BOSWELL AND MELANCHOLY

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking phenomena of the mid-eighteenth century is the great number of important literary figures whose lives or works were influenced by what was called "melancholy." In poetry, Gray, Collins, Thomson, Cowper, Young, the Wartons, Blair, and a host of minor writers paid tribute to the goddess of melancholy for both the moods and themes of their writings. In the drama, John Home's *Douglas* owed its inspiration to the same goddess, and in fiction, Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* was a modified expression of literary melancholy. In addition to this literary devotion to melancholy, a surprising number of eighteenth-century writers eventually went mad, or like Johnson, feared that they would, and this madness was regarded as related to melancholy.

Although James Boswell neither wrote graveyard poetry nor seemed to have feared the possibility of madness, much of his life was taken up with periodic attacks of what he also called "melancholy." It is apparent that in the eighteenth century whenever Boswell or anyone else complained of "the melancholy" (sometimes called "the
spleen" or "the vapors"), it was understood by anyone else to mean that he was depressed, introspective, and obsessed by morbid thoughts. In fashionable society, melancholy seems to have been a very popular complaint to have. In fact, before the discovery of the Boswell papers, it was often thought that Boswell's melancholy was a fashionable affectation. Since Boswell was then often regarded as a mere buffoon who would stop at nothing in order to gain attention, and one who might well imitate the manners of great men if he could not become one himself, it seemed likely to many that he feigned melancholy in imitation of Samuel Johnson. However, with Boswell's journals and letters now at hand, we find that his melancholy was indeed very real.

Since Boswell was genuinely afflicted with melancholy and since the vast quantity of recently-discovered Boswell papers deal as ably and exhaustively with their subject--James Boswell--as his great biography dealt with its subject, Boswell's writings yield a veritable treasure for anyone interested in eighteenth-century melancholy. In these papers, all the materials for the answer to the question, "What did melancholy mean to James Boswell?" are provided in abundance.

In one place, in a letter to Rousseau, Boswell provides a functional definition of melancholy:
It is a certain truth, Sir, that I am afflicted by a malady which can make me see all things as either insipid or sad, which can take away all desire for enjoyment, which can make me lose taste even for virtue; and, what is the darkest and the most inexplicable of all, it is a malady which can so destroy my spirit that I scarcely even wish to be cured.

To the above description of melancholy must be added the quality of frenzy, for once melancholy had been triggered off, Boswell could behave as he did when he first arrived in Utrecht and found himself alone in unfamiliar surroundings. He describes his experience to his friend John Johnston:

I groaned with the idea of living all winter in so shocking a place. I thought myself old and wretched and forlorn. I was worse and worse next day. All the horrid ideas that you can imagine, recurred upon me. I was quite unemployed and had not a soul to speak to but the clerk of the English meeting, who could do me no good. I sunk quite into despair. I thought that at length the time was come that I should grow mad. I actually believed myself so. I went out to the streets, and even in public could not refrain from groaning and weeping bitterly. I said always, "Poor Boswell! is it come to this? Miserable wretch that I am! what shall I do?"—O my friend; pause here a little and figure to yourself what I endured. I took general speculative views of things; all seemed full of darkness and woe...

The foregoing gives us an idea of what Boswell meant by "melancholy," but is it what the eighteenth

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century generally understood by the word? We find that it is not. In Thomas Warton's *Pleasures of Melancholy*, we have an entirely different conception of melancholy:

    Few know that elegance of soul refin'd,  
    Whose soft sensation feels a quicker joy  
    From Melancholy's scenes, than the dull pride  
    Of tasteless splendour and magnificence  
    Can e'er afford.  

And Robert Blair, because of a "melancholy" bent, chooses to write of things such as the grave:

    While some affect the sun, and some the shade,  
    Some flee the city, some the hermitage;  
    Their aims as various as the roads they take  
    In journeying through life;—the task be mine  
    To paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb;  
    The appointed place of rendezvous, where all  
    These travellers meet . . .  

Among the scenes that his "melancholy" spirit inclines him to observe is:

    The new-made widow too, I've sometimes spied,  
    Sad sight! slow moving o'er the prostrate dead:  
    Listless, she crawls along in doleful black,  
    Whilst bursts of sorrow gush from either eye,  
    Fast falling down her now untasted cheek.  

From these examples it can be seen that although the word "melancholy" was commonly understood in the eighteenth century, there were really two different types:

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5Ibid., 473, 72-75.
melancholy as an emotional disability and melancholy as a romantic pleasure. It is also clear that Boswell's was of the first type. He experienced no "soft sensations" when he was melancholy; his sensations were painful, and there was no "joy" in the pain. In this paper, I intend to define the nature of Boswell's melancholy, on the basis of his own writings about himself or about the condition itself, and distinguish his melancholy from the fashionable literary melancholy exemplified by Thomas Warton and others. Then, by exploring some of the ideas of Boswell and his contemporary sufferers from melancholy as to the causes and cures of their condition, I will attempt to relate what emerges as common attitudes towards it to the broader perspective of the neoclassical spirit of the times.
CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY TRADITION OF MELANCHOLY

In order to understand the tradition upon which the literary melancholy of the eighteenth century is based, it is necessary to go back to some of its seventeenth century sources. Amy Louise Reed⁶ has traced the concept of melancholy in English literature from Robert Burton to Thomas Gray, and the following background sketch draws upon some of her more pertinent points:

Reed points out that Robert Burton defines melancholy in his Anatomy of Melancholy as "a kind of dotage without a fever, having for its ordinary companions, fear and sadness, without any apparent occasion."⁷ Burton, she says, is very careful to distinguish his concept of melancholy as contained in the above definition from those feelings of mental distress which are temporary, perhaps caused by physical pain or the death of a loved one. Reed concludes that when Burton discusses the causes and cures of melancholy, it is apparent that he conceives of it as a

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⁷Ibid., p. 6.
type of physical disease. As Reed notes, Burton associates melancholy with certain times of the day, seasons, and places, as well as with the state of solitude. (It is the state of solitude in particular, as I will discuss later, that plays an important part in the Miltonic, the "graveyard," and the Boswellian types of melancholy, although with interesting differences.)

Reed also notes that Shakespeare refers to the condition of, or uses the word, "melancholy" frequently in his works. Although Hamlet is clearly melancholy in the seventeenth century sense, he is not, according to Reed, melancholy in the modern sense. In the seventeenth century, a melancholy person was one who had an excess of melancholy humor. That is to say, Hamlet was seen to be habitually disposed towards moroseness and cheerlessness, which in the seventeenth century would be attributed to a constitutional overbalance of melancholy humor. Generally in modern usage, the designation would apply to a person who might have periods of depression but one who would not necessarily be habitually morose or cheerless.

While Hamlet was thought to be melancholy by Shakespeare's contemporaries, John Donne, whom many twentieth-century part-time psychiatrists have marked as their own, would not and did not appear to his contemporaries a melancholy man. Reed points out that Walton found
Donne to have an admirable balance of "melancholy and pleasant humor." Reed observes that since Donne was not habitually melancholy and that what melancholy he had was not accompanied by fear and sadness, he would not have fit into Burton's category.

According to Reed, with Milton the tradition of melancholy takes a new turn. As she points out, Milton banishes the Burtonian type of melancholy in the opening stanza of *Il'Allegro*. Milton associates this type of melancholy with ugliness, grotesqueness, and darkness. The species of melancholy that he adopts in *Il Penseroso* yields pleasure only, for Milton's melancholy man is one who is thoughtful and loves solitude. Consequently he spends his time reading or musing alone indoors or out. According to Reed, Milton establishes a new set of connotations for melancholy, including saintliness, wisdom, poetry, philosophy, music, and leisure to spend in lovely outdoor settings. Reed observes that Milton is the only major author of the century who does not regard melancholy as a disease.

John W. Draper\(^8\) points out that Milton's "divinest Melancholy" has very little relationship to the Burtonian

\(^8\)The *Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* (New York, 1929).
tradition and that it is Milton whom the graveyard poets follow. However, there is an essential difference between the melancholy of the graveyard poets and that of Milton. For Milton, the melancholy life was that of a man of serious and studious interests who did not pursue solitude simply as a good in itself, but because solitude was a condition necessary for him to pursue these interests. Draper says that the eighteenth century favored melancholy "sometimes for religious reasons, sometimes as a proof of exquisite sensibility, and often for the mere pleasure of its agreeable titillation to the sense." He says that it was derived from the attitude of the seventeenth-century dissenters who, especially in the clergy, cultivated the feeling as good for the soul. He maintains that "... the persistence of melancholy, often Sentimental, in the mind of the average Englishman down almost to our own day ... would seem largely to originate in the deeply ingrained religious mood of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries." Although first associated with the Puritans, the melancholy mood, according to Draper, passed into the general stream of poetry with some modifications. Draper feels that its development is connected with the influence

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9 Ibid., p. 22.
10 Ibid., p. 320.
of the trading classes. On the association of melancholy with the middle class, he says:

.... The cry for democracy was the slogan of the emerging middle classes in their struggle to power; it shows itself directly in the funeral elegy by a constant harping upon the theme of death the equalizer of beggars and of kings, death, which ushers in the righteous gloom of God, very much as the armies of Cromwell had prepared the way for the regicide judges. 

Draper goes on to link the tradition of the funeral elegy, which he says is the parent of the graveyard school, to the romanticism of the end of the eighteenth century. However, this need not concern us here. What Draper does do that is of vital interest to us here is to link the melancholy with the sentimental. Discussing what he calls "the intellectual revolt against growing optimism," he says that this revolt sometimes took the form of "a sedulous cultivation in life and in the arts of the old melancholic emotionalism (of the seventeenth century). This last endeavor," Draper goes on to say, "gave rise to the Sentimental, for an emotion cannot be artificially developed for its own sake and still be quite genuine psychologically." 

\[11^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{p. 328.}\]
\[12^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{p. 320.}\]
The fact that the themes of mutability and death were, as Sickels contends, a fundamental preoccupation among writers and others devoted to literary melancholy lends support to Draper's identification of the melancholy with the sentimental.

Sentimentality might be defined as the indulgence of feeling aroused by some specific event, object, or person for the sake of the feeling itself. The object originally arousing the feeling need not be worthy of the quantity of emotion generated. With the foregoing definition of sentimentality in mind, the connection between literary melancholy and sentimentality becomes apparent. It is not difficult to see that the indulgence of feeling for its own sake is very similar to literary melancholy with its extended indulgence in themes of grief over something lost or over something that is not now what it once was. Both literary melancholy and sentimentality, if there is any substantial difference between them, are initiated by specific things or events or the absence of them; they can be said to have "objects." The melancholy moods in Macpherson's Ossian, in its lament for the dead, and of Gray's Elegy, in its speculations on what might

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have been but can no longer be, are evoked by specific objects. In both cases, the specific objects, the dead, provide the occasion for the respective poems. In contrast, it will be seen in the chapter that follows that there is no specific object that sets off the type of melancholy that obsessed James Boswell throughout his life.

Something of the distinction between the type of melancholy that has objects and the type that does not has been acknowledged, of course, for one encounters the separate use of the terms "white melancholy" and "black melancholy." This designation of "white" or "black" is important, for it would appear that most of the poetry of melancholy in the mid-eighteenth century is of the "white" variety. On the other hand, Boswell, a man who was severely afflicted with "black" melancholy, produced no melancholy poetry.

