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ARTICLE

Melancholy, Spiritual Experience, and Dissent in England, c. 1650–1700

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Abstract

The involvement of melancholy had the potential to undermine the authority of early modern individuals' religious experiences, reframing their spiritual afflictions as the mere product of a distempered body. This article refines our understanding of the shifting relationship between melancholy and spiritual experience in the second half of the seventeenth century in England. Focusing on the views of Presbyterians and Independents, it explores how various interests and voices shaped attitudes to the disease throughout the challenges of growing anti-enthusiasm and post-Restoration nonconformity. By emphasizing the voices of sufferers themselves and including examination of a range of overlooked texts, it demonstrates that women and laypeople often diverged from learned views when describing their spiritual struggles. Complicating existing narratives, it suggests that sufferers from both groups avoided using melancholy as an explanatory factor in accounts of religious experience in the 1650s to '70s, before increasingly incorporating the condition in the 1680s and '90s. The involvement of melancholy remained fraught, however, and under continual negotiation. Bringing manuscript sources into conversation with published texts, the article argues that differences of opinion existed both between and within Presbyterian and Independent communities, as well as between those who suffered from melancholy and those who did not.

In 1676, the prominent Independent minister John Owen bemoaned that,

> whatever trouble befals the minds of men upon the account of a sense of the guilt of Sin, whatever Darkness and Disconsolation they may undergo through the displeasure of God ... it is all ascribed in most opprobrious Language unto Melancholy reeks and vapours, whereof a certain and mechanical account may be given by them who understand the Anatomy of the Brain.[1]

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[1] All pre-1750 works were published in London unless otherwise stated. John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, a discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (1676), pp. 92–3.

Having fallen far from their powerful position during the Interregnum, and now facing fierce persecution alongside other nonconformists, Independents such as Owen were only too aware that these 'mechanical accounts' threatened to undermine their claims of spiritual experience. In the aftermath of the mid-century's disorder, and as Calvinism's hegemony waned in favour of less emotive forms of Protestantism, the issue of what should be ascribed to 'Melancholy reeks and vapours' became a key point of religious and social discord. From debates over conformity to what constituted fanaticism, ascriptions of melancholy carried much theological and political weight.

In particular, these ascriptions often strategically homogenized Independents with other groups – from Presbyterians to Quakers – despite nonconformists' dramatically varied positions on numerous issues. Leaning on growing interest in natural philosophy, this homogenization allowed some conformists to set themselves apart as the rational, moderate alternative, while also justifying the blanket refusal to extend comprehension or toleration to anyone outside the church. In 1668, for example, the Anglican minister Simon Patrick enabled the wholesale criticism of all dissenting groups by mockingly commenting that 'Nonconformists' are driven by 'Senses and Imagination' rather than 'Reason and Judgement', and therefore often 'fall into … melancholick & despairing Fits'.[2] Another Anglican, Samuel Parker, in 1670 similarly labelled nonconformists as 'Melancholy Religionists' and 'a Brain-sick People'.[3] The dualistic nature of these claims, which had roots in Renaissance criticisms of 'puritans', proved remarkably persistent – including in historical scholarship.

Several influential studies of seventeenth-century melancholy and madness took up a similarly binary view, positing Anglican conformists as the drivers of 'mechanical accounts' of intense religious experiences, and nonconformists as the unbudging targets. Following the lead of John F. Sena, Michael MacDonald, Michael Heyd, and Roy Porter, it was argued that rising anti-enthusiasm, desire for political stability, and the appeal of the new science led to the 'secularization' of melancholy and madness by the late seventeenth century. Fervent religion, it was asserted, had come to be seen as the result of physical illness, and spiritual healing was now repudiated in learned society.[4] In 2007, Jeremy Schmidt's ground-breaking monograph complicated this well-worn narrative, demonstrating that some nonconformists also contributed to the rise of medical interpretations of religious melancholy and that spiritual treatments were

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[2] Simon Patrick, *A friendly debate betwixt two neighbours* (1668), pp. 15, 48.

[3] Samuel Parker, *A discourse of ecclesiastical politie* (1670), pp. 149, 322. For the influence of natural philosophy on these views, see Christopher Haigh, 'The Church of England, the nonconformists and reason: another Restoration controversy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 69 (2018), pp. 531–56, at pp. 534–6.

[4] John F. Sena, 'Melancholic madness and the puritans', *Harvard Theological Review*, 66 (1973), pp. 293–309; Michael MacDonald, *Mystical bedlam: madness, anxiety, and healing in seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1981), esp. pp. 217–30; Michael MacDonald, 'Religion, social change, and psychological healing in England, 1600–1800', *Studies in Church History*, 19 (1982), pp. 101–25; Michael Heyd, '*Be sober and reasonable': the critique of enthusiasm in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries* (Leiden, 1995), esp. chs. 2 and 7; Roy Porter, *Mind-forg'd manacles: a history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. pp. 66–73.

continued by some Anglicans.[5] Schmidt's analysis of nonconformist opinion focused heavily on the printed, pastoral views of Presbyterians, however, and – although other important studies have explored additional dissenting viewpoints on melancholy – a number of voices are yet to be fully considered, especially those of laypeople expressed in manuscript sources.[6] More broadly, early modern scholars have tended to take an intellectual approach to the famously protean condition, exploring its medical, literary, and philosophical angles, with particular emphasis on either the Renaissance or the long eighteenth century.[7]

As a result, more remains to be learned about the nonconformist perspective throughout the Restoration and late seventeenth century, in terms of both detail and narrative. For example, we lack a thorough understanding of how and why views on melancholy's relationship to spiritual experience differed between (proto-)denominations; between ministers and their congregations; or between manuscript and published texts.[8] In particular, the specificities of the views of dissenting melancholics themselves warrant more attention, as well as of those who were perceived to suffer from the illness by others, but rejected the diagnosis themselves.[9]

To make progress on these aspects, this article focuses on the discussion of melancholy in Presbyterian and Independent writings from the mid-1650s to

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[5] Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the care of the soul: religion, moral philosophy and madness in early modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), esp. chs. 3–6.

[6] Ibid., chs. 5–6. Dissenters' views on melancholy, madness, and spiritual anguish have been examined in, for example, Katharine Hodgkin, *Madness in seventeenth-century autobiography* (Basingstoke, 2007); Katharine Hodgkin, 'Scurvy vapours and the devil's claw: religion and the body in seventeenth-century women's melancholy', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 44 (2011), pp. 1–21; Anne Dunan-Page, *Grace overwhelming: John Bunyan,* The pilgrim's progress *and the extremes of the Baptist mind* (Bern, 2006); John Stachniewski, *The persecutory imagination: English puritanism and the literature of religious despair* (Oxford, 1991); David Harley, 'Mental illness, magical medicine, and the devil in northern England, 1650–1700', in Roger French and Andrew Wear, eds., *The medical revolution of the seventeenth century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 114–44; Michael MacDonald, '*The fearefull estate of Francis Spira*: narrative, identity and emotion in early modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 32–61; David Walker, 'Piety and the politics of anxiety in nonconformist writing of the later Stuart period', in Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda, eds., *Puritanism and emotion in the early modern world* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 144–65; Allan Ingram and Stuart Sim, eds., *Melancholy experience in literature of the long eighteenth century* (London, 2011), pp. 14–15, 116–19, 189–90.

[7] See, for example, Angus Gowland, *The worlds of Renaissance melancholy: Robert Burton in context* (Cambridge, 2006); Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, medicine and religion in early modern England: reading* The anatomy of melancholy (Cambridge, 2010); Erin Sullivan, *Beyond melancholy: sadness and selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 2016); Jane Darcy, *Melancholy and literary biography, 1650–1816* (Basingstoke, 2013).

[8] For the complexities of identifying religious groups and selecting appropriate terminology in the context of Restoration 'proto-denominationalism', see Michael Winship, 'Defining puritanism in Restoration England: Richard Baxter and others respond to *A friendly debate*', *Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), pp. 689–715. This article's chosen terminology is discussed further in section 1.

