To Samuel Butler, writing in 1659, melancholy’s etiology was clear. The melancholic mind was obnubilated—clouded over—by noxious vapours emanating from humoural disturbances below:

[Man’s] Head is haunted, like a House, with evil Spirits and Apparitions, that terrify and fright him out of himself, till he stands empty and forsaken….The Fumes and Vapours that rise from his Spleen and Hypochondries have so smutted and sullied his Brain (like a Room that smoaks) that his Understanding is blared-ey’d, and has no right Perception of any Thing. His Soul lives in his Body, like a Mole in the Earth.

Forty-two years later, Anne Finch’s ‘The Spleen’ was more sceptical: « What art thou, Spleen, which everything does ape? | Thou Proteus to abused mankind, | Who never yet thy real cause could find | Or fix thee to remain in one continued shape » (ll. 1-4). Finch thought that « Falsely, the mortal part we blame » (l. 25) for these delusions, and throughout her Pindaric she oscillated between acknowledging melancholy’s « terrible » power (l. 77) and suspecting that such sentiments were more factitious than real. In this paper I want to examine what prompted early eighteenth-century writers to lose confidence in the traditional, humoural language of melancholy exemplified by Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, but I also want to ask in what sense an attachment to melancholy nonetheless persisted, even amongst the otherwise sceptical Scriblerians. My focus will be Jonathan Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*, but let me first define how melancholy was understood in 1700.

Angus has mentioned Galen’s account of the disease. According to this theory, an excessive build-up of the natural humour of melancholy, or the « adustion »—the spontaneous combustion—of any of the four humours so as to form unnatural melancholy, will distemper man’s physiology (*Anatomy* i. 167. 2-21). Such events may occur throughout the body, in the head, or—crucially for my

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purposes—in the hypochondries. Wherever situated though, the distempering humour will putrefy, producing black vapours that ascend through the viscera until they darken the animal spirits and infiltrate the imagination. (In hypochondriacal melancholy this motion is accompanied by « falsome belchings, continuall winde..., heate and griping in the bowels » (i. 411. 7-8).) The imagination, once suffused with these morbid vapours, becomes troubled with « terrible monstrous fictions in a thousand shapes & apparitions » (i. 419. 1), to which the sensitive appetite reacts by triggering the heart to suffer passions of fear and sadness. Melancholic delusion and its characteristic emotions begin, then, in this way; and nor can reason check these thoughts because such is the difficulty of detecting the vapours within that the fantasies appear real. Consequently, melancholic conceits prove strikingly tenacious: « still, still, still thinking of it:...Though they doe talke with you,...still that toy runnes in their minde,...that suspition, that abuse,...that crotchet, that whimsie » (i. 393. 9-14).

This account of melancholy, drawn here from Burton, was commonplace in the seventeenth century. Henry More, for example, interpreted the fanaticism of dissenters as its own kind of melancholy since theirs was a condition in which « one particular absurd Imagination » gripped the mind. He continued:

The Spirit...that wings the Enthusiast...is nothing else but that Flatulency which is in the Melancholy complexion, and rises out of the Hypochondriacal humour upon some occasional heat....Which fume mounting into the Head,...fills the Mind with variety of Imaginations, and so quickens...Invention, that it makes the Enthusiast to admiration fluent and eloquent, he being...drunk with new wine drawn from that Cellar of his own Body.

Mystical interpretations of Scripture, quaking, and visions were all, therefore, to be regarded as the monomaniac fantasies of madmen gripped by hypochondriac melancholy. Yet by 1700 etiological language premised upon the principles of humoural physiology was declining. Anatomists had found no chimney-like passages within the body, no « fumes...wafting up from the guts and smoking out

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6 Ibid., p. 12.

