



ALBRECHT DÜRER AND THE 16TH CENTURY MELANCHOLY

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ABSTRACT

Little has been discussed in academia about the close relationship between the Renaissance of the 16th century and melancholy humor, and esoteric elements arising mainly from Florentine Neoplatonism. The link between melancholy and esotericism becomes very clear when we analyze the gravure "Melencolia I" by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), composed of a significant number of symbols that refer to an esoteric religious culture that then emerged. Renaissance melancholy gained several nuances. On the one hand, it was considered a sin, a despicable mood characteristic of witches; on the other hand, a deep sense of inspiration typical of men of "genius". This ambivalence also occurred in the firmament, as the melancholic people were guided by the dark planet Saturn, according to astrological belief. We also have the cultural scenario of the 16th century, especially in Dürer's Germany, which contributed to strengthening the melancholy issues.

Science in Renaissance and Melancholy: Confluence between Science and Esotericism

This article is the result of research presented during the International Congress of Arts and Culture held in Madrid, Spain, on November 28-29, 2019. The proposal was to discuss the issue of melancholy in the 16th century, a period characterized by a strong melancholy “feeling” that inspired the German artist Albrecht Dürer to perform “Melencolia I”.

The European historical background of the late 15th and 16th centuries was marked by profound anthropocentrism provided by the Renaissance movement. The return and valorization of classical antiquity, especially the Greco-Roman, mobilized artists, philosophers, and other intellectuals who propelled a renovation in Western culture.

Another field that must be analyzed in this period, and which is closely connected with the cultural aspects of this time, is the science. The Renaissance period achieved success in some scientific aspects, as in medicine, for example. But it was far from abandoning some scientific conceptions that have been inherited since Classical Antiquity, a clear example of this can be seen in the interlacement of religious beliefs and scientific practices. Febvre (2009) exemplifies this interlacement, indicating that the scientific advances achieved in the Renaissance were often based on Classical Antiquity precepts.

Febvre (2009) points out that even with a “scientific revolution” that occurred around the 15th century, science still remained immersed in an occultism atmosphere, that is, it was correlated with religious aspects addressed by the religious culture of that time. This was strongly emphasized in the Renaissance when esotericism and hermetic doctrines increasingly gained credibility, especially among intellectuals. Thus, there was a strong belief, even in academia, that the stars directly influenced the life of the human being. Renaissance medicine was convinced that astral influence, in addition to determining certain psychological characteristics of individuals, was also capable of directly influence the physical and mental health of man.

Thus, it is worth remembering that there was no scientific method that established a parameter between empirical study – as occurred with the dissection of bodies – and the esoteric beliefs that postulated, among so many things, the influence of the stars on the functioning of the human organism. Despite the empirical advances in the exploration of the human body physiology, strongly elaborated by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), they did not placate the belief, for example, that the human body was the most perfect creation God and, following Renaissance religious beliefs, the human being would be related to the macrocosm, that is, to the universe itself. Here again is the belief of the human being, considered a microcosm, as the reflection of a larger reality, the macrocosm. This postulate, which had a strong influence in the philosophical-religious field, also influenced the medical science of that time.

Melancholy has occupied the minds of many philosophers, theologians, and physicians since antiquity, particularly continued to be the object of deep studies in the Renaissance period.

It is this same melancholy and cultural scenario that inspired Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) to carve one of his most famous and enigmatic works, called “Melencolia I”. This is the centre of our research.

Initially, it is possible to point out that Dürer's engraving encompasses, for example, the scientific conceptions in vogue in the 16th century about the theory of the four senses of humor, besides bringing together the whole esoteric context of that moment. In this sense, all our research goes through the characteristics of Western esotericism that, besides exerting great influence in philosophical and religious fields, also had its participation in the construction of Renaissance scientific studies.

The concept of science of the Renaissance was very different from the concept one has today. People of the Renaissance were inserted in a universe that, for them, combined with the divine forces that acted directly in the maintenance of nature. Thus, the individual studying nature believed to be manipulating divine creation itself. Science and religion were closely linked. This tells us about religiosity in the Renaissance, in

which man is understood from the concept of microcosms as a reflection of a much larger reality, a macrocosmic reality.