[9] Erin Sullivan, 'Book review: *Melancholy and the care of the soul*', *History of the Human Sciences*, 22 (2009), pp. 147–8. Studies of autobiography have provided the most insight into sufferers' own views: for example, Hodgkin, *Madness*; Allan Ingram, *The madhouse of language: writing and reading madness in the eighteenth century* (London, 1991); Dunan-Page, *Grace overwhelming*.

the end of the century, drawing on both published and manuscript sources to refine our understanding of how individuals from these groups navigated the relationships between melancholy and religious experience. By not only discussing the decades that followed the Restoration but also considering the 1650s – when Presbyterians had not yet been forced into nonconformity – a richer appreciation of how they came to navigate those relationships is reached. The cases examined have been chosen by virtue of their authors' religious identities, gender, and date of production. The selection brings overlooked sources into conversation with those texts that are more familiar to historians of the field, and integrates the voices of women and laypersons into a deeper understanding of views on melancholy across the period. The study asks if sufferers identified melancholy in their religious experiences; what, if any, spiritual significance they invested in their symptoms; and how their interpretations compare with those of their surrounding communities. Rather than limiting the focus to 'religious melancholy', which was a diagnostic category developed in the 1620s in critical response to 'puritans' and 'papists', identifications of melancholy in various stages of individuals' religious lives are considered and differentiated: from how the illness affected their quotidian duties, to its role in prolonged trials of faith.[10]

This approach results in two key contributions. First, existing narratives of how views on melancholy changed in the second half of the seventeenth century are interrupted and refined. Thus far, scholars have provided somewhat contrasting hypotheses: it has been suggested that nonconformists remained dedicated to spiritual interpretations and treatments of melancholy; became less concerned with separating melancholy from important religious experiences (such as sorrow for sin and afflicted conscience); or, as mentioned above, came to see religious melancholy through a more critical, medical lens.[11] This article brings important alterations to these suggestions, foregrounding the perspectives of sufferers themselves and thereby demonstrating the diversity and texture of godly, nonconformist views. In doing so, it tentatively proposes a multi-layered narrative. Starting with the 1650s and first decades of the Restoration period, it is suggested that a heightened wariness developed among many Presbyterians and Independents after the Civil Wars against the intermixing of melancholy with one's religious experiences, and that this wariness manifested in different ways and to varying degrees across the two groups and across genders. Moving beyond 1680, it is then asserted that melancholy seems to have featured more frequently in Presbyterian and some Independent autobiographical accounts of religious experiences towards the end of the century, but that inclusion of the condition remained fraught. Differences in approach arose along denominational lines, as well as between sufferers and their surrounding communities, with many continuing to show

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[10] The term was used by Robert Burton in *The anatomy of melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), 3.4.1–3, pp. 706–83. For further discussion of Burton's view, see Lund, *Melancholy*, ch. 2.

[11] MacDonald, *Mystical bedlam*, esp. pp. 225–7; Ingram and Sim, eds., *Melancholy experience*, pp. 14–15; Hodgkin, *Madness*, esp. pp. 72, 78; Schmidt, *Melancholy*, esp. pp. 134, 105–14.

discomfort and reproval at the involvement of melancholy in spiritual narratives.

The identification of these ongoing tensions leads to the article's second key contribution, which is to demonstrate the extent to which lay and female voices diverged from ministers' and other learned individuals' views on how melancholy should affect one's religious life. Rather than being passive receivers of others' prescriptive teachings or operating within the confines of existing genres, these sufferers actively worked against and contributed to the relevant discourses across the period, with micro-level experiences of melancholy, anxieties, and pressures playing a significant role in generating attitudes to the condition. In this way, the article also advances growing scholarly interest in lay accounts of madness and spiritual anguish in various European contexts, as well as literature on early modern 'lived religion' more generally, both of which have highlighted the importance and autonomy of personal experiences.[12] Before the significance of these contributions can be fully demonstrated, however, it is necessary to address some methodological hurdles and provide further context on the beliefs, events, and debates that informed understandings of melancholy in spiritual experience.

I

The issue of melancholy intersected with the lives of Presbyterians and Independents on multiple levels, the reasons for which reached back to the start of the seventeenth century. This first section examines that intersection, describing the moral, religious, and political factors that are likely to have shaped these groups' attitudes to the condition by the 1650s. The benefits and difficulties in pinning down religious identities in this tumultuous period as categories for analysis are also tackled, as well as what form of the sprawling concept of 'melancholy' is under discussion here.

Starting at the foundations, the word 'melancholy' in its most basic sense referred to black bile: one of the four humours, along with blood, phlegm, and yellow bile. The humoral model, which dominated early modern medical belief, held that a predominance of one of these humours from birth would shape a person's nature or 'complexion', while a later prolonged excess would result in disease. Individuals were therefore responsible for keeping their humours in balance through diet, exercise, regulation of the 'passions' (emotions), and other methods.[13] Given that an excess of black bile could

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[12] See, for example, Tuomas Laine-Frigren, Jari Eilola, and Markku Hokkanen, eds., *Encountering crises of the mind: madness, culture and society, 1200s–1900s* (Leiden, 2018), chs. 1–4; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo, eds., *Histories of experience in the world of lived religion* (London, 2022), esp. ch. 7; Ronald K. Rittgers, *The reformation of suffering: pastoral theology and lay piety in late medieval and early modern Germany* (Oxford, 2012), esp. ch. 10; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013), esp. p. 2.

[13] For a more comprehensive explanation of the humoral model, see Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and selves in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 1. For its longevity, see Olivia Weisser, *Ill composed: sickness, gender, and belief in early modern England* (New Haven, CT, 2015), pp. 19–32.

also happen in passing, creating a transitory mood of melancholy, and that those whose bodies naturally possessed more black bile were predisposed to melancholic disease, the concept was highly adaptable – and the line between pathological and non-pathological melancholy was often blurred.[14] Moreover, the word itself was also used more broadly as an adjective (to describe, for example, a sad event). While this conceptual flexibility makes analysing attitudes to 'melancholy' difficult, this article focuses on the disease form. Only sources that used the term to refer to a pathological distemper are examined here; descriptions of being naturally melancholic from birth or suffering from a fleeting melancholic mood, for example, are not included.

To summarize the disease's complex aetiology and cultural associations, melancholy was generally understood to involve an excess of black bile in the head, bloodstream, or abdomen, causing noxious vapours that, on reaching the brain, muddled the mind's senses, bringing about false fears, sadness, and, in extreme cases, delusions – along with a vast range of other possible symptoms, from lethargy to fever.[15] As a result, it was simultaneously a physical and mental illness involving both the body and the soul. Interventions therefore included purgation, diet alterations, and bloodletting, as well as moral therapy – such as pleasant diversions, philosophical counsel, and spiritual guidance.[16] Prayer, too, was standardly used as a means of recovery, with melancholy – like all sickness and misfortune – seen as a providential punishment by Protestants.[17]

Although the central symptoms of melancholy remained largely consistent, a chemico-mechanical aetiology became prominent in the late seventeenth century as the influence of the humoral model waned, with the condition increasingly understood to be caused by the malfunction of the body's animal spirits, rather than black bile.[18] The animal spirits, which originated in the blood, were ideally 'transparent, subtle and lucid' but, in a melancholic person, became 'obscure, thick, and dark', moving incessantly and irregularly in the brain.[19] Terminology also shifted. 'Hysteria' and 'hypochondria' – which referred to diseases very similar to melancholy – were more often used by the first decades of the eighteenth century, along with 'vapours' and

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[14] Burton, *Anatomy*, 1.1.2.5, pp. 16–19; Timothy Wright, *The passions of the minde in generall* (1604), pp. 63–5.

[15] Timothy Bright, *Treatise on melancholy* (1586), pp. 82, 110–11; Burton, *Anatomy*, 1.1.3.1–5, pp. 45–54; Sullivan, *Beyond melancholy*, pp. 26–7, 93.

[16] Burton, *Anatomy*, 'Democritus Junior to the reader', pp. 12–13, passim; Joannes de Mediolano, *The English mans doctor*, trans. John Harington (1617), pp. 30–1; Schmidt, *Melancholy*, pp. 2–3, ch. 2. On the entwinement of the mental and physical in this period, see, for example, Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the body: emotions and the Shakespearean stage* (Chicago, IL, 2004).

[17] Sophie Mann, '"A double care": prayer as therapy in early modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 33 (2020), pp. 1055–76.

[18] Michael Heyd, 'Medical discourse in religious controversy: the case of the critique of "enthusiasm" on the eve of the Enlightenment', *Science in Context*, 8 (1995), pp. 133–57, at p. 138; Angus Gowland, 'The problem of early modern melancholy', *Past & Present*, 191 (2006), pp. 77–120, at p. 88.

[19] Thomas Willis, *Two discourses concerning the soul of brutes* (1683), pp. 189–91.