Instead, the explanatory focus was already shifting (thanks to Thomas Willis) to iatrochemical accounts of melancholy, accounts which attributed the disease to chemical changes that rendered the blood and animal spirits acetous, and so stagnant and corrosive. This paradigm gave way, in turn, first (under Herman Boerhaave’s influence), to mechanical explanations, which rooted melancholy in disruptions to the hydrodynamics of the blood and to the flow of animal spirits through the nerves; then (via William Cullen’s work), to mechanist cum vitalist explanations, which identified melancholy with torpor and rigidity in the nerve fluid, inhibiting the latter’s capacity to transmit vibratory motions. In 1704, however, when Swift published A Tale of a Tub, most of these developments—and, with them, the « nervous » language of hypochondria and « the spleen » associated with Blackmore, Robinson, Cheyne and Whytt—still lay ahead. Swift’s frame of reference remained that of Burton and More. As I will show later, the satirist who pictured Houyhnhnms drawn in sledges by Yahoos had good reason to remember Robert Burton, the proclaimer of mankind’s universal madness who fancied he saw, amidst the world’s many follies, « horses ride in a Coach, men draw it » (i. 54. 31).

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Throughout his Tale, Swift ridicules the materialism of natural philosophy’s efforts to explain human behaviour by magnifying its literal-mindedness to the point of absurdity. Thus, in Section I the Hack—the naïve, pretentious persona who narrates the Tale—presents a « Physico-logical Scheme of Oratorical Receptacles » parodic of recent attempts to attribute mass to the air. This « Scheme » postulates a gravitational theory of communication according to which words, being aerial « Bodies of much Weight » (38), must be spoken from on high so as to drop into the open maws of audiences waiting, gaping-mouthed, below.
Elsewhere, Swift mocks the materialist, commodifying tendencies of the Moderns’ approach to learning by having his Hack report an alchemical technique for distilling books into a potable liquid, thus rendering knowledge ingestible (82). The taste for indexes, systems and abstracts is likewise presented as a substitute for «the Fatigue of Reading or…Thinking» (96), and Swift connects the Moderns’ preoccupation with outward forms of wit more generally—the realm of the signifier rather than signified—to contemporary philosophy’s fixation upon empirical materialism. His principal focus, though, in combating materialism concerns its tendency to reify the soul. What the Hack describes seriously and approvingly, Swift holds up for ridicule:

what is Man himself but a Micro-Coat,…a compleat Suit of Cloaths with all its Trimings ? ...Those Beings which the World calls improperly Suits of Cloaths, are in Reality the most refined…Rational Creatures, or Men. For, is it not manifest, that They live, and move, and talk, and perform all other Offices of Human Life ? Are not Beauty, and Wit, and Mien, and Breeding, their inseparable Proprieties ? …Is it not they who walk the Streets, fill up Parliament—, Coffee—, Play—, Bawdy-Houses…Man [is] an Animal compounded of two Dresses, the Natural and the Celestial Suit, which [are] the Body and the Soul : …the Soul [is] the outward, and the body the inward Cloathing. (49-50)

We are offered, here, an inversion of past belief, what was once thought an excrescence suddenly laying claim to being essential. There is, too, an obvious note of social satire about the passage, an implication that modern urban life, with its culture of politeness and consumerism, comes at the expense of inward character and integrity. Above all, Swift insinuates that the mechanistic reduction of man’s original soul to the status of a mere ghost in the machine—a reduction on which the above redefinition of «soul» depends—is intimately connected to England’s moral torpor. Implicitly, this new soul is, for Swift, no soul at all, and he indicates through his satire his own continued adherence to a less materialist pneumatology.

Ultimately, as I will show shortly, the Tale’s repeated invocations of melancholy and « the spleen » demand interpretation in this same, anti-materialist light. Swift drew on Henry More and the humoural tradition to frame his characters’ supposed faiths—Peter’s Romanism, Jack’s Calvinism—as manifestations of quasi-melancholic delusion. Both figures suffer from « Phrenzy » and « Spleen » (128). Both conceive « the strangest Imaginations » (73). Being « run mad out of Pride » (73), Peter’s monomania focuses around the delusion that bread is in fact mutton and its dry crust a claret. In other respects Peter is capable of « lucid Intervals » (77)—a stock phrase in the contemporary discourse of madness—but where these two perceptions are concerned his imagination is as dogmatic as the stereotypical melancholic who believes himself made of butter or glass. Meantime Jack (« run mad with Spleen » (94)) subscribes to a version of More’s diagnosis of enthusiasm, but as if this were a creed rather than a bit of nosology. Jack and his fellow Æolists take literally the precept that the soul is a kind of wind, and so fart and belch freely (« the Sourer the better » (101)) as a means of sharing that breath of God abroad. The Æolists imagine themselves
skilled in bottling the winds of « Σχοτια » (meaning Scotland but also « the Land of Darkness » and so of melancholy). Thus equipped, they pipe fresh supplies of inspiration into themselves through the anus—« not...without much Pain and Gripings », as per Burton’s hypochondriac melancholics—and they then « disembogue whole Tempests upon [their] Auditories » (102). In sum, Jack and his ilk actively cultivate More’s hypochondriac flatulence in the mad conviction that it is a truly spiritual condition; this, a peculiarly self-referential version of the spleen.