One of the exponents who emphasized and spread Renaissance Medicine was Ficino (1433-1499). As Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl (2012) reveal, the precursor of Renaissance Neoplatonism was also an enthusiast in the study of medicine, as he himself was a physician. Ficino mixed medicine and magic. The Florence philosopher considered that the human soul was divided into three parts: the physical, the psychical, and the spiritual, which in the medicinal field should be considered as body, soul, and mind. We will not enter into the philosophical discussion of these three divisions, but one should note that Ficino, like other theorists, was unable to postulate a purely mechanistic Medicine, as they included concepts of soul and spirit, conferring a "religious" character to medicinal studies.

Ficino was a defender of the use of magic in correlation with medical treatment. His advocacy of using magical methods was to postulate that the patient's illness was correlated, for example, with astrological forces that acted in the soul of the individual. In order to obtain a complete cure, the physician, in Ficino conception, should use occult, magical forces in order to manipulate such forces in favor of his patient's health.

The authors make an important reflection on the interlacement between the religious-magician and the medicinal doctrine of the time of Ficino, the important Neoplatonic philosopher. Here we can observe that, in addition to the interlacement between the medicinal and the esoteric, we have the encounter with philosophy, since Ficino is the largest representative of Neoplatonism in Italy. In general terms, it is true to say that in the sixteenth century it was not possible to conceive of a medicinal science without interlacement with the esoteric.

It is important to refer to Saturn. This is because of the intellectuals of that time, like Ficino, regarded this planet as the ruler of melancholy. Venus, Mars, Moon, and Saturn came to be considered the respective celestial bodies that governed the four temperaments, or the four touches of humor: the sanguine, the choleric, the phlegmatic, and the melancholic. The latter was represented by the

ambivalence of the figure of Saturn, which, like melancholy itself, represented the ambivalence between the good and the evil. That is, if melancholy could be considered from the perspective of good or bad introspection, Saturn, like the other gods, was also taken by the dual form. However, on Saturn, this duality is too pronounced. We find this paradigm in the Hellenization of the Roman gods. Kronos exchanges for Roman Saturn and gains benign aspects, the God who cares for the harvests and who also oversees riches and coins.

It is possible to once again allude to Dürer's work "Melencolia I" - figure 1, as the 16th-century scientific-medicinal environment placed great emphasis on the study and cure of melancholy, it is not surprising that one of the greatest geniuses of German Renaissance painting has developed work with such thematic.

Figure 1. "The syphilitic" by Dürer, Germany, 1496



Source: Books, Health, and History (2017)

Figure 1 corroborates our thesis. It is one of the hundreds of prints produced by Dürer; However, it contains the particularity of illustrating precisely what we have been studying here, namely, the junction between science and esoteric-astrological concepts. The individual in the picture is afflicted with syphilis, a disease that plagued Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. Above his head, we can see a sphere with the zodiac symbols. According to Ball (2009), the print shows the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn that would cause syphilis, according to intellectuals of that time.

Warburg (2013) mentions that the belief of the influence of the stars in the daily life of humanity has led to a true "fever" of European society in the search of prevention and cure of diseases and disasters by making astrological charts, as diseases and disasters were common in 15th and 16th century Europe. Events such as environmental catastrophes and political-religious revolutions that, for many, had astral influences, further contributed to approaching medicinal science, astrology, and other esoteric practices.

Warburg (2013) study is another important contribution to understanding the reasons why Renaissance Medicine was subjected to esoteric. Yates (1995) points out that Ficino was a defender of the use of talismans, that is, the making of small amulets, with specific symbols, made with appropriate materials. These talismans were a form of magic, considered by Ficino as a kind of natural magic, aimed at the psychic and biological protection of individuals, against the planetary "forces" that act in our midst.