'spleen'.[20] Throughout the period, the social status, gender, and religious identity of most individuals reduced their ability to navigate towards more positive interpretations of the condition, with a prevailing view being that melancholy was unwelcome, uncomfortable, and shameful.[21] Women, being seen as weaker in body and mind than men, were held to be particularly susceptible to its negative, pathological forms.[22]

This reproving approach to melancholy was driven, in large part, by spiritual and moral concerns. Self-regulation of one's humoral balance and passions was believed to be a vital factor in both preventing and curing melancholy.[23] Falling prey to an overabundance of the humour could, therefore, be seen as a sinful failure to meet the Christian ideal of moderation – especially in regard to limiting worldly sadness, which was firmly contrasted with the vital experience of spiritual sorrow for one's inherent depravity due to original sin.[24] Given that the subject of many melancholics' fears and anxieties revolved around religious matters, identifying a perturbed person as either melancholic or sorrowing for sin could be difficult in practice, however – especially if their experience of the latter had intensified to the point of despair. Indeed, the ties between melancholy and despair, in which an individual became convinced they were hopelessly damned, were well established by the seventeenth century. The humour was seen as *balneum diaboli*, through which the devil took advantage of the body's imbalance to lure sufferers into sinful doubts of God's mercy.[25] In these cases, the suspicion of culpability remained, given that melancholic despair could indicate secret sins or, at worst, damnation.[26] What is more, because godly sorrow, despair, and melancholy each involved intense fear and sadness, which – like all emotions in this period – were in turn understood to have physiological effects and be capable of causing illness, bodily and spiritual distress were deeply entangled.[27]

The difficulty in separating melancholy, spiritual sorrow, and despair would prove vital to Presbyterians' and Independents' sensitive relationship to melancholy in the second half of the century. For these groups' godly predecessors, who had often been disparagingly referred to as 'puritans' from the late sixteenth century, the lack of separation had proven both useful and damaging. Within the context of their reformed, Calvinist theology, in which

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[20] Jeffrey Boss, 'The seventeenth-century transformation of the hysteric affection, and Sydenham's Baconian medicine', *Psychological Medicine*, 9 (1979), pp. 221–34, at pp. 224–5; Gowland, 'The problem', pp. 112–13.

[21] Clark Lawlor, 'Fashionable melancholy', in Ingram and Sim, eds., *Melancholy experience*, pp. 27–40; Hodgkin, 'Scurvy vapours', p. 4; Sullivan, *Beyond melancholy*, pp. 95–103.

[22] Michael MacDonald, 'Women and madness in Tudor and Stuart England', *Social Research*, 53 (1986), pp. 261–81; Katharine Hodgkin, *Women, madness, and sin in early modern England* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 67–73.

[23] André Du Laurens, *A discourse of the preservation of the sight* (1599), pp. 80–4, 107.

[24] Arthur Dent, *The plaine mans path-way to heaven* (1607), p. 373, sigs. Dd6v–Dd7r; Sullivan, *Beyond melancholy*, p. 30.

[25] Burton, *Anatomy*, 1.2.1.2, p. 69, and 1.4.1.1, p. 269; Bright, *Treatise*, pp. 123, 192, 204–5.

[26] Matthewe Gribalde, *A notable and marveilous epistle* (1570); Richard Greenham, *A most sweete and assured comfort* (1595), sigs. A3r–v, D9v–D10r.

[27] Weisser, *Ill composed*, ch. 3.

believers were expected to undergo conversion and search within themselves for signs of assurance of their predestined salvation as members of the elect, some ministers and laypersons attempted to make firm distinctions between bodily melancholy and the soul's necessary turmoil. The influential theologian William Perkins, for instance, asserted that affliction of conscience and melancholy 'are not all one, but differ much' and could, therefore, be 'plainly distinguished'.[28] In the first half of the seventeenth century, such boundaries were laid out in theological, pastoral, and medical texts, while individual believers worked through the distinction in their spiritual writings.[29]

At the same time, however, both accidental and purposeful blurring occurred. As Jeremy Schmidt and Elizabeth Hunter have both shown, melancholy was actively used by the godly as an explanation for the struggles of pious people, particularly in the problematic cases of deathbed despair and suicide.[30] Godly ministers, moreover, were proponents of the belief that religious melancholy required a combination of physical and spiritual treatments. The latter involved pushing the sufferer towards a full awareness of their sins, almost to the brink of despair, in order to induce sufficient repentance and humility, before finally applying the reassurance of God's mercy and grace.[31]

Somewhat unsurprisingly, this method did not meet with support in all corners, and had consequences that extended into the latter half of the century. While the explanation of melancholy allowed the godly to salvage the reputation of struggling converts from the taint of reprobation, it also pointed to a vulnerability that their opponents were quick to attack. Those against 'puritanism' declared that Calvinist Protestants in fact *caused* religious melancholy through their cultivation of a toxic, dejection-inducing form of piety. In the 1620s and '30s, as Calvinism's hegemony in the established church began to falter, particular aim was taken at the predestinarian soteriology of 'puritans' and their reliance on feeling in reaching assurance. Those clerics moving towards Arminianism, which by contrast made moral performance a condition of justification, asserted that the claims of the godly to rapture or suffering from the withdrawal of the Spirit were merely the fruits of a melancholic body.[32] This perspective served as an effective strategy for undermining one's opponents, and was often adopted in confessional conflicts across Europe at the time.[33]

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[28] William Perkins, *The whole treatise of the cases of conscience* (Cambridge, 1606), p. 194.

[29] Bright, *Treatise*, pp. 187–98; Robert Yarrow, *Soveraigne comforts for a troubled conscience* (1619), pp. 12–13; Jeremiah Burroughs, *The eighth book of Mr Jeremiah Burroughs* (1654), pp. 385–424; Sullivan on Nehemiah Wallington in *Beyond melancholy*, p. 129; Hodgkin on Dionys Fitzherbert in *Women*, pp. 60–1.

[30] Schmidt, *Melancholy*, pp. 49–64; Elizabeth Hunter, 'Melancholy and the doctrine of reprobation in English puritan culture, 1550–1640' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 2012), esp. chs. 1, 4, and 5.

[31] Schmidt, *Melancholy*, pp. 61–3; Greenham, *Most sweete*, sigs. E11v–F2r; Edmund Gregory, *An historical anatomy of Christian melancholy* (1646).

[32] Burton, *Anatomy*, 3.4.1–3, pp. 706–83, and expansions of this section in subsequent editions; Alexandra Walsham, '"Frantick Hacket": prophecy, sorcery, insanity and the Elizabethan puritan movement', *Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), pp. 27–66, at pp. 62–4.

[33] See, for example, Mathilde Bernard, 'Mélancolie et apostasie aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles', *Études epistémè*, 28 (2015), https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.748; Jennifer Hillman, 'Testing the spirit of

The criticisms were also made more broadly, taking the form of a popular, mocking trope: in plays and texts, the 'puritan' suffered from imbalanced humours and was an irrational, often hypocritical, figure.[34]

During the Civil Wars and Interregnum, these criticisms continued, with royalists often describing the godly parliamentarians as suffering from 'malancholie fits'.[35] After the Restoration, the link between Calvinist piety and melancholy was made stronger than ever; 'Spiritus Calvinianus est spiritus Melancholicus', echoed the royalist biographer David Lloyd.[36] Moreover, the Act of Uniformity of 1662 allowed these attacks to be made against nonconformists as a whole. As argued in the introduction, this group was homogenized in polemical texts as 'Melancholy' 'Fanaticks' who lacked reason and practised a 'malapert' 'Splenetick Religion'.[37] These accusations sat comfortably alongside some Anglican conformists' claims that dissenters were dangerous, antinomian, and disobedient 'men of war', all of which functioned productively within their wider efforts to block the comprehension and toleration of nonconformists throughout the 1660s and '70s.[38] Genuine pastoral concerns motivated these criticisms too, alongside a growing preference among learned society for reason and self-control in religion.[39]

Most studies exploring seventeenth-century melancholy have emphasized this anti-enthusiasm espoused by some Anglicans, and it is certainly true that their opinions were a major influence on how the relationship between melancholy and spiritual experience was understood in this period. But if we are to thoroughly unravel attitudes to this relationship, it is necessary to stress that anti-enthusiasm was not simply a matter of Anglicans versus puritans, Arminians versus Calvinists, royalists versus parliamentarians, or conformists versus nonconformists. Concerns over the dangers of Calvinism were not limited to conformists, and physiological explanations to discredit and condemn those deemed ungodly were used across the spectrum, including among those under examination here. Some Presbyterians, for instance, declared certain Independents' spiritual experiences to be the result of melancholic imbalance and 'brainsick *Enthusiasmes*' when these groups, which held differing views on ecclesiology, tussled for power in the

the prophets: Jean Chéron, melancholy and the "illusions" of *dévotes*', *Études epistémè*, 28 (2015), https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.827.