Gray makes clear the distinction between white and black melancholy in a letter to his friend West:

Mine, you are to know, is a white Melancholy, or rather Leuchocholy, for the most part, which though it seldom laughs or dances, nor ever amounts to what one calls Joy or Pleasure, yet is a good easy sort of a state, and ca ne laisse que de s'amuser. The only fault of it is insipidity; which is apt now and then to give a sort of Ennui, which makes one form certain little wishes that signify nothing. But there is another sort, black indeed, which I have now and then felt, that has somewhat in it like
Tertullian's rule of faith, *Credo quia impossibile est;* for it believes, nay, is sure of everything that is unlikely, so it be but frightful; and, on the other hand, excludes and shuts its eyes to the most possible hopes and everything that is pleasurable; from this the Lord deliver us! for none but he and sunshiny weather can do it.\textsuperscript{14}

From this statement, we can see that white melancholy is a character trait and, in the pleasure it affords, Miltonic. White melancholy is an assimilated taste which governs the way a man chooses to live all of the time. Black melancholy, on the other hand, is a deviation from a man's normal way of living and is unwanted. Gray wrote his poetry while under the influence of this white melancholic trait. One would guess that he did not write at all under the influence of the black.

\textsuperscript{14}Reed, p. 243, quoting from Correspondence of Gray, Walpole, West, and Ashton, 1734-1777, ed. Toynbee, II, 42-43.
CHAPTER III

BOSWELL'S BLACK MELANCHOLY

Boswell suffered from what Gray called black melancholy but apparently did not find it necessary to distinguish between the two types, probably because he did not tend to turn to the "pleasures" of white melancholy. When in his Hypochondriack essays he discusses melancholy, he means the malady that causes suffering, and when he describes what the hypochondriac feels, he applies to his description the realism of a clinical psychologist.

From Boswell's descriptions of his state of mind during his "attacks" of melancholy, two main themes emerge. The first is Boswell's preoccupation with an ideal picture of himself which he, in his distraction, is pained by the fear that he will not be able to live up to. The second theme, a corollary, perhaps, to the first, is his subjugation to an agitating despair characterized by the feeling that life, his own or anybody else's, holds no values or pleasures.

I

Whether Boswell is melancholy or not, the portrait of the ideal person he would like to make of himself is
his constant preoccupation. When Boswell is content, he is able to misperceive, to accept his failures to live up to the self-portrait, or to temporarily readjust his ideal; when melancholy, his failures torment him.

Boswell's picture of himself is usually derived from real-life models. In his *London Journal*, discussing how a person might avoid being overwhelmed by adversity, Boswell says: "... I am determined to have a degree of Erskine's indifference, to make me easy when things go cross; and a degree of Macdonald's eagerness for real life, to make me relish things when they go well." In this statement Boswell extracts certain traits from his Scottish friends Erskine and Macdonald and would have these isolated personal characteristics part of his ideal character even if these traits as they appear in Macdonald and Erskine might be hardly separable from their total personalities.

In Holland, after suffering through an extremely severe and prolonged depression, Boswell composed a plan for himself (which he called the "Inviolable Plan"), which would bring him closer to his ideal self-portrait (in addition to "curing" him of melancholy). The following is, in part, a picture of the "ideal" James Boswell:

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Without a real plan, life is insipid and uneasy. You have an admirable plan before you. You are to return to Scotland, be one of the Faculty of Advocates, have constant occupation, and a prospect of being in Parliament, or having a gown. You can live quite independent and go to London every year; and you can pass some months at Auchinleck, doing good to your tenants and living hospitably with your neighbours, beautifying your estate, rearing a family, and piously preparing for immortal felicity. To have all these advantages, firmness is necessary. Have constant command of yourself. Restrain ludicrous talents and, by habit, talk always on some useful subject, or enliven conversation with moderate cheerfulness. Keep to study ever to improve. Have your own plan and don't be put out of it. Your friends Temple and Johnston will assist you to do well. Never talk of yourself, nor repeat what you hear in a company. Be firm, and persist like a philosopher.

... A man has much the command of his ideas. Check little uneasy ones. Encourage little pleasing ones ... Your great loss is too much wildness of fancy and ludicrous imagination. These are fine if regulated and given out in moderation, as Mr. Addison has done and as Sir David Dalrymple does. The pleasure of laughing is great. But the pleasure of being a respected gentleman is greater.16

Boswell felt that the reason that he needed the plan was that he tended to be unstable and changeable. He wondered how he could, during the "good" periods of his life, be the gay conversationalist, adept in the company of Johnson and his followers and reputed to have the ability to draw people out into excellent conversation, as well as being able to captivate the actress Louisa into

16 Boswell in Holland, p. 389 (Appendix).
one of literature's most energetic seductions; while at
other times he was the miserable, lifeless, joyless, and
perhaps good-for-nothing creature that his father led him
to believe that he was.

In addition, he wonders, how could a man with his
intelligence and originality be so instantly swayed from
good intentions soundly based by the mere appearance of
antagonistic stimuli or the suggestion of a friend? He
says in his journal: "I am also much made by the company
which I keep. I should be very cautious in my choice. I
am almost determined to break with Dempster and Erskine
[Scottish friends who were Boswell's companions in dis-
sipation]." 17

Thus, Boswell fears, during his moods of melan-
choly, that he is a man who has no stable idea of what he
is or what he wants, and has no identity. He says in his
essay, "On Change:"

Nothing is more disagreeable than for a man
to find himself unstable and changeful. An
Hypochondriack is very liable to this uneasy
imperfection, in so much that sometimes there
remains only a mere consciousness of identity.
His inclinations, his tastes, his friendships,
even his principles, he with regret feels, or
imagines he feels, are all shifted, he knows
not how. 18

18 In The Hypochondriack, ed. Margery Bailey, II
(Stanford University Press, 1928), 245.
Boswell's preoccupation with his own unsteadiness is reflected in the following passage from a letter to his friend John Johnston:

... What I want to do is to bring myself to that aequality of behaviour that whether my spirits are high or low, people may see little odds upon me. I am persuaded that when I can restrain my flightiness and keep an even external tenor, that my mind will attain a settled serenity.19

For the most part, when Boswell attempts to gain some perspective on his attacks of melancholy, he focuses his concern upon identifying particular personality traits that he must change, with the long-range objective of attaining to that "aequality of behaviour" he refers to. For example, the notation "be retenu" appears throughout his journals, diaries, and memos.

In the following passages from his "Inviolable Plan" the particular behavior Boswell is dissatisfied with and wishes to change is implied:

... You have got an excellent heart and bright parts. You are born to a respectable station in life. You are bound to do the duties of a Laird of Auchinleck. For some years you have been idle, dissipated, absurd, and unhappy. Let those years be thought of no more. You are now determined to form yourself into a man.

... This is a great era in your life; for from this time you fairly set out upon solid principles to be a man... You have been long without a fixed plan and have felt the misery of

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being unsettled. You are now come abroad at a distance from company with whom you lived as a frivolous and as a ludicrous fellow. You are to attain habits of study, so that you may have constant entertainment by yourself, nor be at the mercy of every company; and to attain propriety of conduct, that you may be respected. You are not to set yourself to work to become stiff and unnatural. You must avoid affectation. You must act as you ought to do in the general tenor of life, and that will establish your character. Lesser things will form of course.  

When melancholy, Boswell was usually upset about appearing the "ludicrous" fellow that some of his "frivolous" or foppish antics described in his biography of Johnson made him appear to be to so many of his critics. But his journals reveal time and again that his standards for judging "frivolous" antics are by no means consistent. For example, at times, he is disgusted by his practice of taking up with women of the street:

... At night I strolled into the Park and took the first whore I met, whom I without many words copulated with free from danger, being safely sheathed. She was ugly and lean and her breath smelt of spirits. I never asked her name. When it was done, she slunk off. I had a low opinion of this low practice and resolved to do it no more.  

At other times, he is capable of making a gay adventure out of the same "gross practice" and of finding reason to feel proud of himself:

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20 Boswell in Holland, pp. 387-388.
It was the King's birthnight, and I resolved to be a blackguard and to see all that was to be seen. I dressed myself in my second-mourning suit, in which I had been powdered many months, dirty buckskin breeches and black stockings, a shirt of Lord Eglinton's which I had worn two days, and a little round hat with tarnished silver lace belonging to a disbanded officer of the Royal Volunteers. I had in my hand an old oaken stick battered against the pavement. And was not I a complete blackguard? I went to the Park, picked up a low brimstone, called myself a barber and agreed with her for sixpence, went to the bottom of the Park arm in arm, and dipped my machine in the Canal and performed most manfully. I then went as far as St. Paul's Churchyard, roaring along, and then came to Ashley's Punch-house and drank three threepenny bowls. In the Strand I picked up a little profligate wretch and gave her sixpence. She allowed me entrance. But the miscreant refused me performance. I was much stronger than her, and volens nolens pushed her up against the wall. She however gave a sudden spring from me; and screaming out, a parcel of more whores and soldiers came to her relief. "Brother soldiers," said I, "should not a half-pay officer r-g-r for sixpence? And here has she used me so and so." I got them on my side, and I abused her in blackguard style, and then left them. At Whitehall I picked up another girl to whom I called myself a highwayman and told her I had no money and begged she would trust me. But she would not. My vanity was somewhat gratified tonight that, notwithstanding of my dress, I was always taken for a gentleman in disguise.22

But at those times when he is moved to self-evaluation, he believes that the crucial barrier between himself and his ideal James Boswell is his lack of propriety:

But I hoped by degrees to attain to some degree of propriety. Mr. Addison's character

\[22\textbf{London Journal}, pp. 272-273.\textbf{ Underlining mine.}\]
in sentiment, mixed with a little gaiety of Sir Richard Steele and the manners of Mr. Digges, were the ideas which I aimed to realize.23

Boswell's peculiar preoccupation with his ideal self-portrait suggests a tendency towards dissatisfaction with himself, and during one of his periodic depressive states, this tendency towards dissatisfaction explodes into self-disgust. Boswell considers self-dissatisfaction a trait peculiar to hypochondriacs and discusses the way in which self-contempt thrives upon an attack of melancholy in the following excerpt from The Hypochondriack:

His (the hypochondriac's) opinion of himself is low and desponding. His temporary dejection makes his faculties seem quite feeble. He imagines that everybody thinks meanly of him. His fancy roves over the variety of characters whom he knows in the world, and except some very bad ones indeed, they seem all better than his own. He envies the condition of numbers, whom, when in a sound state of mind, he sees to be far inferior to him. He regrets his having ever attempted distinction and excellence in any way, because the effect of his former exertions now serves only to make his insignificance more vexing to him. Nor has he any prospect of more agreeable days when he looks forward ... .

... Though he reasons within himself that contempt is nothing, the habitual current of his feelings obliges him to shun being despised. He acts therefore like a slave, not animated by inclination but goaded by fear.24

23 Bid., p. 62. West Digges was a leading actor in the theatrical company in Edinburgh. He was Boswell's ideal of manly bearing and social elegance.