Swift, then, exploits the expressive power of contemporary nosology as an apt language in which to satirise his characters’ spiritual pretensions. However, even as he does so, he brings the very paradigm of humoral diagnosis into disrepute by pushing it to the very limit of absurdity. The same suspicion of materialist tendencies evident elsewhere in the Tale is apparent again here. Swift takes the idea of hypochondriac motions and gives it the most literal expression he can in order to emphasise the absurdity of pretending that such a discourse might in any sense explain goings-on in the mind, the immaterial soul. The further accounts of frenzy in the Tale’s « Digression...of Madness » (105) then compound this impression. There, the Hack glibly demonstrates that empire-builders, proponents of new philosophical schemes, and religious enthusiasts are all driven by the same etiology—essentially that of the humoral account of melancholy. Swift’s persona claims that such innovative « Imaginations » as Epicurus’ vision of swerving atoms or Descartes’ mechanistic theory of vortices can only be explained by recourse to the phenomenon of « Vapours, ascending from the lower Faculties, to water the [Understanding’s] Invention » and so spawn these ideas (108, 105). Likewise, Henri IV’s bellicose intentions towards the Hapsburgs are ascribed to the effects of what Burton calls « Venus omitted », when raised but unspent semen putrefies and « sends up poisoned vapours to the Brain » (Anatomy i. 230. 9, 15-17)—or, in Swift’s terms, becomes « adust...and ascends to the Brain » (106). The problem with these generic « vapour » arguments is that they cannot account for the individuality of different cases. Swift’s Hack acknowledges this and attributes such variation to the uniqueness of each person’s brain, the different soils upon which the watering vapours act. Yet just as he begins to elaborate on this—outlining exactly « how this numerical Difference in the Brain, can produce Effects of so vast a Difference from the same Vapour, as to be the sole Point of Individuation between Alexander the Great, Jack of Leyden, and Monsieur Des Cartes » (109)—Swift’s putative manuscript breaks off, only to resume with the words « And this I take to be a clear Solution of the Matter » (110). Swift here uses silence to mock the vacuity of the mechanical explanatory models in play, their failure to account for the individual particularity of each human mind. The traditional language of melancholy, and its vocabulary of fumes and evacuations, is thus shown to be too literal-minded, too reductively materialist, to accommodate the complexities of man’s soul. In fact, Swift implies that this mode of explanation constitutes its own kind of melancholy since there is a singularity of vision about it, a still, still, still thinking upon the same crotchet, the same whimsy, the same old notion of smoky fumes, that itself suggests the very monomania that this theory of madness is trying to explain. Swift thus anticipates Foucault’s insight that etiologies of melancholy often read more as if they belong in the disease’s symptomology: « L’explication

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Clearly, then, even before other, more medically-oriented developments could take effect—innovations in iatrochemistry, hydrodynamics and vitalism—Scriblerian criticism was already sapping the explanatory force of the humoural paradigm. This was one reason why Burtonian notions of melancholy declined in the early 1700s, but two other factors also played a part. Firstly, behaviours which, in the seventeenth century, had been thought indicative of abnormal psychology became perceived, even vaunted, in the eighteenth as markers of normality—this for political reasons. In 1713, *Guardian* 144 presented a celebration of « the British humours », claiming that every Englishman has « a peculiar Cast of Head, and…Turn of Wit, or some uncommon Whim »—some « Original Humour »—that « distinguishes him from others »14. Individual idiosyncrasies that, in Jonson, would have been an index of absurdity, an aberration from the ideal of humoural balance, here become objects of proud delight, to be cherished, not eradicated. The inspiration for this shift came from William Temple’s 1690 essay « Upon Poetry », now recalled by *The Guardian*:

> This [humorous quality] may proceed from the Native Plenty of our Soil, the Unequalness of our Climate, as well as the Ease of our Government, and the Liberty of professing Opinions and Factions, which perhaps our Neighbours have about them, but are forced to disguise, and thereby may come in time to be extinguished. Thus we come to have more Originals, and more that appear what they are: We have more Humour, because every Man follows his own, and takes a Pleasure, perhaps a Pride, to shew it15.