[34] Hunter, 'Melancholy', pp. 265–70. For example, Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew fayre* (1631), pp. 7, 83–4.

[35] For example, Anon., *A new anatomie, or character of a Christian, or Roundhead* (1645), pp. 1–2. This line of attack was then used against sectarians in the often-cited texts of Meric Casaubon, *A treatise concerning enthusiasme* (1655), and Henry More, *Enthusiasmus triumphatus* (1656).

[36] David Lloyd, *Memories of the lives, actions, sufferings, and deaths* (1668), p. 296.

[37] Parker, *Discourse*, pp. 149, 178, 320; Patrick, *Friendly debate*, pp. 48–9; Simon Patrick, *A further continuation and defence* (1670), pp. 364–6.

[38] Thomas Tomkins, *The inconveniencies of toleration* (1667), p. 2; Parker, *Discourse*, p. 136; Anon., *The character of a phanatique* (1660); Abraham Philotheus, *Anarchie reviving* (1668), p. 16; Joseph Glanvill, *Philosophia pia* (1671), pp. 57, 229–32. On the wider efforts, see Christopher Haigh, '"Theological wars": "Socinians" v. "Antinomians" in Restoration England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 67 (2016), pp. 325–50; Haigh, 'Church of England'.

[39] Schmidt, *Melancholy*, ch. 4; George Berkeley, *Historical applications and occasional meditations* (1667), pp. 11–13; Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory* (1673), pp. 312–14.

mid-century.[40] These Presbyterians took particular issue with the conversion narratives shared by some Independents when joining a congregation, and the intense expressions of spiritual turmoil and revelation these recounted.[41] After the Act of Uniformity, some Presbyterians used the same attacks to strategically distance themselves from 'Fanaticks' in their efforts to regain comprehension with the established church.[42] Meanwhile, Independents – who were uninterested in comprehension – used similar accusations in their continued attacks on Quakers, sometimes working with Presbyterians to do so.[43]

What all this suggests is that important tensions existed between these religious groups which merit consideration. While a shared sense of godly identity or purpose was often fostered across the conformist as well as denominational divides, it is important to recognize that aggregating terms such as 'puritans', 'the godly', and 'nonconformists' can obscure important differences and competing interests, especially in the context of melancholy and religious experience.[44] This article therefore works to distinguish between denominational voices where possible, focusing on Presbyterians and Independents.[45] These distinctions are based on individuals' own identifications and the communities they chose to operate within, but their usage does not imply that the boundaries of the groups were always clear-cut, nor deny that significant variations in beliefs could also exist within them. Rather, highlighting such distinctions is a step towards a finer grain of analysis of attitudes to melancholy, operating in the same vein as the article's identification of differences between genders, between laypeople and ministers, and between sufferers and those around them.

By the second half of the seventeenth century, then, the issue of melancholy could raise a number of overlapping moral, theological, and political concerns. To learn how these concerns played out in practice, it is necessary to turn to specific examples as case studies. The following section focuses on four individuals' discussions of melancholy in their religious lives, demonstrating that it was consistently avoided as an explanatory factor in these autobiographical accounts of the 1650s, '60s, and '70s, albeit for varied reasons.

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[40] John Vicars, *The schismatick sifted* (1646), sig. A3v; Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall antichrist* (1648), p. 131.

[41] Zachary Crofton, *Bethshemesh clouded* (1653), p. 183.

[42] Baxter, *Christian directory*, p. 909; Richard Baxter, *The judgment of non-conformists of the interest of reason in matters of religion* (1676), p. 2.

[43] John Faldo, *Quakerism no Christianity* (1673), pp. 75–6; John Faldo, *XXI divines (whose names are hereunder affixed) cleared of the unjust criminations* (1675), pp. 3–4.

[44] On the blurred nature of godly identities, see, for example, Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe, 'Reading, family religion, and evangelical identity in late Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), pp. 875–96.

[45] On the benefits of historians making careful distinctions between religious groups at this time, see, for example, Ann Hughes, 'Print and pastoral identity: Presbyterian pastors negotiate the Restoration', in Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page, and Joel Halcomb, eds., *Church life: pastors, congregations, and the experience of dissent in seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 152–3; Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant autobiography in the seventeenth-century anglophone world* (Oxford, 2012), p. 20.

II

A gentlewoman who attended public services yet engaged with Presbyterians and, after 1662, assisted ejected ministers, Mary Rich (1624–78) had married into a prominent parliamentarian family that had supported Calvinist interests in Essex since the 1620s.[46] Her surviving papers reveal important inconsistencies in her handling of melancholy, while also demonstrating some of the ways in which women contributed to discourses on melancholy and godliness in this period.

In her diaries covering eleven years from 1666 to 1677, Rich described numerous bouts of melancholy, often after arguments with her husband or other distressing events. These bouts, which usually featured headaches, left her 'dull' and therefore 'indisposed' for performing religious duties with sufficient fervour.[47] Although she followed conventional thought by tying the onset of melancholy to her having succumbed to excessive worldly passion, and was dissatisfied that her duties were obstructed by it, she did not seem to suffer from any related religious fears in the vein of some godly thinking. Beyond the need to curb her passions in the future, she did not view these interruptions as signifying, for instance, a hidden sin or the withdrawing of God's grace.

Rich's stance resonated with the views of some moderate nonconformists, such as the well-known minister Richard Baxter, who – as Jeremy Schmidt has shown – were growing less concerned with cultivating spiritual feeling as a sign of grace as they moved away from the orthodox forms of Calvinist piety from the 1650s onwards.[48] Like these ministers, Rich separated genuine, reasoned spiritual processes from the setbacks of melancholy, and refrained from emphasizing the need for a turbulent, fear-riddled form of piety.[49] In her autobiography, for example, she acknowledged some unspecified 'doutes and feares' but, overall, asserted that: 'I went on Constantly comfortably in my Christian Course'.[50] While she certainly relished sorrowing for sin in her duties (often through ardent tears), she and those Presbyterians she supported worked to present their religious practices as reasoned, moderate, and respectable.[51]

In line with this goal, it seems that Rich – who had become the countess of Warwick in 1659 – modulated how she spoke about her experiences of melancholy across her different writings. As she likely foresaw, her autobiography was circulated soon after her death and, accordingly, the text made no mention of the word 'melancholy', despite its frequency in her diary – even

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[46] Sara Mendelson, 'Rich [née Boyle], Mary, countess of Warwick (1624–1678)', *ODNB*.

[47] For example, 'Diary of Mary Rich, July 1666–March 1669', London, British Library (BL), Add MS 27351, fos. 68v, 104v, 140v, 153r, 182v; 'Diary of Mary Rich, March 1672–March 1674', BL, Add MS 27353, fos. 3r, 72v, 86r, 114v, 116r, 148v, 160v.

[48] Schmidt, *Melancholy*, ch. 5, esp. pp. 106–7.

[49] Richard Baxter, *The right method* (1653), pp. 10–11, 152, 227–32; Richard Baxter, *The saints everlasting rest* (1650), pp. 430–1, 414; Abraham Caley, *A glimpse of eternity* (1683), pp. 62–3.

[50] '"Some specialties in the life of M. Warwicke", autobiography', BL, Add MS 27357, fo. 25v.