II

As we have seen, Boswell's habitual preoccupation with an ideal self-portrait and his wish to bring about certain changes in himself in order to attain to the ideal are clear evidence of his dissatisfaction with himself the way he is. When he is suffering an attack of melancholy he assesses himself as a pathetic foil to his self-ideal. What in his "normal" periods is a self-dissatisfaction that he believes he can overcome by improving himself through self-discipline and restraint becomes self-contempt when he is melancholy.

If Boswell's confidence, in his "normal" periods, that by simply effecting certain more or less external personality changes he can realize his ideal self-portrait involves a distortion of reality, so, of course, does his despair over what he thinks is his inherently contemptible nature, when he is melancholy. Boswell himself observes in his essay, "On Hypochondria," that melancholy is a distortion of life and not an accurate representation of it. Thus, when he is in despair, the concept of the ideal James Boswell ceases to be a goad to improve himself but instead becomes a confirmation of his overwhelming inadequacy. No longer convinced that through effort

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25The Hypochondriack, II, 44.
self-improvement is possible, the ideal itself is no longer possible. Thus, the hypochondriac "ruminates upon all the evils that can happen to man, and wonders that he has ever had a moment's tranquility, as he never was nor ever can be secure." Boswell says that "... his gloomy imagination is so powerful that he cannot disentangle himself from its influence, and he is in effect persuaded that its hideous representations of life are true." 

If the hypochondriac could only conceive of some idea of happiness for himself or

... in the situation of others, he might by sympathy partake of their enjoyment. But his corrosive imagination destroys to his own view all that he contemplates. All that is illustrious in public life, all that is amiable and endearing in society, all that is elegant in science and in arts, affect him just with the same indifference, and even contempt, as the pursuits of children affect rational men. His fancied elevation and extent of thought prove his bane; for he is deprived of the aid which his mind might have from sound and firm understandings, as he admits of none such. Even his humanity

26"He regrets his having ever attempted distinction and excellence in any way, because the effect of his former exertions now serves only to make his insignificance more vexing to him." Quoted on p. 21, above.

27"Nor has he any prospect of more agreeable days when he looks forward." Quoted on p. 21, above.

28"On Hypochondria," The Hypochondriack, II, 43.

29Ibid., p. 44.
towards the distressed is apt to be made of no avail. For as he cannot even have the idea of happiness, it appears to him immaterial whether they be relieved or not. Finding that his reason is not able to cope with his gloomy imagination, he doubts that he may have been under a delusion when it was cheerful; so that he does not even wish to be happy as formerly, since he cannot wish for what he apprehends is fallacious.  

What Boswell describes is a state of complete denial. His "gloomy imagination" tells him that there is not, never was, or never can be anything worthwhile in the universe. He is convinced that what he feels at the moment is reality. Therefore, although he remembers that he has been cheerful in the past, his cheerfulness must have been based upon delusion. His gloominess of the present reflects what life really is; past cheerfulness is a deviation from what he now believes to be the true perceptions of his real self.

For him, "the world is one undistinguished wild." Having lost his idea of happiness he has also lost sight of his concept of values. Consequently nothing is worth doing and there is nothing to hope for. Pursuits and pleasures that formerly involved him no longer have a

\[30\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 44-45.}\]

\[31\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 42.}\]
value for him. In a letter to his idol Rousseau, whom he had visited in Zurich, Boswell gives a specific instance of this psychological mechanism:

Can you believe that there are moments in my life when M. Rousseau appears to me a poor wretch who had tried to distinguish himself a little among his unfortunate fellows and who will soon be lost like them in the darkness of the grave? In such moments it is impossible to enjoy those feelings of admiration for your genius and your character which give me such great pleasure when I am well.

He expresses this idea again in Holland, in a letter to Temple, alluding to his own recent attack of melancholy: "Not three weeks ago the whole Creation and all the events of life seemed equal and indifferent. All

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32 In apparent opposition to this statement of mine, Boswell in Italy, in pursuit of a certain Mme. S- and apparently having no success, says: "I hesitated if I should not pass the winter here and gravely write to my father that really a melancholy man like myself so seldom found anything to attach him that he might be indulged in snatching a transient pleasure, and thus would I inform him that an Italian Countess made me remain at Turin." Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France 1765-1766, eds. Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle (Yale University, 1955), p. 38. Underlining mine.

The opposition to my statement is in Boswell's implication that there can remain "transient pleasures" for "a melancholy man." Actually, the "melancholy man" that Boswell refers to here is himself in a romantic pose: Boswell, the lover of Louisa, who after consummation with her seemed to himself as "one of the wits in King Charles the Second's time", and Boswell the melancholy Italian cavalier; but not Boswell the hypochondriac of The Hypochondriack essays. The melancholy of which Boswell writes here is white melancholy.

33 Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France, p. 7.
was jumbled in one dreary chaos. You have no notion of how bad I was.\textsuperscript{34}

One might get the impression from the description of a state of mind where "all the events of life" seem "equal and indifferent" that the sufferer from these feelings is left in a near-catatonic state of passivity. This impression would be false. The condition that Boswell describes is accompanied by a state of devastating agitation. In Utrecht, in a letter to William Temple, he describes his frenzy: "My mind was filled with the blackest ideas, and all of my powers of reason forsook me. Would you believe it? I ran frantic up and down the streets, crying out, bursting into tears, and groaning from my innermost heart."\textsuperscript{35}

In the essay, "On Hypochondria," Boswell touches upon the state of frenzy that accompanies an attack of melancholy in which the sufferer also finds "all the events of life" "equal and indifferent":

\ldots An extreme degree of irritability makes him liable to be hurt by every thing that approaches him in any respect. He is perpetually upon the fret, and though he is sensible that this renders him unmanly and pitiful he cannot help shewing it \ldots

He is either so weakly timid as to be afraid of every thing in which there is a possibility of

\textsuperscript{34}Boswell in Holland, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{35}Letter dated August 16, 1763, Boswell in Holland, p. 28.
danger, or he starts into the extremes of rashness and desperation.36

But he does not explain the paradox.

Perhaps the connection between a state of apathy where life seems to hold no values, where there is "no idea of happiness," where past cheerfulness appears to be delusion, and an outburst of frantic and agitated behavior such as Boswell exhibited in "running up and down the streets, crying out, bursting into tears, and groaning from [his] innermost heart" can be found in the very nature of the pre-condition of apathy and denial. A "melancholy" person who remembers past happiness can focus his thoughts upon dreams of the past. His dwelling upon the remembrance of departed happiness can, therefore, serve as a "safe" outlet for the feelings of despair that the loss inspires. However, a "black" melancholiac of the Boswellian breed, in a state of denial of all values, has nothing upon which to focus his anguish. He therefore thrashes out aimlessly like a Pavlovian dog who has been frustrated at every attempt to garner the food-pellet reward and then ceases to regard the reward as an object of satisfaction.

The "melancholy" person who broods over a specific loss has, by implication, the memory of what he has lost.

36The Hypochondriack, II, 43.
to sustain him. The pleasure that the thought of this object or condition inspires—usually exaggerated by the lapse of time—blends with the pain of the loss of it and can therefore be "sweet sorrow." The condition of this type of "melancholy" person does not, therefore, by itself generate anxiety and fear, and the grief or sorrow that it does generate can be safely channeled into the feelings and thoughts about the object. On the other hand, the emotions triggered by an "attack" of melancholy—the type of depression and agitation suffered by Boswell—are linked to nothing definable. They cannot be safely and properly channeled into anything that can be recalled with pleasure. The resulting behavior is therefore undirected and springs from feelings of oppressive anguish.

Contrast the Boswellian type of melancholy that results in agitation and frenzy with the type of melancholy that Lady Randolph, in Home's Douglas, suffers. Lady Randolph has been "melancholy" since the death of her hero-husband Douglas and the loss—supposed death—of their infant son. When the action of the play begins, Lady Randolph is still mourning these losses, and during the course of the play, until her son is discovered to be alive, she thinks of nothing but this misfortune of about eighteen years' standing. Lady Randolph does have an idea of happiness: what life would have been like if she had
lived with her husband and been allowed to raise her son. If Boswell were able to look back upon a former period of his life and think it joyous enough to mourn over his loss of it, he would not be suffering from black melancholy.

For Boswell, then, the epithets: "mournful joy," "sadly pleasing," "gloomy joy," and "sweetly sad" are inappropriate, although they are used in the literature of melancholy of his contemporaries. Again, to have "pleasing pain" requires an object. The object can be Gothic or classical ruins, a rural graveyard, lost youth, or an unhappy love affair; but they are objects, and they imply some notion of pleasure. Boswell's melancholy, on the other hand, makes him out of sympathy with the world and its objects.

Being thus out of sympathy with the world and its objects and consequently being unable to conceive of any idea of happiness, temporal or eternal, Boswell's condition is perforce unyielding to the type of comfort that philosophy or religion could offer. Thus, even though he could identify his own periodic disillusionment with the lamentations of Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*, Boswell would not be capable of finding a solution for himself in

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the poem's conclusion. For, despite Johnson's pessimistic depiction of the human condition in the poem, he does ultimately reveal an idea of happiness that is meant to be a guide during adversity. This idea of happiness is faith in the eternal, a religious faith. But it is strength of belief in anything, religion or tomorrow's sunrise, that is peculiarly denied Boswell during his attacks of melancholy and its absence that defines the peculiar quality of his condition.

Boswell is aware of the inefficacy of religion for him during an "attack." He tells his friend John Johnston in a letter that "when I am attacked by melancholy, I seldom enjoy the comforts of religion. A future state seems so clouded, and my attempts toward devotion are so unsuitable, that I often withdraw my mind from divine subjects lest I should communicate to the most sublime and cheering doctrines my own imbecility and sadness."³

III

Boswell's melancholy fits the Burtonian description at least insofar as it is "a kind of dotage . . . .

³Letter dated April 9, 1764, in Boswell in Holland, p. 211. Whatever role Boswell's "gloomy" Calvinist religion had in shaping him as a black melancholic is still open to speculation but not of importance in this paper. This chapter has attempted to describe and define the nature of Boswell's melancholy but not to trade causes of either a psychiatric or a sociological nature.
without any apparent cause." There are no tragic episodes upon which Boswell's periodic misery dwells. If his thoughts, like Lady Randolph's, were fixed upon a tragic personal loss, he would then have an "apparent cause" for his pain, as well as an idea of past happiness. Further, we can clearly identify Boswell's melancholy with Gray's "black" melancholy. As Gray says, black melancholy "shuts its eyes to the most possible hopes and everything that is pleasurable."

There does not seem to be any necessary connection between the black and white melancholy, and black melancholy does not seem to have produced any significant poetry in this period of the eighteenth century that has sometimes been called a period of "pre-romanticism."