The Whiggish *Guardian* insists on the connection between this mindset and the libertarian flavour of post-revolutionary Britain: « So long as ever Wit and Humour continues, and the Generality of us will have their own way of Thinking », this predisposition, we are told, will serve as « a standing bulwark of [our] Liberties »16.

A similar argument was put by Pope in his *Epistle to Cobham*. Pope, too, isolates what he calls each individual’s « Ruling Passion » as the defining source of identity. This *idée fixe*, a petty madness, is no longer conceived as an aberration but as the very essence of man, at once a trait for poets to satirise yet also the focus of energetic being: « In this one Passion man can strength enjoy, | As Fits give

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15 Ibid., p. 475.
16 Ibid., pp. 475-6.
vigour, just when they destroy » (ll. 222-3)\textsuperscript{17}. Epistle II of the \textit{Essay on Man} repeats the point. There, the ruling passion begins as « The Mind’s disease, », its « peccant part », as per the traditional perspective of humoural discourse (ll. 138, 144)\textsuperscript{18}. However, « Th’Eternal Art »—Providence—« educing good from ill, | Grafts on this Passion our best principle » (ll. 175-6), turning it to virtuous effect and so rendering what was undesirable desirable\textsuperscript{19}. Preoccupying anger is converted into fortitude, for example ; hatred into wit. Hence a humoural language which had once explained what was malign about « the English malady » now serves to justify what is best about Britishness.

The other factor which eroded received assumptions about melancholy at this time was the contemporary preoccupation with interrogating the truthfulness of emotions. Periodicals repeatedly belittled melancholy as a fabrication of fashion. \textit{Tatlers} 47 and 80 ridicule as trivial the concerns—such as a gentleman’s obsession that he is the victim of others’ (non-existent) snubs—to which the sobriquet of « the spleen » lends spurious significance\textsuperscript{20}. \textit{Spectator} 494 likewise depicts religious melancholy as an effete indulgence\textsuperscript{21}. Number 336 reports the complaint of a china-dealer besieged by « Ladies of Fashion, who having nothing to do, employ themselves in tumbling over my Ware » without buying anything, all so as to divert themselves from their factitious « Vapours »\textsuperscript{22}. The correspondent of \textit{Spectator} 53, whilst maintaining that he is « truly Splenatick », is piqued to find others pretending to the same « wise Distemper », and so threatens to « quit the Disease »\textsuperscript{23}. Addison’s point is to reveal how facile this man’s condition is ; and Addison voices the same irony in number 547 when he reports the testimonies of such spoof-readers as Elizabeth Rainbow, George Gloom and Thomas Smoaky, who applaud the \textit{Spectator} as excellent distraction therapy for the spleen\textsuperscript{24}. Crucially, number 26, Addison’s account of wandering through Westminster Abbey, meditating on its tombs, insists on the possibility of being « serious » about such a subject without becoming melancholy about it\textsuperscript{25}. The spleen is actively refused here, rejected as a shallow response to the Abbey’s « deep…solemn Scenes ». Likewise, \textit{Tatler} 181 emphasises melancholy’s contrived nature, its status as a mode of thought that one can « resolve…to lead the Mind into », and which is therefore cognitively, not organically, caused\textsuperscript{26}.

