

## **Love and Melancholia**

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Most Greek philosophers considered love as a state of transient madness. Epicurus stated that “Remove sight, association and contact, and the passion of love is at an end”. In his treatise “On Chronic Disease” (section on Mania), Caelius Aurelianus (one of the most prominent physicians of the Roman Empire) stated that “some physicians hold that love is a proper remedy for insanity...[but]...they are not aware of the obvious truth that in many cases love is the very cause of madness”. Robert Burton, in his most famous “The Anatomy of Melancholy” included a specific chapter on “Love-Melancholy”. He considered love to be one of the most frequent causes of melancholy, a state of “perpetual flux and anguish of the soul, a warfare, every lover a soldier...a consuming fire”. Burton suggested several treatments for Love-Melancholy, such as “Labour, Diet, Physick, Fasting” and rather more sophisticated measures, such as “change of scene” or “a greater sorrow to drive out the less”. Love as a cause of future sorrow was masterfully illustrated in many Flemish and Dutch paintings between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the contemporary increasing passion for dancing dramatically increased the number of love victims. This occurred in spite of the efforts of some music composers to warn about the dangers of love. Thus Henry Purcell starts his piece “I Attempt from Love’s sickness to fly” with the following lyrics “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly in vain, For I am myself my own fever and pain...” While it is highly unlikely that the condition of Love-Melancholia will ever make it into DSM or ICD criteria, its passionate mixture of hope and despair, pleasure and dejection, happiness and pain should never be ignored.

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