Boswell, though afflicted with black melancholy, does not seem to have been subject to the white variety. When he was not burdened with the black variety, he seems to have been a very cheerful and pleasant person. He often remarks in his journals about how successful a personality he was on particular occasions in society, and from his descriptions, these remarks cannot be attributed merely to his vanity. After all, Boswell was the young Scotsman who came to London at the age of twenty-two and

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39 See p. 6, above.
and succeeded in befriending such diverse people as Samuel Johnson and John Wilkes. Boswell quotes Johnson as telling him in one of their early meetings: "There are few people I take so much to as you."\(^{40}\) John Wilkes, who was to Boswell "a gay profligate," tells Boswell that he keeps company with him because he, Boswell, is an "original genius."\(^{41}\)

If Boswell had a habitually melancholy viewpoint, Johnson would have seen to it that their association did not last very long. On one occasion when Boswell had introduced the subject of death, speaking of it with objectivity and expecting Johnson to do the same, he found his presence no longer desired, and he was forever after wary of introducing subjects that would make Johnson


\(^{41}\) *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France*, p. 55. Boswell relates his first meeting with Bonnell Thornton, after whom Boswell and his friend Erskine had patterned their literary partnership, and with John Wilkes:

In a little, Mr. Wilkes came in, to whom I was introduced, as I also was to Mr. Churchill. Wilkes is a lively, facetious man, . . . (Robert) Lloyd too was there, so that I was just got into the middle of the London Geniuses. They were high-spirited and boisterous, but were very civil to me, and Wilkes said he would be glad to see me in George Street. *London Journal*, p. 266.
uneasy. It seems quite apparent, as Boswell himself was aware, that one of the great values that Boswell had for Johnson was to provide cheerful and intelligent company that would distract him from the distressing thoughts which engaged him while alone. Boswell could hardly

42 Boswell says: "When we were alone, I introduced the subject of death, and endeavoured to maintain that the fear of it might be got over." This begins the conversation. It ends sooner than Boswell expects. He relates:

... To my question, whether we might not fortify our minds for the approach of death, he answered, in a passion, "No, Sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time." He added, (with an earnest look,) "A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine."

Boswell continues:

I attempted to continue the conversation. He was so provoked, that he said, "Give us no more of this;" and was thrown into such a state of agitation, that he expressed himself in a way that alarmed and distressed me; shewed an impatience that I should leave him, and when I was going away, called to me sternly, "Don't let us meet to-morrow." Boswell's "Life of Johnson," ed. George Birkbeck Hill & L. F. Powell, 1 (Oxford, 1934), 106-107.

43 It was generally acknowledged that Johnson was obsessed by the fear of death. Perhaps this is why Johnson seemed to prefer the company of young people who, more remote from the prospect of dying tend to spend less time thinking of death. Boswell says: "Mr. Johnson said he loved the acquaintance of young people. 'Because,' said he, 'in the first place, I don't like to think myself turning old. In the next place, young acquaintances must last longest, if they do last; and in the next place, young men have more virtue than old men.... they have more wit and humour and knowledge of life than we had.'" London Journal, pp. 318-319.
have been Johnson's perennially cheerful companion had the former been subject to white melancholy and consequently preoccupied with death and mutability.
CHAPTE IV

ATTITUDES TOWARDS BLACK MELANCHOLY:
BOSWELL AND HIS CIRCLE

That Johnson required of his friends abstention from introducing conversation that might depress him is suggested in the incident related above. The incident also suggests that Johnson dealt with the neurotic fixations that comprised his melancholy by attempting to ignore them. Among the statements of Johnson recorded by Boswell, we will discover that Johnson also thought it best to attempt to ignore or distract himself from the distressing thoughts that could make him melancholy.

While Johnson made it a practice not to discuss his mental sufferings, he did have a great deal to say about melancholy in general. On the other hand, Boswell who found it difficult to avoid describing his suffering, also had some ideas about how an "attack" of melancholy should be handled and what might be the "cause" of melancholy. Furthermore, Boswell was inordinately curious about the attacks of melancholy of other people and what
these other melancholiacs thought were the "causes" and "cures"$^{44}$ of their shared condition.

It is therefore the task of this chapter to explore some of the commonly held ideas about the causes and cures of melancholy, as recorded by Boswell, and from among the various speculations on melancholy attempt to discover a common set of beliefs that can perhaps be related to the intellectual and social milieu of the times.

In a discussion of opinions as to causes and cures of such a nefarious thing as melancholy, a difficulty arises. It is that, as recorded by Boswell, the causes are hardly separable from the cures of melancholy and are therefore not actually amenable to systematic exploration. For example, Boswell, Johnson, and their contemporaries who discuss the problem of black melancholy regard idleness as a cause of melancholy and its opposite, "industry," as the inevitable cure simply because industry

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$^{44}$I have put quotation marks around these two words to indicate their special use in this context. Normally, one does not think of an emotional disturbance as having a simple cause or cure. That these words were used by Boswell and his contemporaries itself suggests an assumption about emotional disturbances which is not now in currency. The assumption is that there is a close analogy between, if not a oneness with, emotional disturbances and organic diseases. Thus, I am using these terms in this chapter in order to retain the connotations that Boswell and his contemporaries placed upon them. Herein-after they will not be set off in quotation marks.
is the opposite condition. Similarly, Boswell, while in Holland, regarded a lack of discipline as a cause of his melancholy and composed his "Inviolable Plan" as a means of disciplining himself and therefore curing his melancholy (although acknowledging elsewhere that his melancholy prevented him from maintaining any kind of self-discipline).

Furthermore, the difficulty of systematically exploring ideas about cause and cure stems from the very nature of the opinions or ideas themselves, for they are only opinions and not theory. These opinions or ideas are non-analytical and only casually thought out. Some of the proffered cures border on quackery, while others consist simply of practical, and often quite reasonable, advice. None of the imputed causes even attempt to explain the variety of purely emotional symptoms that arise in an "attack" of melancholy.

Despite the difficulty, in addition to the superficiality, in separating opinions on cause from those of cure, I have attempted to do so in the discussion that follows if only for the purpose of indicating the range of ideas about melancholy held by Boswell and some of his contemporary fellow-sufferers.

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45 See p. 15, above.
As to the causes of black melancholy, Boswell and his friends did not pretend to have any certain explanations. In his *Life of Johnson*, Boswell discusses Johnson's "vile melancholy" as a "disease" inherited from Johnson's father. Boswell gives a description of Michael Johnson's character and his "weariness of life, an unconcern about those things which agitate the greater part of mankind, and a general sensation of gloomy wretchedness." According to Boswell (who is using Johnson's own account of his early life), Michael Johnson's "disease" became in Johnson, "a 'vile melancholy,' which in his too strong expression of any disturbance of the mind 'made him mad all his life, at least not sober.'" It is apparent from the entry under "melancholy" in Johnson's *Dictionary* that Johnson considered melancholy to be a physical disease. The first definition given for "melancholy" is:

A disease, supposed to proceed from a redundance of black bile; but it is better known to arise from too heavy and too viscid

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46 *Life of Johnson*, I, 35.
47 Ibid.
blood: its cure is in evacuation, nervous medicines, and powerful stimuli.\textsuperscript{48}

The idea that melancholy, that is, "black" melancholy, is a disease with physical causes shows the lingering influence of Burton in \textit{The Anatomy of Melancholy}. Yet, as we shall see later in connection with some of Johnson's recommended cures, he seemed to have more confidence in the efficacy of making certain behavioral changes based upon sheer human will than in taking medicines to cure the "disease."

Despite Boswell's repeated objections, Johnson seemed to have always regarded melancholy and madness as related, if not one and the same. Johnson's second dictionary definition for "melancholy" is: "A kind of madness, in which the mind is always fixed on one object."\textsuperscript{49} Attempting to explain Johnson's confusion of melancholy and madness, Boswell says:

\begin{quote}
It is a common effect of low spirits or melancholy, to make those who are afflicted with it imagine that they are actually suffering those evils which happen to be most strongly presented to their minds . . . . To Johnson, whose supreme enjoyment was the exercise of his reason, the disturbance or obscurcation of that faculty was the evil most to be dreaded. Insanity, therefore, was the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which The Words are Deduced from their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the best Writers . . . . II, (London, 1756).}

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}
object of his most dismal apprehension; and he fancied himself seized by it, or approaching to it, at the very time when he was giving proofs of a more than ordinary soundness and vigour of judgement. 50

Boswell says that the clear distinction between melancholy and madness is that in the former only the "imagination" and "spirits" are affected, but that in the latter, the "judgement itself is impaired." 51 However, it does not seem that Johnson was ever convinced by Boswell's distinction, and from all indications, Johnson's fear of madness was intense during most of his life.

Boswell never seems to be satisfied with any of the theories of the origins of both melancholy and madness that he had arrived at. Keeping in mind the distinction he makes between the two, we find him giving his tentative approval to the traditional Biblical theory that the cause of madness is possession by evil spirits. 52

However, in an essay in The Hypochondriack, Boswell rejects as erroneous though flattering to hypochondriacs the connection that is reputed to exist between melancholy and great genius. According to him this erroneous notion is often reinforced by the pretensions of

50Life of Johnson, I, 66.
51Ibid., I, 65.
52Ibid., III, 176, n. 3.
those who feign melancholy in order to exhibit what is popularly believed to be signs of genius.\textsuperscript{53}

There were, however, those who solemnly believed a connection between melancholy and genius to exist. The Reverend Mr. Ralph Churton in a letter to Boswell commenting on \textit{The Life of Johnson} contends that it is "obvious and just" that "Johnson's 'morbid melancholy' and constitutional infirmities, were intended by Providence, like St. Paul's thorn in the flesh, to check intellectual conceit and arrogance; which the consciousness of his extraordinary talents, awake as he was to the voice of praise, might otherwise have generated in a very culpable degree."\textsuperscript{54}

Most of the Boswellian-Johnsonian cures for melancholy involve forgetting, ignoring, and being completely distracted from one's consciousness of self. This distraction from self can be achieved in two basic ways. The first is through dissipation, and the second is through constant occupation. Boswell, of course, took advantage of the first means frequently, as did Johnson, though the latter's indulgence in it took somewhat different forms from Boswell's. In a letter to Sir David Dalrymple,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{53} "On Hypochondria," in \textit{The Hypochondriack}, I, 136.
\item \textsuperscript{54} \textit{Life of Johnson}, IV, 300-301.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Boswell says: "... I have at bottom a melancholy cast, which dissipation relieves by making me thoughtless, and therefore, an easier, though a contemptible animal."\(^{55}\)

Boswell's dissipation, which usually manifested itself in heavy drinking or having sexual relations with street or park prostitutes, was usually not effective in relieving his melancholy, for these activities most often left him with a feeling of guilt to add to his difficulties. Boswell's guilt over sexual profligacy does not seem to be due to a belief that it was morally wrong, although he paid lip service to this belief,\(^{56}\) but to his feeling of degradation after union with a "low creature." He says, after one of many such encounters: "Yet after the brutish appetite was sated, I could not but despise myself for being so closely united with such a low wretch."\(^{57}\) The morally-righteous memorandum for the day on which he lectures himself on "mean profligacy" is further evidence of the gap between Boswell's requirements for himself and his ability to carry them out. The one


\(^{56}\)London Journal, p. 304. Boswell's arguments against sexual profligacy are based upon both the necessity for social responsibility and the prohibition of sexual "immorality" by the Bible.

\(^{57}\)Ibid., pp. 255-256.
statement, "... Swear to have no more rogering before you leave England except Mrs. ___ in chambers," makes further comment unnecessary.