The Scriblerians developed this point about the rehearsed, formulaic nature of melancholy. Their doing so was part of a wider concern to subject received

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., iii.-i. 71-2.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., iii.-i. 76.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., iii. 245-6.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., i. 226-7.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., iv. 457-61.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., i. 111.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Tatler}, ii. 483.
forms of emotional experience—what we now call, following Rom Harré, the socially constructed dimensions of affectivity—to irony’s sceptical gaze. (Pope, for example, peppered his works with abortive sorties into sentimentiality—abortive because a separatist, sceptical tendency constantly overtook him.) Accordingly, Swift’s pretentious persona in the Tale criticises Homer for not providing « a compleat Account of the Spleen » (Tale 84), but the ironic point of that remark is to highlight melancholy’s actual status as a modern fabrication. Similarly, Swift’s Gulliver learns with disgust about a particular Yahoo whom « a Fancy would sometimes take...to retire into a Corner, lie down and howl, and groan, and spurn away all that came near him, although he were young and fat...And the only Remedy [the Houyhnhnms] found was to set him to hard Work »27. « Fancy » is the key word here : this spleen, a condition that « only seizeth on the Lazy, the Luxurious, and the Rich », is a wilful indulgence. The most pronounced exposure of melancholy’s factitiousness comes, though, in Canto IV of Pope’s Rape of the Lock, after Belinda’s lock has been cut. Pope inserts here a journey to the underworld, despatching « dusky melancholy » Umbriel to the Cave of Spleen to invoke goddess Spleen’s influence over Belinda28 (l. 13). The cave features every conceivable trope of melancholy: a « dreaded East » wind (l. 20); stagnant vapours; « Fiends », « Spectres, gaping Tombs » (ll. 43-4); personifications of the most comic delusional conditions reported by melancholics: « Here living Teapots stand, one Arm held out, | One bent ; the Handle this, and that the Spout : |...| Here sighs a Jar, and there a Goose-pye talks ; [...] And Maids turn’d Bottels, call aloud for Corks » (ll. 49-50, 52, 54)29. This over-supply of clichés encourages a scepticism about melancholy’s contrived nature. That is then reinforced by the reductive glibness of the description of Spleen’s dual aspect: « Parent of Vapour and of Female Wit, | Who give th’Hysteric or Poetic Fit » (ll. 59-60)30. (We are encouraged to sense little difference between these two fits, each as vacuous as the other.) In framing the cave episode as an allegory, one more ostentatiously figurative even than the rest of the poem’s supernatural machinery, Pope further underlines this emotion’s fabricated nature. Melancholy is less a natural passion than a rhetorical display, and it is therefore appropriate that when we find Spleen, it is with « Pain at her Side, and Megrin at her Head » (ll. 24)31: « at », not « in », because these handmaids are contrived appurtenances, not the intrinsic parts of a truly organic emotion. « Affectation » is in attendance, too, supplying the socially conditioned gestures through which melancholy performs itself. She, « Practis’d to Lisp, and hang the Head aside, | Faints into Airs, and languishes with Pride ; | On the rich Quilt sinks with becoming Woe, | Wrapt in a Gown, for Sickness, and for Show » (ll. 33-6)32. Assisted by this entourage, Spleen supplies Umbriel with a bag of fury and a vial of tears to cast upon Belinda. Again, however, Pope conveys his

30 Twickenham Edition of Pope, ii. 185-6.
31 Ibid., ii. 182.
32 Ibid., ii. 183.
scepticism. His heroine’s « Rage, Resentment and Despair » have already been established as fact at the Canto’s opening (l. 9), before Umbriel departs for Hades, and she is already « dejected » (l. 90) by the time he returns. So although Umbriel duly dispenses his malign gifts, they impart only affected exaggeration to emotions already naturally present and in no need of such forced embellishment. Here again, then, is an instance of Scriblerian scepticism sapping the force of the language of vapours.

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Still, all these points notwithstanding, the Scriblerians remained partially attached to melancholy and to the discourse of madness that it sustained. I want to end by demonstrating this. Hitherto I have assumed that the Tale makes a sharp distinction between its naïve Hack and the ironizing shadow cast by Swift himself. In fact, that distinction frequently becomes blurred. In the « Preface » and Sections III and V the persona is indeterminately either knowingly or unknowingly ironic as he applauds shallow modernity, blandly untargeted satire, and literary criticism fixated on fault-finding. When he voices the potentially barbed claim, « our Noble Moderns’…most edifying Volumes I turn indefatigably over Night and Day, for the Improvement of my Mind, and the good of my Country » (Tale 62), it is unclear where the ironic awareness sits: whether only with Swift or with this speaker too. Such boundary blurring is tellingly evident in the « Digression…of Madness ». For all that this chapter’s portentous theorising invites ridicule, the absurdity of the Hack’s thinking suddenly becomes less clear-cut when he infers from his account of melancholy that all happiness is but « a perpetual Possession of being well Deceived » (111). There are suggestions of real wisdom in the argument that

whatever Philosopher…can find out an Art to solder and patch up the Flaws and Imperfections of Nature, will deserve much better of Mankind, and teach us a more useful Science, than that so much in present Esteem, of widening and exposing them….Such a Man truly wise, creems off Nature, leaving the Sower and the Dregs, for…Reason to lap up. This is the sublime and refined Point of Felicity….The Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves. (112)