[51] Robert Ferguson, *Interest of reason in religion* (1675); Thomas Jacombe, *Several sermons preach'd on … the epistle to the Romans* (1672).

when recounting events that, in her daily log, had included references to it.[52] One episode of 'the spleen' (which indicated a particularly severe and long-lasting case of melancholic distemper) was related alongside an account of smallpox – but, beyond her recovery being described as a sign of God's 'mersy', it was presented as disconnected from her spiritual life.[53] Moreover, any description of how melancholy had frequently affected her devotional routine was absent. Taking a firmly favourable tone, Rich depicted godliness as generating cheerfulness and contentment, not gloomy, distempered health. In her 'Rules for holy living', written for her friend Lord Berkeley, she informed him not to believe 'that Religion will make you melancholy' but that, in contrast, 'nothing can [more effectively] give you ... comfort, serenity and composedness of mind'.[54] The same message was promulgated by others in her circles. Baxter, for instance, had instructed a young minister in 1654 to 'regard the health of your body ... [do] not weaken or damp your spirits by too much sadnes & melancholy. Live so cheerfully among your neighbours that they may not be tempted by you to thinke of Gods service as greivious & destructive to their peace & honest mirth.'[55]

But while some godly individuals like Rich were able to separate their melancholy from their sense of assurance, and seem to have minimized references to the condition because of concerns over reputation, other sufferers responded differently, in line with their contrasting symptoms and doctrinal outlooks. Letters written by the Presbyterian gentlewoman Katherine Gell (bap. 1624, d. 1671) reveal loyalty to Calvinism's more fervent, introspective principles, as well as the perspective of those who suffered severely from spiritual fears. In a series of letters exchanged with Richard Baxter between 1655 and 1658, Gell expressed concerns over her dullness in religious duties and the state of her soul. In return, she was informed that these perceived failures were evidence not of a lack of grace, as she strongly suspected, but of melancholy.[56] In other words, Baxter was expressing the opinion, demonstrated in Rich's case and discussed in many of his publications, that feelings – such as Gell's dullness and fears – should not be used to measure grace but instead be viewed as the results of melancholic distemper.[57]

Gell oscillated between accepting and rejecting this diagnosis, while pointing out the sections of Baxter's writings that she found unnecessarily

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[52] Compare BL, Add MS 27353, fos. 207v–209r, 218r–222v, with BL, Add MS 27357, fos. 34v–35v.

[53] BL, Add MS 27357, fos. 26r–27v.

[54] Anthony Walker, *Eureka eureka, the virtuous woman found her loss bewailed* (1678), pp. 134–5.

[55] Richard Baxter to Abraham Pinchbecke, Kidderminster, 5 July 1654, London, Dr Williams's Library (DWL), RB/2/4.168. See also Thomas Jacombe, 'Domestick dedication', in *Hooinh egzainiomnh* (1668), p. 184.

[56] Baxter to Katherine Gell, 7 June 1656, DWL, RB/2/5.217.

[57] For example, Richard Baxter, 'The cure of melancholy and overmuch-sorrow by faith and physick', in Samuel Annesley, ed., *A continuation of morning-exercise questions and cases of conscience* (1683), pp. 263–304. See also Alison Searle, '"My souls anatomiste": Richard Baxter, Katherine Gell and letters of the heart', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 12 (2006), pp. 7.1–26; Keith Condie, 'Some further correspondence between Richard Baxter and Katherine Gell', *Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), pp. 165–76.

compounded her anxieties.[58] When rejecting the minister's interpretation, she reported finding greater comfort in pastoral works by other authors who provided solely spiritual consolation, including William Gurnall, rather than through the physic and diversions recommended as treatment by Baxter.[59] In making this opposition, Gell was pushing the view – also espoused by some other Presbyterians and Independents – that vital spiritual feelings (or worries over a lack thereof) should not be dismissed as mere bodily imbalances. As the firmly Calvinist, ejected minister Henry Hickman bemoaned in 1665, too many 'wrong the Spirit' by ascribing all God's 'works of conviction and contrition, to the predominance of the melancholy humor, or to a cracked brain'.[60]

Gell's response seems to have primarily functioned on a personal level. She found Baxter's identification of bodily illness to trivialize both the immensity and form of her troubles, insisting they were 'reall', 'too true & doe much perplex my spirit & discourage me'.[61] Her stance points to a perhaps unsurprising tendency among individuals suffering from severe spiritual anguish: they were disinclined to have their concerns misrepresented as the fruits of a disturbed imagination and 'a sickly, melancholy'.[62] This was not new: individuals had often preferred to render their religious distress in solely spiritual terms in the first half of the century, as the incisive research of Katharine Hodgkin and Erin Sullivan has demonstrated.[63] Moreover, individuals had shown this preference despite the openness displayed by many godly ministers towards intermixed cases at the time. Within the 1650s' changed context of softening Calvinism, the growing sway of purely physical explanations for spiritual struggles, and rising anti-enthusiasm, Gell seems to have faced a heightened need for such self-assertion. Later cases similarly suggest that personal experience of intense spiritual distress continued to lead individuals to reject ascriptions of melancholy. For example, through his experience of an afflicted conscience in 1673, the Presbyterian minister Edmund Trench wrote that he came 'to underst[and] better the condition of the Scrupulous, ... that the withdrawings of the Spirit are something beside Melancholy, though that may be joyn'd with them'.[64]

But Trench's assertion also points to the gendered nature of individuals' wariness of identifying the involvement of melancholy in their religious

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[58] Finola Finn, 'Melancholy and the nonconforming godly in England, c. 1640–1700' (PhD thesis, Durham, 2018), pp. 147–55; Ann Hughes, '"A soul preaching to itself": sermon note-taking and family piety', in Elizabeth Clarke and Robert W. Daniel, eds., *People and piety: Protestant devotional identities in early modern England* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 66–8; Alison Searle, *Pastoral care through letters in the British Atlantic* (Cambridge, 2023), pp. 21–2.

[59] Gell to Baxter, 29 Apr. 1657, DWL, RB/2/5.3; Gell to Baxter, 10 Nov. 1657, DWL, RB/2/5.28; William Gurnall, *The Christian in compleat armour* (1655); Baxter to Gell, 26 Nov. 1656, DWL, RB/2/4.142.

[60] Henry Hickman, *The believers duty towards the Spirit* (1665), pp. 22–3. See also John Brinsley, *The drinking of the bitter cup* (1660), p. 238.

[61] Gell to Baxter, 25 Aug. 1658, DWL, RB/2/5.5.

[62] Vincent Alsop, *Melius inquirendum* (1678), p. 311.

[63] Hodgkin, *Women*, pp. 55–88; Sullivan, *Beyond melancholy*, ch. 4.

[64] Edmund Trench, *Some remarkable passages* (1693), p. 41.

experiences. Male ministers such as Trench were able to assert the distinctness of their spiritual sorrow while also pointing to its possible co-occurrence with melancholy, whereas women such as Gell struggled to have their interpretations taken seriously and did not, therefore, tend to indulge in such ambiguity.[65] What Gell saw to be justifiable fears of a lack of grace due to perceived failings in household religion were easily dismissed as humoral imbalance: not just because her influential confidant, Baxter, viewed such anxieties in this way, but because melancholy was so tightly, and now increasingly, connected to women.[66] As a result, women were burdened more heavily by the growing pressures outlined above. Indeed, even many of those who shared the Calvinist concerns of Gell would have been open to dismissing her experiences as mere distemper, with gendered bias seemingly trumping theological agenda. The steadfastly Calvinist minister Samuel Clarke, for instance, mockingly remarked that 'Mr. Baxter denies assurance, because he never met with any, nor can hear by others of any that have it, except some melancholy women that pretend to it, and that for a moment only.'[67] Regardless of whether they were asserting their assurance or confessing a lack thereof, women were likely to have their spiritual experiences brushed off with undermining diagnoses.[68]

The narrative of an anonymous Independent gentlewoman, *Conversion exemplified*, demonstrates this point further. Published posthumously in 1663, the text pursued the stated aim of rebutting the author's royalist, episcopalian relatives' accusations that her religious transformation had merely been caused by 'melancholy fits'.[69] Like her fellow Independents, the gentlewoman did not believe that the necessary spiritual anguish of conversion should be ascribed to 'mechanical accounts'.[70] Instead, she vigorously defined her turmoil as a deeply troubled conscience that eventually reached the 'set[t]led peace' of 'Soul-comfort', demonstrating the same desire to self-categorize her experiences as that seen in Gell's and Trench's writings.[71] Like Rich and Gell, she also showed a concern for defending the reputation of her community as a whole. Having 'pass[ed] from *Episcopacy* to *Presbytery*, thence to *Independency*' in the 1650s due to her ecclesiological beliefs, the anonymous gentlewoman was now 'scandalized at the behaviour' of some seemingly godly conformists 'towards their dissenting Brethren', and intent on defending

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[65] See also, for example, John Rogers, *Ohel or beth-shemesh* (1653), p. 429.

[66] Hodgkin, 'Scurvy vapours', p. 17; Schmidt, *Melancholy*, p. 117.

[67] Samuel Clarke, *Medulla theologiae* (1659), p. 127.

[68] For example, Philip Henry's advice to a gentlewoman, as later recounted in Matthew Henry, *An account of the life and death of Mr. Philip Henry* (1698), pp. 225–6. See also Oliver Heywood's diagnostic comments on women's spiritual fears in Joseph Horsfall Turner, ed., *The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630–1702: his autobiography, diaries, anecdote and event books* (4 vols., Brighouse, 1882–5), I, pp. 251, 255.

