot gives voice to a robustly anti-Platonic insistence on the irreplaceability of the unique beloved. That this insistence may have tragic consequences is clear enough in the romances, which nonetheless only hint at the tragic potentiality of their protagonists' stories through the outlying figures of a Sir Terwin or a Fiordiligi. But Petrarch knows of what he speaks in his self-portrait as a tormented Dido, wandering like a wounded stag: “fugi enim, sed malum ubique circumferens” (I took flight,

but carried my wound with me everywhere).⁸² Petrarch's Virgilian simile returns us to the image that organizes the book as a whole, and that recurs in different guises in each of the texts examined here: the "secret wound," the sign precisely of the "sweetness" and "torment" of a love fixed on an embodied, mortal beloved.