With this remark Swift’s perspective shifts: he tempers his earlier mockery of the Tale’s persona and implies an indeterminate degree of sympathy for the latter’s opinions. What is said here illuminates Book IV of Gulliver’s Travels. During his stay in Houyhnhnm-land, Gulliver’s narratorial perspective dominates Swift’s chapters, coercing readers to accept the hero’s misanthropic view of the Yahoos. We regard Lemuel as a comparatively sane, nobly discriminating figure. However, once back in human company, where his outlook is measured first against Captain

33 Ibid., ii. 180, 187.
Pedro’s benevolence, then against his loving family, Gulliver instantly appears mad to us. His attitudes have not changed at this point—only the context within which we view them has—but it is as if Swift, having initially admired Gulliver’s moral honesty, now recognises the value of a little temporising, some wilful self-delusion, when confronting the Yahoo-like shortcomings of human nature. A « Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves » is again called for.

The same applies to Epistle II of Pope’s Essay on Man. Having established its case that providence can redeem men’s ruling passions by appropriating them for virtue’s purposes, the epistle ends by envisaging the opposite—that individuals might better be left to enjoy those obsessions in their raw, unreconstructed form: « See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing, | The sot a hero, lunatic a king; | The starving chemist in his golden views | Supremely blest, the poet in his muse » (ll. 267-70). Pope recognises these fixations as the adult equivalent of children’s « toys » and « baubles » (ll. 280-1), and now acquiesces in that fact in a spirit of amused indulgence. Elsewhere, in his Horatian « Epistle II. ii. », he recalls with fondness a particular Peer

Who, tho’ the House was up, delighted sate,
Heard, noted, answer’d, as in full Debate:
In all but this, a man of sober Life,
Fond of his Friend, and civil to his Wife,
Not quite a Man-man, tho’a Pasty fell,
And much too wise to walk into a Well:
 Him, the damn’d Doctors and his Friends immur’d,
They bled, they cupp’d, they purg’d; in short, they cur’d:
Whereat the Gentleman began to stare—
My Friends? he cry’d, p–x take you for your care!
That from a Patriot of distinguish’d note,
Have bled and purg’d me to a simple Vote. (ll. 186-97)

Again, the implication is that this character was better off and, paradoxically, a figure of greater integrity when living within his delusion than he is now, cured of that monomania. The genial note in Pope’s recollection of that state suggests a wistful, even melancholic fondness for precisely that structure of madness so characteristic of traditional melancholy.

Swift and Pope, then, exhibit a plaintive fondness for self-delusion, whatever their misgivings about the humoural discourse underlying it. There is a further respect, though, in which Tale of a Tub recalls Burton specifically, even as it exploits and yet satirises the humoural paradigm. Swift’s « Digression…of Madness » relativises madness by suggesting that the word « mad » is nothing more than an epithet applied by those on a different wavelength from oneself; « for a Fool in one Company, when in another…might be treated as a Philosopher », just as we treat « Curtius with Reverence and Love…Empedocles, with Hatred

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35 Twickenham Edition of Pope, iii.-i. 87.
36 Ibid., iv. 177-8.
and Contempt » though both alike simply « leapt into a Gulph » (109, 113). Swift makes satire out of this point by suggesting that each occupant of Bedlam could be fitted to a role in public life on the basis that every so-called symptom finds it corollary in the supposedly sane world:

Is any Student [of Bedlam] tearing his Straw in piece-meal, Swearing and Blaspheming, biting his Grate, foaming at the Mouth, and emptying his Pispot in the Spectator’s Faces? ...give him a Regiment of Dragoons, and send him into Flanders among the Rest. Is another eternally talking, sputtering, gaping, bawling...? ...away with Him to Westminster-Hall (113-15).