Ball (2009) draws attention to Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), who insisted on the idea that man could only obtain knowledge about nature when they accepted magic as a mode of work and research. Agrippa (2012) took magic as the most "sacred" of all philosophies:

Magia é uma faculdade de maravilhosa virtude, cheia dos mais nobres mistérios, contendo a mais profunda contemplação das coisas mais secretas junto à natureza, ao poder, à qualidade, à substância e às virtudes delas, bem como o conhecimento de toda a natureza, e ela nos instrui acerca da diferença e da concordância das coisas entre si, produzindo assim maravilhosos efeitos, unindo as virtudes das coisas pela aplicação delas uma em relação a outra, unindo-as e tecendo-as bem próximas por meio dos poderes e das virtudes dos corpos superiores.

Essa é a mais perfeita e principal ciência, a mais sagrada e sublime espécie de filosofia e, por fim, a mais absoluta perfeição de toda a excelentíssima Filosofia. (AGRIPPA, 2012, p. 80)

Agrippa's (2012) emphasis on magic, as well as other esoteric elements, has made his book "Three Books of Occult Philosophy" become the "best-known Renaissance Magic Handbook" (YATES apud BALL, 2009, p. 81), that mixes scientific-

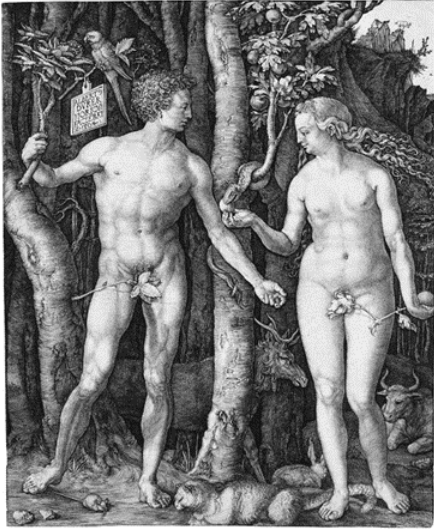
medicinal knowledge with esotericism. Even with the spread of this "hermetic science" names like Agrippa himself (2012) were under threat from the Catholic Inquisition, which correlated his work with possible diabolical influences. But despite many bans and accusations, the work and advances around Alchemy, for example, continued to gain credit and followers.

For Ball (2009), the knowledge and experiences brought by Alchemy aroused the admiration of several intellectuals of that time such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Lucas Cranach (1515-1586) and Dürer himself. Apparently, alchemical science, as well as every esoteric tradition that it brought together, proved to be a kind of "key" or "tool" at that time for the exploration and knowledge of nature.

Obviously, as stated by Delumeau (1984) and Ball (2009), the great respect that Renaissance intellectuals had for the writings of Hippocrates (460-370 BC) and Galen (circa 129-200 AD), for example, placated further development in the scientific-medicinal field. But what must be observed and explored is that men of those times were imbued with great intellectual curiosity, and were driven by a curiosity aroused by the desire to gain greater knowledge about the functioning of the universe. Delumeau (1984) cites the example of Giordano Bruno, who, even being persecuted and killed by the Inquisition for being directly involved in religious matters, was one of the figures who "inaugurated" the foundations of modern rational knowledge by postulating that the transcendent is unknowable.

Dürer, the famous German artist, was apparently very close to this connection between the esoteric and the scientific, which involved the late fifteenth century and the whole sixteenth century. One can make this statement by looking at some of your work. For example, Figure 2, which represents the "fall of Adam," has been outlined numerous times by Dürer. The important biblical myth that narrates the "fall" of the first man, and the consequent defilement by sin, was also held by many alchemists as the moment when the man was stricken with all diseases and evils in his physical and mental health. The noble "task" of Alchemy was to restore the balance between healthy living and the diseases brought about by the "Adamic fall."

Figure 2. "The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve)," by Albrecht Dürer, 1504



Source: XiloArt (2017)

Dürer did not write directly about his ideas about esotericism and Alchemy themselves. However, following indications of his life, through Panofsky (2005), and some of his artistic works, it is possible to assume that Dürer was in touch with all this alchemical-esoteric effervescence of the sixteenth century. Panofsky (2005) is convinced that the German painter was familiar with the works of Agrippa, the famous Renaissance magician, especially his most famous work, "Three Books of Occult Philosophy" (AGRIPPA, 2012), which is surrounded by magical and alchemical symbolism. This influence would have led the artist to reproduce his most enigmatic engraving, "Melencolia I".