[69] Anon., *Conversion exemplified in the instance of a gracious gentlewoman now in glory* (1669), pp. 9, 55–9.

[70] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, pp. 92–3; Joseph Caryl, *An exposition ... upon the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters of the book of Job* (1647), p. 351; Joseph Caryl, *An exposition ... upon the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth chapters of the book of Job* (1650), pp. 313, 512–13.

[71] Anon., *Conversion*, sig. A4r, pp. 19–21. See also similar language in other Independent conversion narratives: for example, Henry Walker, *Spirituall experiences* (1653), passim.

her choices.[72] She, however, faced even stronger pressure than that experienced by more moderate figures. Indeed, she was accused by her family not only of melancholy but also of 'Phrenzy' – a more serious condition understood to be caused by inflammation of the brain, often conflated with madness.[73] Moreover, her text – which was reprinted in 1669 and still sold in 1674 – revealed the degree to which practices such as 'Conversion' had not only become increasingly undermined through physiological explanations after the Civil Wars and Interregnum, but were also perilously given 'no better title ... than *Phanati*[*ci*]*sm*, or (which is worse) *Sedition* and *Rebellion*'.[74] Given the inextricability of the label of melancholy from these other accusations, her denial of the distemper not only promoted a spiritual interpretation of her experiences but also worked to defend Independency and dissent more broadly.

Another narrative, authored in 1672 by the layman Charles Langford, displayed a similarly defensive determination, showing that some men likewise felt pressured to make firm distinctions between their spiritual experience and physiological problems. Langford, who avidly read the works of a number of Independent writers and suffered from the suppression of their assemblies after the Restoration, described a long and torturous conversion.[75] Over the course of many years, he experienced no fewer than four intense episodes of 'spiritual desertions'. The devil, he asserted, even tempted him to murder his wife, and, by the narrative's sprawling end, he had not reached any peaceful conclusion of assurance.[76] As a result, his account, which was published by a persecuted printer of dissenting works, would have been a prime target for those who wished to discredit Calvinist practices as a source of never-ending melancholic distress.[77]

Langford seemed fully aware of this scepticism, working hard to counter any negative, diagnostic interpretation by repeatedly objecting to 'any [that] should look upon discourses of this kind, as matter of scorn and reproachful contempt, ... accounting all experiences of this sort as meer Fictions, and the issue of a melancholly brain'.[78] He dedicated some twenty pages in the postscript to insisting that 'all those sad things that are here related' were not 'but a meer mellancholly distemper of body', but a guilty conscience and a soul afflicted by sin.[79] In making these assertions, he strove to give

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[72] Anon., *Conversion*, pp. 55–6.

[73] Ibid., p. 59. On understandings of 'frenzy', see Dunan-Page, *Grace overwhelming*, pp. 168–9.

[74] Rachel Adcock, Sara Read, and Anna Ziomek, eds., *Flesh and spirit: an anthology of seventeenth-century women's writing* (Manchester, 2016), pp. 174–6; Anon., *Conversion*, p. 59.

[75] Charles Langford, *Gods wonderful mercy in the mount of woful extremity* (1672), pp. 45, 49, passim. He described reading such ministers as Thomas Goodwin, William Bridge, Joseph Symonds, and Jeremiah Burroughs.

[76] Ibid., p. 47, passim.

[77] His printer was Ann Brewster, the widow of Thomas Brewster. See Henry R. Plomer, *A dictionary of the printers and booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668 to 1725* (Oxford, 1922), p. 48.

[78] Langford, *Gods wonderful mercy*, sigs. A4r, B6r, p. 102.

[79] Ibid., pp. 102–22.

meaning to his own experiences, while also staving off the threat that physiological explanations posed to his chosen form of piety more generally. ''Twas not', Langford stressed, 'too much preciseness, which the enemies of true Godliness falsly so call, that wrought this disturbance in me.'[80]

On this point, Langford's intention circles us back to Mary Rich's concerns for reputation. Indeed, a common thread running between the individuals discussed in this section has been their desire to defend their version of 'godliness' from the taint of melancholy. These four cases suggest that, throughout the factiousness of the 1650s and the persecution that followed the Restoration, external political and epistemic pressures – in combination with individuals' beliefs about what constituted genuine spiritual experience – produced a profound wariness among Presbyterians and Independents of identifying the presence of melancholy in their lives. This wariness compounded a pre-existing tendency among sufferers of religious distress to present their struggles in purely spiritual terms. It manifested, moreover, in both contemporaneous and retrospective accounts of distress across the genres discussed, including letters, diaries, autobiographies, and published conversion narratives. Even Gell, whose primary aim in corresponding with Baxter was one of personal reassurance, did not sign her secret, anxious letters – thereby hiding her struggles from a wider audience while, in print, she was praised for her 'sweet and satiating' piety.[81]

Beneath this shared wariness, however, lay significant differences, as the forms of 'godliness' that these individuals were protecting varied, shaping how and why they avoided using melancholy as an explanatory factor. For Rich, the priority was to demonstrate the respectable moderation of godliness, while the Independent gentlewoman and Langford aimed to promote a strongly emotive form of piety. Yet, regardless of these differences, Presbyterian and Independent sufferers of spiritual anguish – such as Gell, the anonymous gentlewoman, and Langford – seem to have shared a heightened concern that the involvement of melancholy would undermine the authority and value of their struggles with spiritual doubts. For women and those who distanced themselves most firmly from the practices of the established church, the desire to act on this concern was perhaps the most acute, leading to these Independents' assertive publications.

III

By the early 1680s, however, further cases suggest that this hesitancy to incorporate melancholy into autobiographical accounts of spiritual experience may have waned, especially among some Presbyterians. Melancholy appears to have been mentioned more freely in spiritual writings, including diaries, letters, and published narratives. At first glance, this increase might seem to suggest that nonconformists had become less concerned with making firm distinctions between genuine spiritual distress and melancholy, or that more

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[80] Ibid., sig. B7r.
[81] William Bagshaw, *De spiritualibus pecci* (1702), pp. 58–60; DWL, RB/5.216 and RB/5.3.

medical, even secular interpretations of such experiences were taking root. But, as the following two sections argue, significant variations again lay beneath the shared tendency, particularly along the lines of denomination, genre, and form of spiritual experience, obscuring the possibility of generalizations. Moreover, considerable tensions can be identified between the voices of sufferers themselves and the viewpoints of other members of their communities, suggesting that the role of melancholy in spiritual lives continued to be fraught and under constant negotiation.

Those suffering from spiritual distress remained at the forefront of these negotiations, but – in some cases – had changed their approach. Rather than separating important religious processes from the distemper, as we saw in the earlier examples, some individuals now integrated it into their accounts, primarily through the existing frameworks of providence and sanctified affliction. The Presbyterian minister Timothy Rogers, for instance, asserted that the onset of melancholy was the result of 'all-wise Providence'. The assistant to a prominent Presbyterian minister in London, Rogers had suffered from a highly debilitating form of melancholic spiritual distress for a number of months sometime between 1682 and 1684, before publishing what he had learned from the experience in 1691.[82] In his view, the spiritual significance of melancholy stemmed from the knowledge that God had chosen to afflict the sufferer with that disease, which was, he asserted, 'the worst of all Distempers'. In line with the godly view on afflictions and sickness more generally, the key was to learn from this 'School of Affliction', in order to show that the ordeal was sanctified by God and intended for the sufferers' spiritual improvement.[83] Rogers believed, for instance, that melancholy and the spiritual anguish it caused could turn sufferers away 'from carnal Security' and towards putting a 'high Value on the Scripture'.[84] In claiming that only God – rather than physic – was capable of curing this disease, he further heightened its spiritual import.[85]

This integrative, providential interpretation was not only advanced by a learned minister, however. An anonymous Independent woman expressed a similar, albeit modified, view shortly after. A relation of Oliver Cromwell, the woman included two intense episodes of melancholy in her diary of 'experiences' and 'special Provedence[s]' in the early 1690s. According to her description, being 'under great mallencoly' deadened her heart in duties and, when severe, caused her to imagine the devil was before her, to feel that she was tied down, and to have atheistical thoughts. Like Rogers, she understood the bouts to be providential 'Tryal[s]' that ultimately kept her in an awakened spiritual 'Frame' by turning her away from worldly concerns and encouraging her to rely solely on God.[86] Rather than outright rejecting

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[82] Timothy Rogers, *Practical discourses on sickness & recovery in several sermons* (1691), p. 1; Timothy Rogers, *A discourse concerning trouble of mind and the disease of melancholly* (1691). See also, for example, Schmidt, *Melancholy*, pp. 118–28.