The litany of examples—these are only the first—grows increasingly passionate as Swift proceeds, emphasising repeatedly that socialised man is actually as mad as his incarcerated counterpart. That list then collapses though, the text giving way to another pretended gap in Swift’s manuscript of which only a fragment remains, isolated on the page: « ---Hark in your Ear------ » (116). A footnote by the Tale’s printer—Swift by another name—claims not to know what this means, but the line is actually Lear’s, spoken to blinded Gloucester: « see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear; change places, and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? » (King Lear IV. vi. 151-4). Lear is anticipating Swift’s point about the arbitrariness of distinctions here, but significantly he does so whilst in a state of ambiguous madness, oscillating between moments of insanity and insight—between « fie, fie, pah, pah! » and « I know thee well enough, thy name is Gloucester » (129, 177)—as he rants against lechery and rapacity. Swift’s selecting this allusion, giving it isolated importance within his text, and drawing attention to its inscrutability via a footnote, is therefore suggestive. We are invited to ponder how far not just the Hack but Swift too glimpses himself as a second Lear here, barking at a mad world whilst feeling uncomfortably complicit with that very madness.

This is the point at which The Anatomy of Melancholy suddenly leaps into view, because of course, whereas the Anatomy proper attempts to localise melancholy to specific individual types with specific pathologies, Burton’s preface, « Democritus Junior to the Reader », meditates rather on mankind’s universal melancholy cum madness. Crucially for Swift, Burton uses the Democritus persona to play out this very anxiety about the instability of sanity. At some points in the preface, Burton identifies himself with Democritus, Democritus the satirist and disciplined rationalist whose « Ironical passion » (Anatomy i. 33. 2), born of moral authority, enables him to stand apart from the world and its madness. In other places, Burton concedes instead precisely his own immersion in that universal melancholy: « I write of Melancholy,...being busie to avoid Melancholy »; « I

37 A chasm having appeared in the Forum, an oracle prophesied that Rome would only be saved if what it held most dear was cast into that hole. Accordingly, a young horseman, Marcus Curtius, threw himself into the chasm and the city was saved. Meantime, legend told that Empedocles threw himself into Etna, though why remains disputed.

have anatomized mine own folly » (i. 6. 29-30, 112. 14). From this position too, Burton speculates that Democritus, more than he, may be the real madman here: a misanthropic satirist, crazily intolerant of those little follies and imperfections which are inevitably a part of human nature. Hence Burton’s periodic efforts to dissociate himself from this all « too Satyricall » figure: « ’tis not I, but Democritus, Democritus dixit » (i. 110. 22-4) 39. It is these oscillatory movements that Swift mirrors as he slides in and out of Lear’s voice (and of the sometime Bedlamite 40 Hack’s voice), even as his text meditates upon the fragile boundaries of lunacy. It is these oscillations, too, that are reflected in the double perspective of Book IV of Gulliver’s Travels. A Tale of a Tub remembers the Anatomy, then, not just in its endlessly digressive, disrupted structure 41, but also as a precedent anticipating Swift’s equivocal reaffirmation of melancholic consciousness at the very moments that he most seems to satirise it. Here, and in other works—for example, Pope’s Horatian « Epistle I. i. »—the Scriblerian’s characteristic perspectival scepticism 42 draws them, wistfully, back towards the very modes of melancholy that their wit otherwise seems to eschew.

39 These various stances are discussed at length in Tilmouth, « ’Turning Picture’ », pp. 544-9.
40 On the evidence for the Hack’s past madness see DePorte, Nightmares and Hobbyhorses, pp. 69-71, 74.
41 Note, though, that Nicholas McDowell has recently argued for an alternative inspiration behind the Tale’s « endlessly digressive narrative form » ( « Tales of Tub Preachers : Swift’s Heresiography », The Review of English Studies 61 (248), 72-92 : p. 89).
42 In using this phrase, I have in mind Fred Parker’s account of Pope in his Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 86-137, and I propose also a view of Swift (defined in contrast to Deporte’s (Nightmares and Hobbyhorses, pp. 84-9)) that emphasises the same intellectual fluidity in his work that Parker finds in Pope’s.