Figure 3. "Melencolia I" by Albrecht Dürer, Buril Engraving, Paris, 1514



Source: Judas (2017)

Saturn and melancholy

Since Greek antiquity, man has been formulating theories, based on the knowledge of Physiology that may indicate the health condition of individuals. This search for a medical "theorization" led the Greeks to formulate a biological-psychic typology that would fit man into four distinct categories, namely: sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic. In this sense, Greek medicine has organized a medical "manual" to systematically diagnose a typology of the state of human health.

Humoral theory, as it became known, was deeply related to the ancient Greeks' knowledge of nature, that is, as we identified four primordial elements of nature (air, earth, fire, and water). The scholars of that time, Like Hippocrates, they believed that in addition to being composed of these four primordial elements, the human being was also subject to four specific types of humor (phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric, and melancholic) that defined his biological and mental health.

Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl (2012) mention that it is possible to find the first vestiges of humoral theory among the Pythagoreans, which related human life to "tetradic" theories, that is, the life of man occurring together with the cycles of nature: the four seasons and the four elements. This typically Pythagorean theory gained profound repercussions in Paracelsus Medicine (1493-1541) and Agrippa's studies, for example.

The aforementioned authors indicate that the humoral theory received its improvement around 400 BC. This theory was used by the ancients and has been perpetuated in medical history for over two thousand years. In this sense, the understanding of the formation of the humoral theory, since Classical Antiquity, becomes of great importance, because it was this same scientific concept that moved Renaissance intellectuals in the medical field.

It is the fluidic compounds of the human body, that is, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, responsible for maintaining the good physical and mental health of humans that have their productions in the respective organs: heart, respiratory system, liver, and spleen. From these compounds, and the way they are distributed in the organism was that the psycho-biological

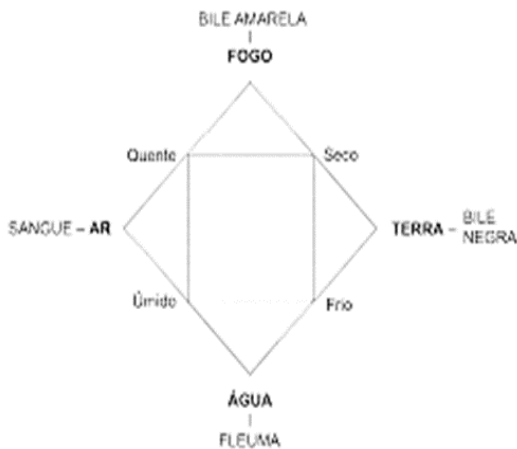
typology of the individual was defined. For example, according to the galenic theory, which has deepened the study of moods, the subject with the most yellow bile in his body would tend to the choleric mood that, in turn, was related to people of aggressive temperament. The sanguine has its characteristics turned to optimism and positivity; the phlegmatic would be a slow, passive and methodical individual; and the subject with the greatest abundance of black bile would have a disposition for sadness, dissatisfaction, and melancholy.

It is possible to notice that the humoral theory also refers to the formation of the personality of the individual. Thus, studies around the humor became the center of ancient and medieval medicine. The medieval men, especially, although they had the same belief since antiquity, instituted that the bodily moods were intrinsically related to the dispositions of the stars. Astrology, once again, receives credibility in the scientific field of that time. Stars like Mars, Jupiter, Moon, and Saturn ruled their respective moods: choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholic.

Tyson (2012), the commentator on Agrippa's "Three Books of Occult Philosophy" provides an explanatory diagram of the humoral theory according to ancient and medieval scientific knowledge:

- Fire (hot-dry) - Cholera
- Air (humid-hot) - Blood
- Water (cold-humid) - Phlegm
- Earth (dry-cold) - Melancholy

Figure 4. Diagram of the moods



Source: Agrippa (2012, p. 929)

Rezende (2009) explains that the diagram also reveals the concept of micro and macrocosms, so estimated by antique men. The conceptualization is clear in verifying the relationship between the compounds of the body, the four senses of humor, and the four elements of nature.