Johnson's dissipation was quite different from Boswell's. To Johnson, solitude could be a fearsome thing, and his methods of relieving it could be considered, for him, a type of dissipation. For Johnson to leave his chambers at four in the afternoon and not to return until early in the morning was, as Boswell once observed, a waste of talent, albeit a boon to the art of conversation. Sir Joshua Reynolds writes:

Solitude, to him was horror; nor would he ever trust himself alone but when employed in writing or reading. He has often begged me to go home with him to prevent his being alone in the coach. Any company was better than none; by which he connected himself with many mean persons whose presence he could command.

Johnson himself, on the avoidance of solitude, says:

It may be laid down as a position which will seldom deceive, that when a man cannot bear his own company there is something wrong. He must fly from himself, either because he feels a tediousness in life from the equipoise of an empty mind ... or he must be afraid of the intrusion of some unpleasing ideas, and, perhaps, is struggling to escape from the remem-

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58 Ibid., p. 304 (footnote).
59 Quoted in Life of Johnson, I, 144-145 (footnote) from Leslie and Taylor's Reynolds, II, 455.
brance of a loss, the fear of a calamity, or some other thought of greater horror. 60

Boswell quotes Johnson as saying: "Melancholy, indeed, should be diverted by every means but drinking." 61 Specifically, Johnson recommends "constant occupation of mind, a great deal of exercise, moderation in eating and drinking, and especially to shun drinking at night." 62 "He said," says Boswell, "that melancholy people were apt to fly to intemperance for relief but that it sunk them deeper into misery." 63

To a great extent, concern about sensual pleasures figured into Boswell's and Johnson's thoughts on melancholy. As already observed, for Boswell, there does not seem to be much actual concern about the moral problem of over-indulgence. What worries him in connection with dissipation is that he lacks the ability to practice control over all of his actions when he feels that he has a good reason—not necessarily a moral reason—for wanting to enforce this control. His reason is that a man of consequence, one with the possibilities of becoming a "great

60 Quoted in Life of Johnson, I, 145 (footnote) from The Rambler, No. 5.
61 Life of Johnson, III, 5.
62 Ibid., I, 446.
63 Ibid., I, 446.
man," must be reserved in behavior ("retenu," as he puts it). This idea is incorporated in the "Inviolable Plan," and to violate it is to lack stability and to violate the main purpose of the "Plan" itself.

But with Johnson, the concern over immoderate pleasures is something different. It seems to involve an exaggerated sense of guilt. Katherine Balderston suggests the possibility that Johnson's problems involved guilt over abnormal sexual desires. Some of her not-completely-substantiated information suggests that Johnson tried to gain relief from some of his more severe attacks of melancholy through receiving physical punishment from his good friend Mrs. Thrale. A statement of Johnson's linking pleasure and pain for "the madman" is particularly interesting in the light of Miss Balderston's theory.

Johnson says:

... Madmen are all sensual in the lower stages of the distemper. They are eager for gratifications to soothe their minds and divert their attention from the misery with which they suffer: but when they grow very ill, pleasure is too weak for them, and they seek for pain.65

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65 Life of Johnson, III, 176.
What Johnson thought was the best advice that he could give Boswell for dealing with his melancholy was: "If you are idle, be not solitary; if you are solitary, be not idle."\textsuperscript{66} Generally, however, Johnson did not wish to hear of Boswell's complaints. On a few occasions Boswell was distressed over being upbraided by Johnson for talking about his own melancholy. In one of his gentler attacks on Boswell, Johnson advises:

\textquote{... Make it an invariable and obligatory law to yourself, never to mention your own mental diseases; if you are never to speak of them you will think on them little, and if you think little of them, they will molest you rarely. When you talk of them, it is plain that you want either praise or pity; for praise there is no room, and pity will do you no good; ...}\textsuperscript{67}

It must be said that Boswell did not accept this advice cheerfully, but by this point in their relationship, he was well aware that Johnson was not the person to whom he could comfortably confide his emotional problems.

\section*{II}

Here, Johnson's and Boswell's attitudes towards melancholy and its sufferers begin to diverge to the

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., III, 415.

\textsuperscript{67}Life of Johnson, III, 421.
extent that the personalities of the two men are divergent. Striking differences in approach can be seen by comparing the accounts of testimonies of fellow melancholiacs that occur in Boswell's diaries of his European travels with Johnson's discussions of poets who were known to be melancholy or who eventually went mad, in his Lives of the English Poets.

Boswell's travels in themselves might be considered, at least in part, a kind of quest. Although Boswell had the combined proddings of his father, his future career, and family business to urge a more swift conclusion of his travels, it was apparently of great importance to him not to return to Scotland sooner than was absolutely necessary. What lay behind his procrastination was not simply pleasure-seeking, it would appear. Boswell was engaged in learning about other people in order to learn about himself, and the area around which his learning centered was his own melancholy. Insofar as this was an objective of his travels, it was an intensely personal objective and one to be contrasted with a detached philosophical objective of gaining knowledge about mankind that concerned Johnson's Imlac.

From Boswell's comments on the testimonies regarding melancholy that he recorded, we find that it was of the utmost importance to him to re-confirm that he did
not suffer alone. Wherever he traveled he was surprised to find himself the confidant of hypochondriacs who were often unaware that they were confessing to an expert in their subject. For example, in Berlin:

... I dined with Monsieur le Professeur de Castillon. I talked to him of hypochondria. He said, "Sir, I have suffered greatly from that malady. After the death of my first wife, there was a year during which I dined alone and I swear to you that all that time, I never touched my knife and fork without wishing to kill myself." This was another proof to me that I am not a singular victim to the dire disease.

Further proof for Boswell that he is not alone in his suffering:

The Abbé [Jerusalem] then owned to me that he himself had suffered most severely from the hypochondria... It is impossible to conceive the satisfaction which I had at hearing that this excellent person had fought with the demon as I have done, and that he had conquered him;...

Prior to his continental travels, when Boswell had first discovered that Johnson suffered from melancholy, Boswell had remarked in his journal:

It gave me great relief to talk of my disorder with Mr. Johnson; and when I discovered that he himself was subject to it, I felt that strange satisfaction which human nature feels at the idea of participating distress with others; and the greater person our fellow

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68 Boswell on the Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland, 1764, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New York, 1953), p. 82. (Underlining mine.)

69 Ibid., p. 57.
sufferer is, so much the more good does it do us.\textsuperscript{70}

Besides the satisfaction of knowing that melancholy has not marked him off as separate from his fellow men, Boswell is getting opinions on causes and cures. Case histories capped by speculative pronouncements are never lacking:

\textsuperscript{70}\textit{London Journal}, p. 319.

\textsuperscript{71}\textit{Boswell on the Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland}, p. 12.

... She [Madame de Froment] talked of the hypochondria, which she had severely felt. She understood it perfectly. She told one of a gentleman whom his friends wanted much to settle in business, but he said he would not stir two steps to get two thousand pounds. She said that the imagination and all the faculties of the mind were confounded, and could judge of nothing so that all things appeared one undistinguished black mass. Exercise and dissipation, with moderate enjoyment, she said, were the only remedies ... \textsuperscript{71}

Among those who clung to the theory that melancholy is physically caused and cured is, again, Madame de Froment:

... At night Madame de Froment told me how hypochondriac she had been. "All my thoughts were gloomy. The beauties of Nature mocked me. I was in despair. Yet without any change in the external world I suddenly became perfectly happy. My imagination was gay. In the evening I found myself alone in my room; I wished for company, to tell them of my felicity. I opened my window. I was delighted with everything I saw: the moon, the stars, the fields, the lake, all bore their most cheerful aspect. I said to myself, 'Good
Heavens! is it possible? Where does all this joy come from? The fact is, Sir, that our happiness depends on the way in which our blood circulates.\(^\text{72}\)

Madame de Froment is not the only speculator whose theories of physical cause seem unrelated to the descriptions of symptoms to which they are attached. Boswell himself has great difficulty in bridging the gap between description and theory, as witness the following passage from a letter to Temple:

... What a gloomy winter did I pass at Utrecht! Did I not speculate till I was firmly persuaded that all terrestrial occupations and amusements could not compose felicity? Did I not imagine myself doomed to unceasing melancholy... And yet, my friend, I am now as sound and as happy as mortal can be. How comes this? Merely because I have had more exercise and variety of conversation...\(^\text{73}\)

In Brunswick, a friend of Boswell's contributes this item with its consequent non-sequitur:

Caivalcabo paid me a visit. He told me that he had been "so wretched that if I had not had the care of my sister in-law and her children, I should have have been capable of blowing out my brains with a pistol." I told him, "Indeed, Sir, I was extremely gloomy. But I thought, what is the difference? It is all the same whether I suffer or not. I am only a single individual. "Well, Sir," said he, "you had certainly fallen into a fine melancholy. It all comes from the body, and can be cured by

\(^{72}\)Ibid., p. 18.

\(^{73}\)Boswell on the Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland, p. 33.
diet. Happy is the man who knows his own body."74

In the following, the irrelevant advice based upon a theory of physical cause precedes the case history:

... Madame Kircheisen said, "You must take great care, or you will become hypochondriac. You must drink a great deal of water and take a great deal of exercise. My husband used to be very melancholy. He thought every one had a grudge against him. He wanted to stay in this room. I had his bed brought here, and I lay on the settee. Then he would say, "I should be better off on the settee, and we would change. Well, I pretended to go to sleep. He would remain there without closing his eyes, get up, wander about the room. He was always restless. He tried to write. He couldn't. He was gloomy and complained bitterly. I would rise. I would talk to him. I would quote him consolatory passages from the Bible. He would be somewhat soothed. He would begin again. So I said to him, "Why, you will kill me and yourself too, staying awake like this, and, what will become of our family? I would talk like that to rouse him a little. Then he would be sorry. He made an effort. He conquered his humour. He began to sleep."75

Another testimony to the purely physical nature of melancholy:

I was gloomy and talked to Peronce of that distemper. He said it was merely corporeal; for he had heard of a girl of twelve who had hanged herself, and she could not have much thought.76

74 Ibid., p. 69.
75 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
76 Ibid., p. 15.
Obviously, these sample testimonies as to the nature of melancholy do not offer much in the way of insight into the condition of melancholy. But they do offer evidence of Boswell's continuing, openly expressed, preoccupation with the condition, a preoccupation that eventually culminated in Boswell's composition of a group of periodical essays entitled *The Hypochondriack*.\(^77\) Although hypochondria is not the total concern of these essays, Boswell, in his role as their anonymous author, does speak through them as "the hypochondriack" whether he is discoursing on "truth" or on the nature of hypochondria. The point is that Boswell puts hypochondria, or melancholy, out in the open. He is interested in knowing more about it, and he clearly indicates that he thinks that other hypochondriacs must feel the same.\(^78\) Boswell's attitude, then, is that there is a value in communicating with others about a shared "malady." Johnson's attitude was just about the reverse.

Samuel Johnson in his *Lives of the English Poets* writes of the poet William Collins, who eventually went mad, in the following manner:

\(^77\)Although these essays were published anonymously, Boswell fully acknowledged his authorship of them. ("Introduction," *The Hypochondriack*, I, 4.)