[83] Rogers, *Discourse*, sigs. A3r, C2v.

[84] Ibid., pp. 152, 160.

[85] Ibid., p. 149; Rogers, *Practical discourses*, p. 41.

[86] 'Oliver Cromwell's cousin's diary', in William Cole, *Athenae Cantabrigienses*, III, BL, Add MS 5858, fos. 213v–221r.

the notion of the involvement of melancholy, in the vein of earlier Independents, she incorporated the distemper into prominent ministers' teachings on godly trials and faith, paraphrasing and adapting their writings.[87] The same approach was taken in the published narrative of the Presbyterian Hannah Allen in 1683, in which 'the great advantages [that] the devil made of her deep melancholy' were presented as God having 'exercised' her 'with manifold Trials' over the course of fifteen years.[88]

As such framings suggest, these authors fused melancholy with the spiritual experiences of sorrow for sin, an afflicted conscience, and despair, using the well-established generic tropes of trials of faith and conversion narratives. The scriptural references that had been employed in these genres to reject 'mechanical', physiological interpretations during the 1650s, '60s and '70s were now used to meld melancholy into spiritual accounts. Likening themselves to figures such as Job and Heman – as well as well-known sufferers of spiritual sorrow from their own century – these writers presented their struggle with melancholy-induced fears through such standard phrases as having gone 'forth weeping, ... sowed in Tears, but ... reaped an Harvest of wonderful Joys afterwards'.[89]

In doing so, their struggles with the distemper and the spiritual doubts it caused were presented as indicators of their status as one of God's 'saints'.[90] For example, a Presbyterian apothecary, Elias Pledger, who suffered from chronic melancholy himself, described humorally fuelled spiritual concerns as positive evidence of one's election in his manuscript writings. Writing a consolatory letter to a friend in the 1680s, he argued that those who suffer from spiritual troubles as a result of melancholic imbalance are in fact likely to be saved, asserting that 'God seldom takes so much paines with reprobates[;] they seldom dispaire til they come to hell.'[91] Thus, rather than seeing 'Melancholy reeks and vapours' as negating the authenticity of spiritual affliction, these writers now presented the physiological origins of the condition as constitutive of that affliction.

This framing echoed the more productive connections made between melancholy and godly sorrow by some earlier Calvinists. As outlined in the first section, the godly had held ambivalent views on melancholy at the start of the century, attempting to make firm distinctions between it and an afflicted conscience, but also – in some cases – blurring their boundaries. As I argued in the second section, however, sufferers themselves appear not to have been as interested in this blurring, instead tending to render their distress in a purely spiritual light, both in the first half of the century and then with particular

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[87] Ibid., fos. 214r, 221r. She draws on Stephen Charnock, *A discourse of divine providence* (1684), and Jeremiah Burroughs, *The rare jewel of Christian contentment* (1648).

[88] Hannah Allen, *A narrative of God's gracious dealings* (1683), titlepage, p. 74. See also, for example, Hodgkin, *Madness*, passim.

[89] Rogers, *Discourse*, pp. xv, xxiii, 6, 30; Allen, *Narrative*, pp. ii–iii, 74–9. Rogers equates religious melancholics with figures such as Sarah Wight, as described in Henry Jessey, *The exceeding riches of grace* (1647).

[90] Rogers, *Discourse*, pp. xxiii–xxiv; Allen, *Narrative*, p. x.

[91] 'Diary of Elias Pledger', DWL, MS 28.4, fos. 46r–47v.

insistence after the Civil Wars. Yet later examples suggest that, by the 1680s, at least some sufferers had changed their stance – finally taking on the label of melancholy more readily but not in the same ways as some others in their communities who, turning away from Calvinism, were increasingly viewing intense religious anguish through a purely physiological lens. Instead, these sufferers stalwartly harked back to the condition's most spiritual aspects.

While the writings of Rogers, the anonymous Independent woman, Allen, and Pledger all incorporated melancholy into accounts of spiritual growth, significant differences in their approach can be identified which reveal a number of tensions at play. The apothecary Pledger's advice was particularly generous, free of the sense of providential punishment, 'castigatory wrath', and the need to 'speedily Repent' that was found in Rogers's and others' accounts. Rogers's therapeutic approach was already significantly less harsh than that of the early seventeenth-century divines he took inspiration from, as Schmidt's close analysis has shown – but the layman Pledger retreated even further from the need for self-condemnatory reflection.[92] This difference perhaps reinforces the notion that many nonconformists were, in general, shifting to seeing providences as largely benevolent by the end of the century, while also revealing that lay writers showed a significant degree of interpretational autonomy when describing struggles with melancholy in manuscript writings.[93] Indeed, like Pledger, the anonymous Independent woman went against published advice, with the nature of her recovery countering the views of ministers who, on other topics, she paraphrased and adhered to. Her claim to have found immediate relief through scripture being 'rung' in her 'Ears' was a trope of spiritual afflictions, but did not align with ministers' continued insistence that only an afflicted conscience could be alleviated by God in an instant. Melancholy, they maintained, was instead remedied gradually 'by degrees'.[94] Both the anonymous Independent and Allen, moreover, continued to see the devil's hand in their melancholic distress, despite moves away from demonological explanations in some pastoral texts.[95]

Differences in approach also appeared along denominational lines, pointing to additional tensions and further clouding the ability to make general claims about nonconformists' attitudes to the role of melancholy in spiritual experience. The anonymous Independent writer placed her 'trials' of melancholy alongside numerous other forms of providential afflictions in her account of 'the Worke of God on' her 'Soule', from further sicknesses to life-threatening accidents.[96] In other words, she did not present her bouts of melancholy as

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[92] Rogers, *Discourse*, chs. I–III, esp. pp. 6–7; Schmidt, *Melancholy*, ch. 5, esp. pp. 122–3.

[93] John Spurr, 'From puritanism to dissent, 1660–1700', in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, eds., *The culture of English puritanism, 1560–1700* (London, 1996), p. 264.

[94] BL, Add MS 5858, fos. 215r, 217r; Burroughs, *The eighth book*, pp. 414–24; Baxter, *Right method*, pp. 8–9; Rogers, *Discourse*, pp. 15, 409; Richard Gilpin, *Daemonologia sacra* (1677), p. 380. For examples of the trope, see 'Occasional reflections of Mrs [Elianor] Stockton', DWL, MS 24.8, fol. 12r; Walker, *Spirituall experiences*, pp. 36, 159; John Bunyan, *Grace abounding to the chief of sinners* (1666), pp. 25, 74–5.

[95] Schmidt, *Melancholy*, pp. 133–7.

[96] BL, Add MS 5858, e.g. fos. 215v, 219v.

being uniquely significant to her spiritual growth to the same degree as the Presbyterians Allen and Rogers. On this point, the writer aligned herself with other Independents who continued to reject physiological interpretations of the major process of conversion and related trials of faith, even if less emphatically than the anonymous gentlewoman and Charles Langford had in earlier decades. In 1700, for example, the Independent minister Charles Nicholets published an account of the long conversion of a young woman, Mary Harrison, which refused to present her 'Spiritual Troubles' as stemming from or intermixing with the illness of melancholy. In a similar style to earlier texts, he instead recounted her 'Despairing Sorrow' while stressing that she never turned to physick for aid, only to God.[97]

IV

The differences between these cases have revealed important tensions within Presbyterian and Independent writers' identifications of melancholy in personal religious experiences. But turning to the voices of others in Rogers's and Allen's Presbyterian communities reveals deeper conflicts, suggesting that these sufferers' incorporations of melancholy may have generated more unease than acceptance among those around them. The wider cultural shift towards a preference for self-restraint and reason in religion could account for this unease, but there seems to have been more at play. Even many of those Presbyterians who remained dedicated to passionate piety, in the vein of the sufferers Allen and Rogers, seem to have been dismissive and disapproving of melancholic spiritual distress, continuing to separate the genuine sorrow of an afflicted conscience from the symptoms of physical distemper. In their view, if melancholy was involved in a supplementary way, sent by God to exacerbate the affliction, then this was only possible to the extent that 'the Distressed Party acts rationally'. Once a sufferer was 'Irrational', the experience was, again, merely 'the effect of a natural disease' and of no especial spiritual significance.[98] As a result, it was expected that many in their communities would 'make a doubt' about the 'spiritual nature' and ensuing 'promises' of a sufferer's recovery if it had involved melancholy, and would continue to tie the condition to culpability, 'hidden sins', and worldliness.[99]

Similar opinions can be detected within the accounts of sufferers themselves. The introductory authors and additional contributors to Allen's publication, for example, attempted to neutralize the negative connections of melancholy to worldliness, immoderation, and sin – while remaining tellingly anonymous. Although Allen herself was overt in identifying her 'dark Melancholy bodily distempers' as causing her intense 'delusions',

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[97] Charles Nicholets, *A burning yet unconsumed bush* (1700), pp. 76, 127.