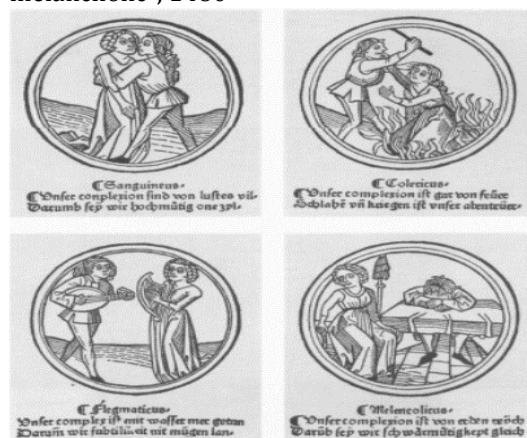
Humoral theory, besides being widely used and studied in Classical Antiquity, was also the most widely used medicinal theory among the medieval and Renaissance. Figure 5, called "The Four Temperaments," is a fifteenth-century drawing that illustrates the old concept that the four temperaments, or the four moods, were related to the four elements of nature. Figure 6, also from the fifteenth century, refers again to the four temperaments, however, with the peculiarity of demonstrating some psychological aspects of individuals.

Figure 5. "The Four Temperaments," 15th-century German woodcut



Source: Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl (2012)

Figure 6. "Sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic", 1480



Source: Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl (2012)

Critical fortune presents the melancholic temperament as the most studied and analyzed between ancient and medieval people. This temperament that, for many, left the human being in inertia, was the greatest concern of philosophers and theologians. Let us now turn to specific considerations about melancholy to draw an important background that perhaps led Dürer to explore this mood in one of his many works.

Among the moods explained since antiquity, it is very likely that no other mood has received more attention and study than the melancholy one. Since the formulation of the humoral theory, melancholy has been considered as a disease, ie, all men presenting with the symptoms of melancholy, ie sadness, dejection, or even dementia, had too much black bile produced by the spleen. However, Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his "Problems XXX, 1" makes other considerations about melancholic humor, going against the typology of melancholy as a disease.

Even providing a positive interpretation for the melancholic state, Aristotle agreed about the biological and, mainly, behavioral characteristics that an affected individual could have. In addition to the disproportionate production of black bile, the melancholic state, according to Burton (2011, v. II), takes the subject to social isolation, presents states of sadness and discomfort for life, the restlessness of spirit, dissatisfaction, unhappiness and, even, madness. All these characteristics were seen by Aristotle as necessary for the creation of genius in man, that is, the individual, in Aristotelian doctrine, who possessed melancholic characteristics, especially the characteristic that leads them to isolation, possibly will be endowed with genius. Probably Aristotle saw that melancholy led the subject to introspection and, therefore, they would be more predisposed to philosophical and artistic intuitions, for example.

According to the importance Aristotle gave to melancholy in the formation of genius, madness was now very close to genius, since the humoral theory of melancholy was, for the Hippocratic, favorable to the emergence of madness and, for the Aristotelians, as a key element for exception men.

Plato (428-348 BC), master of Aristotle, saw melancholy as a state of illness that affected man; however, this philosopher believed that

melancholy was also present in men who had some genius. Plato called the "illumination" of men of great intellect as "furor divinus". This Platonic thought likely influenced his disciple Aristotle to believe, in a generalized way, that the melancholic character was present in all great geniuses.

Paula (2014) states that the Middle Ages was a period of widespread use of humoral theory, and the medicine of that period was completely based on this notion inherited directly from the ancient tradition. Melancholy continued to receive prominence and became an element of great concern among intellectuals of the medieval period. The medievals had little interest in Aristotle's "Problems XXX, 1". The humoral theory came to be regarded, in a way, with an atmosphere of religiosity, since the medieval people were convinced that men were at the mercy of the fluids of senses of humor as a result of the "Adamic fall."