\(^78\)See p. 76, below.
The latter part of his life cannot be remembered but with pity and sadness. He languished some years under that depression of mind which enchains the faculties without destroying them, and leaves reason the knowledge of right without the power of pursuing it. This implicit distinction between madness and melancholy corresponds with the one made by Boswell. See p. 39, above. These clouds which he perceived gathering on his intellects he endeavoured to disperse by travel, and passed into France; but found himself constrained to yield to his malady, and returned. He was for some time confined in a house of lunatics, and afterwards retired to the care of his sister in Chichester; where death in 1756 came to his relief.\(^{79}\)

In this account, Johnson, himself a hypochondriac, shows no interest in the clinical details of Collins' illness. He does not engage in describing what form "that depression of mind" took, he uses phrases such as "these clouds which he perceived gathering" to refer to the feelings aroused by "that depression of mind," and whatever finally led to Collins' madness, Johnson sums up in the statement that Collins "found himself constrained to yield to his malady." Johnson does not look for the causes of the "malady" within the personality of his subject, nor, in this account, does he speculate on cause at all—perhaps this is not the place for it, but the implication is that when such a physical disease approaches, it can either be handled with strength of will or be given in to:

The approaches of this dreadful malady he began to feel soon after his uncle's death; and, with the usual weakness of men so diseased, eagerly snatched that temporary relief with which the table and the bottle flatter and seduce. But his health continually declined, and he grew more and more burdensome to himself. 80

In the above statement, Johnson shows his impatience with "the usual weakness of men so diseased" when he says that Collins "eagerly snatched that temporary relief with which the table and the bottle flatter and seduce." Further evidence of Johnson's impatience with what, from his own viewpoint, could well be a disease physically caused and curable only by medication 81 is reflected in his comments on Gray:

... and he had a notion not very peculiar, that he could not write but at certain times, or at happy moments; a fantastick foppery, to which my kindness for a man of learning and of virtue wishes him to have been superior. 82

This comment is reminiscent of the rebuke Johnson had given Boswell for complaining about his melancholy state (See p. 46, above) to which Boswell had commented:

... I could not help thinking [this] strangely unreasonable in him who had suffered so much from it himself; --a good deal of

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severity and reproof, as if it were owing to my own fault, or that I was, perhaps, affecting it from a desire of distinction.83

In his Lives of the English Poets, Johnson is even harder on Swift. Discussing Swift's illness, he says:

Having thus excluded conversation, and desisted from study, he had neither business nor amusement; for having, by some ridiculous resolution or mad vow, determined never to wear spectacles, he could make little use of books in his later years; his ideas, therefore, being neither renovated by discourse, nor increased by reading, wore gradually away and left his mind vacant to the vexations of the hour, till at last anger was heightened into madness.84

The assumption is, again, that madness or melancholy most likely is a physical disease but that it can be held off by sheer exercise of the will.

It is apparent, then, that from Johnson's point of view a melancholiac must exert all of the efforts of his will to combat his melancholy. But, according to Johnson, one combats melancholy by not combating the distressing thoughts it produces. According to Boswell, Johnson, "Talking of constitutional melancholy, ... observed, 'A man so afflicted, Sir, must divert distressing thoughts, and not combat with them.' BOSWELL. 'May not he think them down, Sir?' JOHNSON. 'No, Sir. To attempt to think

83 Life of Johnson, III, 87.
84 Lives of the English Poets, II, 265-266.
them down is madness. He should have a lamp constantly burning in his bed-chamber during the night, and if wakefully disturbed, take a book, and read, and compose himself to rest . . . ."\(^85\)

Thus, Johnson’s approach to melancholy amounts to trying to pretend that the distressing thoughts that melancholy unearths do not exist, for Johnson thought it unmanly to "publish . . . by complaints . . . any fit of anxiety, or gloominess, or perversion of mind."\(^86\) On the other hand, it seems fairly evident that Boswell had a consuming personal interest in learning the details of the experiences with melancholy of his fellow-sufferers. Boswell made or listened to speculations as to the causes and cures of melancholy. The speculations were usually unanalytical and not closely related to the descriptions of symptoms they were meant to explain. Whereas Boswell wondered if one should "think down" distressing thoughts and Johnson thought that one should think away from them, neither Boswell nor Johnson believed, as does modern psychiatry, in thinking them out.

\(^85\) *Life of Johnson*, II, 440.
\(^86\) *Ibid.*, III, 368.
III

In the conclusion of the Constantinople episode in Candide, after Pangloss, Candide and Martin have learned of the assassinations of two viziers and the mufti, they inquire of an old Turk the identity of the mufti. The old man replies:

"I do not know, I have never known the name of any mufti or any vizier. I am entirely ignorant of the occurrence you mention; I presume that in general those who meddle with public affairs sometimes perish miserably and that they deserve it; but I never inquire what is going on in Constantinople; I content myself with sending there for sale the produce of the garden I cultivate."

Learning more about this, the three men are impressed. Candide says: "That good old man seems to me to have chosen an existence preferable by far to that of the six kings with whom we had the honour to sup." Candide's statement triggers a tiresome discussion of "exalted rank" by Pangloss. Candide interrupts:

"I also know," said Candide, "that we should cultivate our gardens." "You are right," said Pangloss, "for, when man was placed in the Garden of Eden, he was placed there ut operaretur eum, to dress it and to keep it, which proves that man was not born for idleness." "Let us

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88Ibid., p. 148.
work without theorizing," said Martin; 'tis
the only way to make life endurable."89

Much of the advice on warding off melancholy
presented in this chapter and especially the advice given
by Johnson, can be summed up by the Voltairean dictum:
"Cultivate your own garden." In the Johnsonian view, this
would mean first that one should be busy in a constructive
task. The old farmer in Candide says: "I cultivate them
[his twenty acres] with my children; and work keeps at
bay three great evils: boredom, vice and need."90
Johnson would add to these, melancholy.

Secondly, the dictum implies that the task that
occupies one should be a limited task: the cultivation of
just a garden. Johnson's reply to Boswell regarding the
quotation of small incidents in his journal is relevant
here: "Sir, said he, there is nothing too little for so
little a creature as man. It is by studying the little
things that we attain the great knowledge of having as
little misery and as much happiness as possible."91
Boswell's assiduous recording of minute events could, in
fact, be an example of cultivating one's own garden, how­
ever simple or limited.

89Ibid., p. 149.
90Ibid., p. 147.
91London Journal, p. 305.
Finally, the advice is to cultivate your own garden—to stay at home in your own back yard—and even if it is a small garden, to cultivate well what you have chosen for yourself or has been chosen for you as your limited task. Significantly, Johnson did not like to travel and did not see much value in it; Boswell could not be kept at home. Boswell's peregrinations in Europe and his eagerness when in Scotland to return to London constituted, in fact, his way of avoiding cultivating his own garden, and he even delayed embarking upon a career, especially the one—law—chosen for him by his father, as long as he could. Johnson was often critical of him for this procrastination and Boswell, apparently aware of his vulnerability on this point, proposes in his "Inviolable Plan" to

... return to Scotland, be one of the Faculty of Advocates, have constant occupation, and a prospect of being in Parliament, or having a gown. ... You can pass some months at Auchinleck doing good to your tenants and living hospitably with your neighbours, beautifying your estate, rearing a family, and piously preparing for immortal felicity. 92

This was Boswell's personal prospect for cultivating his own garden. Constructive and limited to keeping usefully busy and attending to practical matters, it also involved

92See p. 16, above.
staying in his own milieu and not aspiring too high, but concentrating on what would be reasonable and possible.

The limitation in task and milieu also means that to cultivate one's own garden, one need not seek out any large causes, and Voltaire's Turkish farmer, all the better for it, knows nothing of Constantinople politics and cares less. This way he keeps out of trouble, and he is able to tend to his own affairs without any unnecessary distractions. In contrast, Boswell, who in his travels became involved in the cause of Corsican independence, violated the dictum on this count, for Corsica was far outside of Boswell's garden by any standard.

"'Let us work without theorizing,' says Martin," and so says Dr. Johnson. As we have seen in the excerpts from the Lives of the Poets quoted above, Dr. Johnson is somewhat reticent about speculating on the causes of his subjects' melancholies, while Boswell and his friends indulge in this type of speculation habitually. Johnson is more interested in the positive approach of keeping busy, avoiding solitude, doing anything simply to avoid yielding to an onslaught of melancholy: cultivating his own garden. He is annoyed by the different outlook inherent in Gray's notion—"a fantastick foppery"—that Gray could write only at happy moments, for this kind of attitude leads one to yield to his "disease" rather than
to cultivate his own garden. Johnson is also annoyed by the way the hypochondriac yields to his weakness when he complains to others about his psychic problems, rather than exerting the effort not to speak of these things. As far as is evident, Johnson rarely confided his psychic sufferings to anyone.

IV

This "cultivate-your-own garden" approach to life, shared by Candide, Martin, Dr. Johnson, and, in his resolutions, Boswell, may be said to be neo-classical in the sense that neo-classicism, as applied to aspects of the eighteenth century, is an outlook emphasizing harmony, order, discipline, respect for "the rules" and for models of the past.93 The neoclassic outlook is generally agreed

93 I am using the term "neo-classicism" in the sense of a cultural constant, following the example of Sir Herbert Grierson in his essay "Classical and Romantic: A Point of View" in The Background of English Literature: Classical and Romantic and Other Collected Essays and Addresses (London, 1950), pp. 256-290, when he says:

... Classical and romantic—these are the systole and the diastole of the human heart in history. They represent on the one hand our need of order, of synthesis, of a comprehensive yet definite, therefore exclusive as well as inclusive, ordering of thought and feeling and action; and on the other hand the inevitable finiteness of every human synthesis, the inevitable discovery that, in Carlyle's metaphor, our clothes no longer fit us, that the classical has become the conventional, that our spiritual
to embody a static view of society. The period in the eighteenth century called "neoclassic" was epitomized by the belief that there is a fundamental and unchanging order and harmony in the universe which could be perceived by the use of man's reason, his one reliable and immutable guide, and should be followed in order to arrive at the "truth." Nature, the way things are, is the given order. Following nature, then, according to the prevalent neoclassic assumptions, is following immutable principles, for one has only to follow nature to find truth. Evidence of this static outlook is the conviction in literature that one must confine oneself to the portrayal of the general principles of human nature by which "truth" for all times and to all educated people can become self-evident. The emphasis of all of these convictions is on the static, the unchanging and the given, as opposed to the dynamic and the remote.

aspirations are being starved, or that our secular impulses are "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confined;" . . . pp. 287-288.

Grierson, as well as other literary historians identify the dominant tendencies of the eighteenth century as "classical" or "neoclassical" in this sense. However, I am not so much interested in the term that is meant to stand for the main tendencies of this age, as I am in finding a concise and handy way to refer to the dominant "classical" qualities of the age itself.
Thus, the "cultivate-your-own-garden" approach seems to rest upon neoclassical premises. For, to cultivate one's own garden for Voltaire's Martin or Samuel Johnson means to deal at least stoically and attentively with what one's fortune and condition makes the "given" of his station and to ignore, reject, and resist involvement, from within and without, which distracts one from this purpose. In this way does Candide's Turkish farmer happily ignore the palace intrigues of Constantinople which are far outside his given place and function as a productive vegetable grower, and in this way also is Johnson, in dealing with melancholy in *The Lives of the Poets*, disdainful of Collins' "submission" to his trouble and annoyed with Gray for the "fantastic foppery" that allows him to interfere with his given work.