[98] Gilpin, *Daemonologia*, pp. 380–3; John Collinges, *The intercourses of divine love* (1683), p. 3; David Irish, *Levamen infirmi* (1700), pp. 48–53.

[99] Collinges, *Intercourses*, p. 421; John Collinges, *Several discourses concerning the actual providence of God* (1678), pp. 687–95; John Janeway, *Invisibles, realities, demonstrated* (1673, republished 1698), pp. 13, 31.

'temptations', and suicide attempts, the introductory author placed her experience firmly within a spiritual framework, asserting that humoral imbalance was not the root of her problems.[100] Similarly jarring differences can be identified between the main text and the introductions of other spiritual autobiographies that wrestled with a subject's struggles with melancholy or madness in this period. Reminiscent of the pre-emptive defences seen in the published autobiographical sources of the 1660s and '70s, these introductions declared that religious melancholics' struggles were directly inflicted by God, unforeseeable, and not the result of irresponsible mishandling of their humoral complexion, thereby reducing the sufferer's culpability.[101]

Rogers himself made similar assertions, and within these pre-emptions and unwieldy caveats lay an awareness that many readers were unlikely to take melancholics' words seriously.[102] He expressed dismay at the lack of credibility and sympathy that sufferers like himself usually faced, complaining that their words were 'deride[d]', dismissed as 'Fancy' rather than 'Reality'.[103] Some members of Allen's community had indeed responded to her distress with incredulity and, although they sought out both medical and pastoral treatments in their efforts to help her, they did not necessarily view her ordeal in the same spiritually significant light as her text demanded.[104]

Melancholy continued to be an inherently poor fit for the framework of sanctified affliction, given that its symptoms of fear and delusion usually inhibited sufferers from responding with the patience that was expected of those undergoing a providential trial.[105] Some observers may have therefore viewed the religious melancholic's suffering as the 'unsanctified Afflictions [that] parboyle the Soul for hell', rather than preparing it for heaven, as Allen herself had feared.[106] It seems that Rogers's restrained approach – in which he gave very little information about his actual suffering under melancholy, did not divulge any episodes of irrationality, and instead focused on what could be learned from the experience in hindsight – was the preferred route for many Presbyterians. The contrasting reputations of Rogers's and Allen's respective printers certainly suggest that this was the case.[107] But, whatever Rogers's

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[100] Allen, *Narrative*, pp. i–xi; Adcock, Read, and Ziomek, eds., *Flesh and spirit*, pp. 236–7.

[101] Allen, *Narrative*, pp. ii, vi, 72; George Trosse, *The life of the Reverend Mr. Geo. Trosse*, ed. Joseph Hallett (1st edn, Exeter, 1714), sigs. A2r–A4v; Anthony Walker, *The vertuous wife* (1694), passim, esp. pp. 17, 26.

[102] Rogers, *Discourse*, pp. xxx, xxxvi, 147–9, 170–1.

[103] Ibid., pp. xv, lxviii, 370–1, 382; Rogers, *Practical discourses*, p. 155; Allen, *Narrative*, p. x.

[104] Allen, *Narrative*, pp. 40, 60–3. See also Schmidt, *Melancholy*, p. 114; Hodgkin, *Madness*, pp. 184–5.

[105] James Birdwood, *Hearts-ease in heart-trouble* (1690), esp. pp. 20–1, 45; Edmund Calamy, *The godly mans ark* (1657), pp. 35, 216–17, reprinted approximately eighteen times until 1709, according to Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in early modern England* (Oxford, 2000), appendix 1.

[106] Allen, *Narrative*, p. 63.

[107] Rogers's publisher was 'the most eminent Presbyterian Bookseller', according to a contemporary quoted in Harold Love, 'Parkhurst, Thomas (c. 1632–1711)', *ODNB*; and his *Discourse*, pp. xxxiv–l, included seven letters of support from fellow ministers in response to *Practical discourses*. Allen's printer, in contrast, was the more obscure John Wallis, whose extant publications suggest that he focused on producing attention-grabbing pamphlets, and no positive reception

comparative acceptance, it remains evident that asserting the spiritual value of a melancholic's afflictions, no matter how well a writer framed them as providential, sanctified, and godly, was not straightforward. Indeed, even Presbyterian writings that did not attempt to meld an individual's melancholy with spiritual sorrow – instead blaming the onset of the distemper on the hardship of persecution – required similar caveats to persuade readers of the sanctified nature of the ordeal.[108]

V

In his conversion narrative, Charles Langford commented that those under the weight of spiritual distress 'may not be able to make so long a stand, as to hear all that the tongue of the Learned have to say for the relief of their weary Souls'.[109] Many of the cases discussed here certainly suggest that this was the case, with sufferers often diverging from learned and other external opinions of their anguish. Rather than being the result of fatigue, however, their divergence seems to have stemmed from conviction: as Langford continued, ''tis not in well set words and sentences, but in clear experiences [that] true learning doth consist'.[110] Sufferers insisted on their own interpretations of their first-hand experiences, with women and laypersons staking clear claims over how melancholy should be viewed in relation to one's religious life across the period.

These interpretations were not developed purely out of self-assertion, however, but were adjusted in response to wider social and cultural changes. While these individuals remained dedicated to the frameworks of spiritual sorrow and sanctified affliction, the attitudes around them varied, influencing how and whether they also looked to melancholy as an explanatory factor. Melancholy had always been received with ambivalence by learned and laypeople alike, and the doctrinal, epistemic, and political pressures of the second half of the century only increased the stakes. As the above discussion has tentatively suggested, Presbyterians and Independents held a heightened reluctance to involve melancholy in autobiographical accounts of religious experience during the discord of the 1650s and persecution of the 1660s to '70s, before increasingly incorporating the condition in the 1680s and '90s, as the influence of physical interpretations took greater hold. As the analysis has also shown, however, the reactions of their readers may not have aligned with sufferers' hopes for how they wished to be seen.

A blanket account of these shifts and their reception across dissenting communities is thus difficult to sustain, with differences existing not only between sufferers and those around them, but also between genders and between the

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of her writings can be traced. For clues on Allen's intended audience, see S. J. Wiseman, 'Allen [née Archer], Hannah (c. 1638–1668x1708)', *ODNB*.

[108] Benjamin Grosvenor, *The dissolution of the earthly house of this tabernacle* (1713), pp. 35–6; Edmund Calamy, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter's history of his life and times* (2nd edn, 2 vols., 1713), II, pp. 2–3, 383, 562–3, 597–9, 745.

[109] Langford, *Gods wonderful mercy*, sigs. A2v–A3r.

[110] Ibid., sig. A4v.

denominations examined here. Those writing manuscripts intended for a select, narrow audience revealed a particularly strong degree of interpretational independence in their efforts to invest struggles with spiritual significance, while authors of printed texts showed a deeper concern with addressing the expectations of their anticipated readership. Indeed, some writers were more concerned than others with convincing their detractors, the wider community, and fellow sufferers of the spiritual value of their experiences, and this helped shape the means and tone of their discussions of melancholy. All sufferers, however, were also (and perhaps primarily) concerned with convincing *themselves* of this value – and their desire to do so seems to have responded to a deeper need identifiable across the century and beyond: to give coherence and meaning to their struggles. The persistence and insistence of this need reminds us of the value of considering individuals' subjectivities when trying to understand how ideas about health and religion came to be altered, continued, or revived in early modern society.[111] After all, even when faced with new theories, pressures, or remedies, many sufferers of intense spiritual anguish continued to see themselves, in Langford's words, 'tossed with Tempest and not comforted, however others look upon it'.[112]

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[111] Lyndal Roper, 'Beyond discourse theory', *Women's History Review*, 19 (2010), pp. 307–19.
[112] Langford, *Gods wonderful mercy*, sig. A2v.

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