The "medieval" melancholy was seen as the first symptom of madness that the subject could present, so the medical intervention was quickly requested. The melancholy factor was one of the most speculated themes by philosophers, doctors, and theologians, but theological speculation stood out. The symptoms of the melancholy were regarded as a probable demonic manifestation, since their excess, in medieval belief, washed the subject from madness. Alcides (2001) comments that the situation of the so-called melancholic individuals was quite difficult since they were also seen as envious, suspicious, and avaricious, among other harmful vices to social life.

It was mainly in the early Middle Ages that melancholy was correlated with the belief in demonic influences. Nevertheless, a new problem worried medieval scholars. It became apparent that clerics, especially monks, were affected by melancholy. But if the melancholy were predisposed to demonic influences, why did this influence occur in monks, men so devoted to the service of God? The answer is that the demons were intended to test the faith of these men who were turned toward God.

The reclusion to monastic life, usually isolated from the world, brought to the monks' characteristics of idleness that often led them to

the melancholy situation. Acedia had the same symptoms of melancholy: displeasure about life, discouragement, somnolence, and sadness, and became the most widely used term to characterize the presence of melancholy among the monks.

The phenomenon intrigued medieval people, as the manifestations of acedia became increasingly common in monasteries. The theology of the time classified acedia or, in other words, melancholy itself, as the eighth deadly sin.

Despite all the heavy negative characteristics under the melancholic people, parallel to it, they realized that this evil, which hit the monasteries deeply, could be correlated with an excess of study, erudition, as the monasteries housed large libraries and those monks, in a state of acedia, spent much of their time in deep theological-philosophical studies.

With the same consensus that the medieval people treated melancholy, that is, with all negativity and rejection, astrologers held the same attitude. Like the ancient people, the medieval man believed that the melancholic person was ruled by the planet Saturn, the slowest, coldest, and the distant planet from the Sun. Saturn was not known to be dark only by its position in the planetary system, it was thus considered by your own mythology. Being cold and distant, Saturn became the "patron" of the melancholic people.

Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl (2012) mention that the dark aspect of Saturn gained emphasis in this period. Among all the gods of antiquity, Saturn was known, as well as many others, as a kind of demon, since its own story told that he had been thrown into the depths of "hell." In this sense, both theology and astrology, and even medicine of that time, regarded Saturn in his evil aspects.

Melancholy, in addition to influencing monastic life, also affected the subjects who exercised one of the seven liberal arts, Geometry. We can say that not only mathematicians/geometers were predisposed to the melancholy symptoms and influence of Saturn, but all intellectuals generally had an inclination for the eighth deadly sin. The Medieval thought thus established that the seven liberal arts were products of the human soul, but

their excess, that is, a great amount of mental effort, could lead the individual to a deep melancholy state.

It is possible to notice a change in relation to the melancholic mood at the end of the Middle Ages. The difference was that melancholy was considered not entirely harmful. But this change in mentality took place over a long process, and only in the Renaissance the issue of melancholy and the figure of Saturn would change completely.

The Renaissance completely changed the notion of medieval melancholy. The melancholy issue and the "Saturn tradition" significantly affected the fields of arts, philosophy, and religion. The recovery of ancient texts, especially those of Aristotle and Plato, served as a basis for the changes of paradigms about melancholy. Delumeau says that it was the intellectual changes brought about by the Renaissance that revived a melancholy in the man of that time, in its positive sense. It is precisely on this "positive" melancholy that the Renaissance established.

The ideas about the moods and their relationship with nature, for example, remained in vogue in the Renaissance, despite scientific advances in Physiology. However, it was the issues of melancholy and Saturn that took a very different direction, especially at Ficino's Neoplatonic School.

The notion that melancholy could be aroused, mainly, by an excess of studies and by ascetic life was inherited and very welcomed by the Renaissance. This notion, in turn, gained a new interpretation, totally positive. The melancholic person was no longer seen as a subject tempted by the devil, and Saturn has a benign aspect. Yates (1995) believes that the studies and developments brought by the Renaissance period, as well as the valorization of man, as a "miracle of nature", contributed to a new conception of melancholy. The rediscovery of the treatise that was attributed to Aristotle, "Problems XXX, 1", and of Plato's writings, also gave credit to the melancholy humor.