According to this viewpoint that one should tend to his own garden and, as implied, not try to meddle in grand affairs or to effect large changes, Johnson, in *Rasselas*, says: "Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed." This statement from *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* epitomizes what I have called the "neoclassic"

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point of view because it implies a pessimism that can result from the imposition of restraints and controls on oneself in the belief that one must confine himself to the "given" of his station and condition, no matter how unpleasant the circumstances of this "given" is, and to endure these circumstances because they are his "lot" in life. In this way does Johnson "endure" his melancholy. Though Boswell struggles with his melancholy, he is aware of weaknesses in not overcoming it, his failure to attain "that aequality of behaviour that whether . . . (his) spirits are high or low, people may see little odds upon . . . [him]." 95 Thus is Boswell's "ideal" in harmony with Johnson's neoclassical outlook in which melancholy must be "endured" and kept secret. Thus is Boswell's outlook, despite his deviations from it in practice, basically in line with the moral and intellectual outlook of his times.

95 See p. 18, above.
At the entrance of Boswell's father's house at Auchinleck appeared this motto from Horace:

Quod petis, hic est; Est Ulubris, animus si te non deficit aequus.

Freely translated, it means: "All you seek is here, here in the remoteness and quiet of Ulubrae [Auchinleck], if you have fitted yourself with a steady mind." This motto serves as a good introduction to the man who lived inside. It rightly suggests that Lord Auchinleck spent his time cultivating his garden and thought it an occupation good enough for any man. Since "all you seek is here," what need had James to go wandering all over the continent? Apparently the senior Boswell had not much inclination to puzzle over this or any other question concerning his son. His son describes him as "a healthy, sound, hard-working man, who has never experienced one moment of hypochondria, and who regards the complaints of

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96 Epistles, I. xi, 29-30, quoted in Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France, p. 73, n. 3. The editors point out that Ulubrae, a small village near the Pontine marshes, is used by Horace as an example of an unpleasant residence.
men like us (Boswell and his friend Mallet, to whom he is addressing these remarks) as so much affectation."\(^97\) Obviously, then, Boswell's father was not a man with whom a person having any sort of aberration could come to an understanding.

From Boswell's references to his father in his papers, the senior Boswell appears to have been a man of a stern and rigidly conventional character. He seems to have treated Boswell with little or no affection and to have been unwilling to understand the younger Boswell's impulse towards independence. He was fixed in his opinions and would not tolerate any objections to his ideas even though they often involved the very fiber of his son's existence. Lord Auchinleck's persistent attitude towards his son is evident in the following excerpt from a letter he wrote to James after having perused James' private journals. The journals had been sent to a friend by Boswell and accidentally got into Boswell's father's hands:

After mentioning these particulars (his grievances against James), if you'll at all reflect, you must be sensible what I suffer by your means. Is it not hard that after all the tenderness I have shown you and the expense and labour I have bestowed upon you, you should not only neglect your own reputation, but do what you can to bring me to shame on your account?

\(^97\)Letter dated Sept. 15, 1765, in *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France*, p. 133.
The offices I hold entitle me to some respect, and I get it beyond my merit from all that know me except you, who by the laws of God, nature, gratitude, and interest are bound to do what you can to make me happy, in place of striving, as it were, to find out the things will be most galling to me and making these your pursuit. What I have said will account for my not having wrote you these three months. Indeed, finding that I could be of no use to you, I had determined to abandon you, to free myself as much as possible from sharing your ignominy, and to take the strongest and most public steps for declaring to the world that I was come to this resolution.98

About a week prior to this letter, Boswell had written his side of the argument with his father to Sir David Dalrymple, a trusted family friend:

You must know seriously that I am a good deal uneasy at present. My father is far from being pleased with me. We are really on bad terms, which is a most disagreeable thing. He is bent on my returning to Scotland; and following the plan that he did. I am unsettled and roving, and would choose to drive about from one thing to another, abnormis sapiens [wise without the rules], if it be possible to be so. I have a most independent spirit. I cannot bear control, nor to hang on like a young Laird. I assure you I have a sincere regard and affection for my father, and am anxious to make him easy.99

It is clear that James was always consciously eager to please his father. From Italy, he writes to John Johnston:

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The great point will be to begin properly when I return, and get my father to see me as I really am. Come, my good friend, encourage me. Who knows but I may yet rejoice my father's heart? I call God to witness that I wish most earnestly to do so. 100

And this notation appears in his daily memoranda from about the same time: "Swear keep up own firm character to surprise Father, etc." 101

Most of the time, however, Boswell cannot but despair of his chances of pleasing his father. Again, to John Johnston, he says:

My great comfort is that I am ever firm in my attachment to the old Family of Auchenleck, to my worthy parents, and to my bosom friends . . . I must, however, own that I am uneasy when I think of returning to Scotland. My father is very well satisfied with me at present but I much fear he will not be so when he finds me at home with him. By his way of writing I can discover that he expects me to be a solid, steady man, who shall apply to business with persevering assiduity. But, my dear friend, you know there is hardly any probability that I shall ever be such a man. Years, indeed, may render me steady, but I despair of having application. God bestows his gifts as he thinks fit, and long study of myself has convinced me that my constitution was never intended for great labour of mind. . . . I swear to you that I seriously think it my truest philosophy to be content with the powers which my Maker has assigned me, and not to torment myself by ineffectual struggles to change my nature. 102

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100 Letter dated May 11, 1765, Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France, p. 79.
101 Ibid., p. 88.
102 Ibid., p. 78.
Ten years later, in a letter to William Temple, Boswell gives an example of his father's behavior towards him:

My father is most unhappily dissatisfied with me. My wife and I dined with him on Saturday. He did not salute her, though he had not seen her for three months; nor did he so much as ask her how she did; though she is pretty big with child. I understand he fancies that if I had married another woman, I might not only have had a better portion with her, but might have been kept from what he thinks idle and extravagant conduct. He harps on my going over Scotland with a brute [Samuel Johnson] (think how shockingly erroneous), and wandering (or some such phrase) to London. In vain do I defend myself . . . How hard is it, that I am excluded from parental comfort. I have a mind to go to Auchinleck next autumn and try what living in a mixed stupidity of attention to country objects, and restraint from expressing any of my own feelings can do with him.\footnote{Letter dated June 19, 1775, in \textit{Letters}, I, 235.}

As Boswell suggests in the passage quoted above, his father disliked Samuel Johnson. Boswell's father referred to Johnson as "Ursa Major" probably because he was rather jealous of Johnson's influence over James, but Johnson and the elder Boswell probably had more in common than James understood.

Like Boswell's father, Johnson believed that the key to contentment was, in effect, the cultivation of one's own garden. Although Johnson, unlike Lord Auchinleck, had experienced a great deal of melancholy, he was
like Boswell's father in his contempt for those who complained about their mental sufferings.

There were other similarities. Like Boswell's father, Johnson was sturdy and represented "manliness" to James. He symbolized the strength, forcefulness, and steadfastness which Boswell knew he himself was lacking and which he wished to obtain in order to become a mature and perhaps outstanding person. It was these attributes of manliness that Boswell had tried to incorporate into his "Inviolable Plan" and his daily memoranda to himself recorded in Holland. In fact, Boswell was obsessed with this image of manliness or solidarity, of which his own father, before Johnson, was the model.

The younger Boswell was always concerned with his lack of self-control and mental stability and, considering the choice of friends he made, he seemed to crave the direction of a man who possessed the qualities that he lacked. He seemed to have desired a close relationship with someone who could treat him with the authority of a father but who would not have his father's insensitivity and harshness. This should in part explain his attachment to Johnson, who, like Boswell's father had "manliness," but a manliness well-tempered with humanity.

Boswell had claimed that it was Johnson's Rambler papers with its advice not to place much importance upon
worldly desires that cured him of his severe attack of melancholy in Utrecht. This is not very likely, since Boswell's periodic depressions did not have a philosophical or religious basis. We have seen that religion was powerless to help him during his depressions, and Boswell as much as admits that his happiness or unhappiness does not have a philosophical basis when he says, commenting on Johnson's pessimism: "The truth, however, is that we judge of the happiness and misery of life differently at different times, according to the state of our changeable frame." If Johnson's Rambler did help Boswell, it was probably only in an indirect way. It could be that the help came through Boswell's recollection at the time he was reading the papers of Johnson's past kindliness towards him—the kindliness of a man who in many ways represented Boswell's ideal.

Yet, as we have seen, Johnson was not the understanding friend to whom Boswell could talk freely when he was depressed. Johnson was not the friend who at the critical moment would, by reaching out to him, reassure him that he, Boswell, had not changed, that he was not an

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104 Boswell in Holland, pp. 18 & 28.
105 See p. 30, above.
106 Life of Johnson, I, 343.
inferior weakling, that he was today the same as yesterday, that his friends of yesterday were still his friends today, and that the external world, which had contained values and pleasures for him yesterday was still the same today. In short, Johnson was not the friend whose sympathy might make Boswell remember that today's picture of himself and the world was a distorted one but that he would soon return to seeing himself and the world from his normal perspective.

But Boswell did have two friends who could and would reach out to him and remind him of the stability of the world. These two friends were John Johnston and William Temple. While being themselves hypochondriacs, they seem to have had the stability that Boswell admired in Johnson, but they did not consider it unmanly to talk about their infirmities. Since Boswell did not view them with the awe and fear he had for Johnson he could feel free to confide in them what he could not confide to his modified father-figure, Johnson.

Another of Boswell's confidants was Sir David Dalrymple, an older man who was a close family friend. Sir David often acted as liaison between Boswell and Lord Auchinleck and was respected by both. Boswell trusted him and confided in him to some extent.
Johnson, Dalrymple, Johnston, and Temple were all good influences in that they represented to a greater or lesser extent Boswell's ideal of manliness. However, Erskine and Dempster, two fellow Scotsmen whom Boswell had known since boyhood, were not good influences, and Boswell rejected them as friends. He decided that they were only "companions," not "real friends."

As his published letters indicate, Boswell could reveal the most intimate and what Johnson would consider the most shameful details of his life and be assured of a faithful and sympathetic hearing from John Johnston and William Temple. Temple was a clergyman who took his duties seriously. Yet to Temple, Boswell, who was a married man, related his plans for the seduction of a chambermaid, concluding:

I am too many, as the phrase is, for one woman, and a certain transient connection I am persuaded does not interfere with that attachment which a man has for a wife and which I have as much as any man that ever lived .

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107I have not mentioned John Wilkes' influence on Boswell, as Wilkes did not seem to represent an ideal to Boswell (and indeed does not fit the ideal that Boswell created for himself). Wilkes does not loom as a father-figure in Boswell's journals, and Boswell did not seem to entrust himself to Wilkes' confidence as he did to that of his friends Johnston and Temple. Wilkes seems to have represented only one side of Boswell, and it was this side that Boswell wished to change.

Concubinage is almost universal. If it was morally wrong why was it permitted to the most pious men under the old testament. Why did our Saviour never say a word against it? 109

Boswell seemed to regard Temple, who was his own age, as a father, and in the excerpt from the letter quoted above, seemed to want Temple to dissuade him from his unconventional marital ideas.

Boswell could also write like this to Temple:

My Dearest Temple,—Expect not in this letter to hear of anything but the misery of your poor friend. I have been melancholy to the most shocking and most tormenting degree. You know the weakness and gloominess of my mind, and you dreaded that this would be the case . . . O Temple! all my resolutions of attaining a consistent character are blown to the winds. All my hopes of being a man of respect are gone. I would give a thousand worlds to have only mere ease . . . Alas, what can I do? I cannot read. My mind is destroyed by dissipation. But is not dissipation better than melancholy? Oh, surely anything is better than this. 110

And Temple could respond with a sympathetic and fatherly reply like this:

My Ever Dear Friend,—I received your very affecting letter and sympathize with you from the bottom of my soul. I sincerely pity the unhappy disposition of your mind, and would give the world to relieve you. But, my dear Boswell, if you pay any regard to your own character, if you have any affection for me, I beg you may endeavour to act a part more


110 Letter dated August 16, 1763, Boswell in Holland, pp. 7 & 8.
becoming yourself. Remember your resolutions before we parted, allow reason to reassume her dominion, think of Johnson, and be again a man.  

In another letter to Temple, Boswell's awareness that his suffering is comprehensible to others reveals a bond between him and his friend and a gulf between him and his father:

... My dear friend, I am sensible that my wretchedness cannot be conceived by one whose mind is sound. I am terrified that my father will impute all this to mere idleness and love of pleasure.  

Thus, it is clear that Boswell did not suffer alone. His close relationships with men of sufficient moral stature to console and reassure him seems to have sustained him, if not when he was actually suffering from an attack of melancholy, at least between attacks, and nowhere does Boswell give us the impression that his is a voice crying in the wilderness.

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CHAPTER VI

THE NEOCLASSICISM OF BOSWELL'S MELANCHOLY

When Boswell tells his close friends about his attacks of melancholy, his manner suggests complete confidence that, even if they have not personally experienced what he describes, they share with him a common frame of reference into which most of his aberrant feelings can be fitted. It is clear, then, that Boswell does not consider his condition unique. Furthermore, in his Hypochondriack essays, he seems to regard melancholy as an universal malady. He says:

I flatter myself that The Hypochondriack may be agreeably received as a periodical essayist in England, where the malady known by the denomination of melancholy, hypochondria, spleen, or vapours has been long supposed almost universal. . . .

Because of the supposed universality of "the malady," his writings about it can serve the neoclassical "useful purpose." He says in the preface to the essays:

. . . I acknowledge I cannot help feeling a satisfaction compounded between vanity and benevolence, while I please myself with the hope of

113"Number One," p. 106.
contributing to the relief of many as unhappy as I have formerly been.\textsuperscript{114}

Also, in a prefatory statement to his essay "On Hypochondria" (No. 39), where he details the feelings of a hypochondriac suffering an "attack" of melancholy, he says:

\begin{quote}
I have a mind to try what I can write in so wretched a frame of mind; as there may perhaps be some of my unhappy brethren just as ill as myself, to whom it may be soothing to know that I now write at all.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

But, even beyond offering such a consolation, Boswell makes a strong claim: "... and whoever has experienced what I now suffer must feel his situation justly and strongly described."\textsuperscript{116}

Boswell then proceeds to give a "character" in the seventeenth century sense of the word. The "character" is the universal hypochondriac. Boswell says: "Let us select some of those thoughts, the multitude of which confounds and overwhelms the mind of a Hypochondriack."\textsuperscript{117}

Boswell, the anonymous writer of this essay, says he is writing what he feels at present, but what he feels at present he takes to be typical of the feelings of any

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 110.
\item \textsuperscript{115}II, 40-41.
\item \textsuperscript{116}Ibid., p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{117}Ibid., p. 41, (Underlining mine).
\end{itemize}
hypochondriac during an attack of melancholy. And, as the excerpts quoted from this essay in Chapter III, above, indicate, Boswell describes what we have seen from his private papers to be typical of his own state of mind when he is melancholy and dwells on issues, such as those of changeableness and in-stability, that were always Boswell's own personal preoccupations. Yet it does not seem to occur to Boswell that his own preoccupations when he is melancholy might not be endowed with the typicality that he assumes, for when he talks about "the hypochondriac," he is, in effect, describing what he knows about himself.

Johnson is also able to speak objectively about the melancholy from which he suffers and of the madman or melancholiac\(^\text{\textsuperscript{118}}\) as a character type without referring to himself. He can discuss the characteristics of the madman, which we know is what he had feared that he would become, basing his remarks on his own self-observations and yet remain behind the mask of impersonality.

This attention to the typical—-the ideal—underlines Boswell's, as well as Johnson's neoclassical tendencies. (It is generally agreed that adherence to the concept of the ideal or universal is a fundamental

\(^\text{118}\)See p. 44, above.
neoclassical preoccupation.\textsuperscript{119} Boswell thinks and writes in terms of the typical and universal, and it is only the belief that his essay will convey information that applies to all hypochondriacs that makes Boswell feel that his writings will be useful, the usefulness of literature being another important neoclassical premise. He is not writing "in so wretched a state of mind" simply in order to express himself but to prove to his "unhappy brethren, just as ill as myself," that he can write at all when he is suffering from melancholy. (It should be remembered that Johnson thought it a "fantastick foppery" that Gray thought himself unable to work when under the influence of black melancholy.) He implies, therefore, that only his typicality could make what he is about to describe useful.

\textsuperscript{119}In From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (Harper Torchbook, 1961), p. 7, Walter Jackson Bate writes:

Arising from the classical assumption that man's reason and his moral nature are one is the belief that character can be justly formed and guided only by a genuine insight into the universal, and by the rational grasp of the decorum, measure, and standard which characterize the ideal. The portrayal of the universal in art—the exhibition, in other words, of the general in the particular, of the one in the many—can achieve permanent success only if the particulars employed are reasonably common to the experience of cultivated mankind throughout successive generations. Indeed, the most pervasive single tendency of almost all classicism may be defined, as Mr. Santayana has said, by the phrase "the idealization of the familiar."
and that only this intention of usefulness could justify the writing of this essay. Apparently, then, were he to consider his case of melancholy unique, he would not have written the essay.

The neoclassical preoccupation with the ideal or universal is also apparent in Boswell's concern with establishing goals for his own behavior. Boswell the indiscreet wishes to be "retenu;" he wishes to have Erskine's indifference, Addison's moderation, Sir Richard Steele's gaiety, and so on. What we arrive at, then, is a composite portrait, a picture of the ideal James Boswell.

In full accord with the establishment of an ideal, which is a summation of a great many individual parts, is Boswell's method of dealing with the problem of his melancholy. His speculations, as well as those of the people he consults, as to causes and cures of melancholy (the idea that "melancholy" is one thing to all people and hence has one set of causes and cures is perhaps another example of a neoclassical attraction to the universal) is symptomatic of a piecemeal approach to a highly complex problem. The assumption that Boswell and his friends make is that an individual can change particular habits or character traits which, in reality, are themselves only symptoms of the larger problem, and be cured. The only problem, on the basis of this assumption, is identifying
these habits or traits and working, on a behavioral level, towards their extinction. This approach betrays the absence of a dynamic conception of personality.120

There is a great deal more advice and theory as to the causes and cures of melancholy to be found among Boswell's writings than has been considered in this paper, but the items of advice and speculations not considered do not differ in approach from what has been presented here. Moreover, although Boswell talks about melancholy in his papers a great deal of the time, he does not very often say anything different from what he has repeated endlessly before. It must be agreed that Boswell was not very perceptive about his problem and that he never attained to any significant degree of insight about it. His advice and theories are fairly shallow and not really very interesting in themselves. What is interesting are Boswell's authentic descriptions of his neurotic depressions, his need to speculate on them, the interest he had in the case histories and advice of other sufferers, and his conviction that the sufferings of all melancholiacs were alike.

Boswell's conviction that his sufferings are not different from those of anyone else who has the "disease"

120 See p. 62, above.
of melancholy is even more curious when we consider that the special quality of Boswell's blackest depressions is essentially asocial feelings. During an attack of melancholy, he feels out of sympathy with the world and its objects, and he is unable to see anything worth striving for. "The world is one undistinguished wild," Boswell says. This statement underscores the disorderliness, purposelessness, and futility that Boswell feels during an attack of black melancholy. While suffering from melancholy, Boswell experiences feelings that one would tend to associate with the despairing Byronic heroes of the Romantic period or the "Age of Anxiety" neurotic.

It does not seem likely that the black melancholy of Boswell was any less intense than that of Byron or of other nineteenth century Romantics, nor was Boswell any less interested in talking about it than are the black melancholiacs of our present age of psychiatry. However, it seems to me that there is an essential difference in social implication between the melancholies suffered by Boswell, on the one hand, and that of many later melancholiacs, on the other. While Boswell's attacks of melancholy caused him to feel completely isolated from the world and its objects and without any direction or purpose, when he was not suffering from melancholy he did not continue to feel this isolation and purposelessness. In fact,
as has already been noted, he could even objectify his experience of melancholy into the universal character of the hypochondriac. He, thus, regarded his experience of melancholy, when not suffering from it, as a common experience which he shared with many others whose experiences of melancholy were almost identical with his. Were this not so, he could not have created the generalized character of the hypochondriac.

On the other hand, the melancholiacs among the Romantics and, perhaps, those of the twentieth century seem unable to so objectify their condition and to identify it as a common one shared in almost identical form by many of their contemporaries. Indeed, for later melancholiacs, the feeling of isolation during attacks of

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I have here given myself license to generalize about melancholiacs of the Romantic period and of the twentieth century as though they were indistinguishable groups. I am sure that there are significant differences between the qualities of their respective melancholies, but this is a subject for another study. My main purpose here is to underscore the Boswellian assumption that melancholy is a disease that affects one victim much the same as it affects any other and that Boswell himself, as a sufferer, is typical of all sufferers. I would, however, make one distinction between them. It seems to me that whereas the Romantic and Byronic melancholiacs seemed to be unable to objectify their condition and see it as a common one shared by many contemporaries, the twentieth century melancholic may be able to see his melancholy as anxiety or anguish shared by others in this "age of anxiety," but that this gives him no particular comfort.
melancholy tends to carry over into their non-melancholy periods and become a constant feeling of alienation and purposelessness, regularly recharged and brought to mind by succeeding attacks of melancholy. The difference between Boswell's melancholy and that of later sufferers may be explicable in terms of the differences in social structure and attitudes toward the social structure in their respective societies. Boswell's society was a fairly rigidly-structured one in which he had a clearly defined place and in which he felt himself to have a place.

The society of the Romantics and of the twentieth century is generally conceded to be much less structured, to provide much less clearly-defined social places, and to give little encouragement to individuals to feel that they have any socially-recognized place or function. Consequently, post-neoclassical melancholiacs seldom have any socially-recognized identity and place to secure themselves against the deluge of isolation and purposelessness that their attacks of melancholy bring and to rescue them from further feelings of alienation; they have little of the material for the kind of ideal self-portrait and "Inviolable Plan" of life which seems to have given Boswell some feeling of direction. Having a well-defined place in a relatively close-knit society whose values he accepted did not, then, prevent Boswell and scores of his contemporaries
from having serious emotional problems. But this consciousness of place or part in society would seem to have prevented Boswell and some of his fellow melancholiacs from experiencing the continuing feelings of isolation and alienation that plagued Romantic melancholiacs and perhaps twentieth century ones as well.
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