Paula (2014) comments that the Renaissance was the golden age for melancholy. Ficino, a doctor and a great promoter of Platonism in that period had also brought hermetic books to Western reality. All this great intellectual activity

put Ficino, and his philosophical school, in front of the old problem of melancholy, from the Aristotelian conception, of the man of genius, to the medieval notion of melancholy as a deadly sin. After realizing that melancholy was historically linked to the search for knowledge, Ficino reinforced the idea that knowledge explorers are generally melancholic, as Aristotle had proposed.

On the other hand, the notion of melancholy as a disease, as it was already proposed since antiquity, also remained in the Renaissance, but, added to the peculiarity that not all melancholy people were sick, quite the contrary, they were, generally, people of great intellectuality. In other words, melancholy in this period presented itself in a polymorphic way, as well as its own corresponding planet/divinity.

The Renaissance is very close to the thesis that knowledge is for suffering, that is, the more we know, the more we tend to suffer. But this concept of "suffering and knowledge" is praised during this period, because, as Burton (2011, v. II) recalls, if melancholy should be seen as a disease, then such a disease could only have come directly from God because it gives man wisdom and science.

Ficino, in particular, commented on the influence of Saturn in his life. He considered himself as a typical melancholy. Thus, we can infer that the leap made to the positive aspects of melancholy, especially by Neoplatonism, comes from the great intellectual works that were successful in the Renaissance. According to this mentality, the more the man knew, the more his intellect wished to know, therefore, a melancholy tended to invade the soul of the sage, who faced the incompleteness of knowledge. Another peculiar point of this period, and one that can serve to explain the emphasis on melancholy and on Saturn, underlies the scenario of discoveries and changes brought about by the Renaissance. These changes, which occurred in practically all fields of human knowledge, affected the life of the Renaissance man, modifying, in a certain way, his concept of the world.

All these changes, so praised by humanists, have not ceased to arouse fear, not only among the great intellectuals but among common people, in general. In this scenario, it's notable

the ambiguity or the polymorphism of the Renaissance melancholy, as well as the considered ambivalence of the planet Saturn. If there are the praised social progress, the man being instigated to seek more the knowledge about things, on the other hand, knowledge itself causes pain, not only because of the incompleteness of the human capacity to know but also because of the social changes that these discoveries have embraced.

As melancholy is so tied to knowledge, Burton (2012, v. III) suggests that the melancholic intellectual "cure himself" of his current melancholy by searching for more knowledge. Thus, it is possible to understand that, at least in the Renaissance, there was a vicious circle of knowledge and melancholy. This "disease from God" was glorified by humanists for its own ambiguity, as well as its main agent, Saturn.

In this great flow of new concepts about melancholy, Agrippa (2012) dedicates a part of his work "Three Books of Occult Philosophy" to this problem. This Renaissance magician considered the Aristotelian argument about genius and melancholy, however, he also referred to Saturn's ambiguities and the precaution that men needed in order not to make it a planet of antagonistic forces. The innovation brought by Agrippa was the establishment of three types of melancholy, according to his conception of the "triple faculties" of the soul, namely: imagination, reason, and mind.

In a simplified way, in the apprehension of the first faculty, the imagination, when affected by the influence of black bile, that is, melancholy humor, simple men became excellent builders and painters and, in a broader scope, they could be able to predict events like floods, earthquakes, and other catastrophes. In the second sphere, the rational, when influenced by melancholy, man could become an accomplished philosopher, doctor, or orator. In the "rational zone", and in a broader scope, the individual would also have the ability to predict mutations of kingdoms, among other great events in the field of politics. As for the last apprehension, the mind, Agrippa (2012) suggests that the mind, when together with the melancholic mood, would become knowledgeable of divine things, of the order of

angels, and be able to predict religious events and foundations of new religions.

Agrippa's argument is related to a religious-esoteric one since this character was very involved with the esoteric issues of his time. Agrippa believed that man was constantly

influenced not only by the planets but also by spirits.

With this theoretical background brought by Agrippa (2012), Alcides (2001) summarizes the whole new theory, in a table on the levels of melancholy:

Table 1.
Melancholy levels

Level	Instruments	Psychologic habitat	Domain of creative realization	Domains of prophecy
I	Inferior spirits	Imaginati-on	Mechanical arts notably, architecture, painting, etc.	Natural events, floods, starvation etc.
II	Median spirits	Ratio	Knowledge of nature and Human beings, natural sciences, medicine, politics etc.	Political events, disposition of sovereigns, restorations, etc.
III	Superior Spirits	Men's	Knowledge of divine secrets, notably cognition of divine law, angelology, and theology.	Religious events, the appearance of new prophets, or the emergence of new religion.

Source: Translated from Alcides (2001, p. 171)

Agrippa and Ficino were responsible for raising the dignity of melancholy humor, in the same way, that they placed Saturn as the main exponent of wisdom and patron of the Renaissance movement. Especially Agrippa (2012), who, as shown in Table 1 above, stated that man, under the influence of Saturn, that is, in a melancholy state, could achieve great achievements such as, for example, the comprehension of divine things. In this scenario, the master Albrecht Dürer appears in Germany, at the end of the 15th century.

Albrecht Dürer and Melancholy

Dürer was undoubtedly involved in the great events that marked his time and, for this reason, his figure is highlighted as one of the most prominent in the German Renaissance scene. As Panofsky (2005) mentions, Dürer started his painter career very early. He traveled to several European countries, including Italy, where he found artistic inspiration for his projects. During these trips, Dürer probably came into contact with the Florentine Neoplatonic school and was later heavily influenced by it, as Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl (2012) report.

Dürer was an observer of the great cultural-religious effervescence that dominated the 16th century Europe. He experienced a period of great change. These changes constituted from the cultural aspects that motivated the Renaissance, until the transformations occurred inside the religious context, like the Protestant Reformation. This scenario is of great importance to understand the reasons why Dürer immortalized the theme of melancholy, in one of his main works.

It is important to emphasize the artistic-cultural relationship that Dürer maintained with Italy, which was one of the countries he visited the most. Panofsky (2005, p. 39) mentions that Dürer, like many artists of his time, was convinced that the gift and artistic creation were a "grace" of God, making his work a kind of "divine gift". This conception was in vogue during the Renaissance and, according to Cassirer (2001), comes from the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa that, in a certain way, was partly linked to Florentine Neoplatonism, which makes nature, the world, in general, as a great "code" of God, and this code needs to be deciphered by man. Now, we see that Dürer had this same conception throughout his artistic career,

demonstrated by his strong interest in humanistic themes.

The thesis that postulates that Italy had a great influence on Dürer's career can be confirmed by Panofsky (2005). He describes Dürer's competence in bringing to North Europe the characteristics of the "rediscovery" of Antiquity, so widespread and appreciated by the humanists of the Italian Renaissance.

Mann (2006), for example, is an author, like Panofsky, who is convinced that one of the most profound inheritances attributed to Dürer, regarding his travels to Italy, is precisely in Neoplatonism and the valorization of Classical Antiquity. This researcher believes that northern Europe, comprising Germany, was more concerned with religious reform than with purely artistic problems. Dürer, in turn, under Italian influence, rescues the theme of the valorization of man, so appreciated by Neoplatonism, especially in Pico della Mirandola, taking it to Germany at the end of the 15th century.

Mann (2006) and Panofsky (2005) indicate that Dürer achieved rapid success in Germany of his time, precisely because of his innovative style connected with his friendly relationship with Italy. All these achievements drew the attention of the nobility, patrons and other artists, Dürer is proud of his achievements and, as scholars indicate, at the age of 26, he painted a self-portrait (Figure 4). Mann and Panofsky drew attention to the fact that Dürer's self-portrait bears similarities to the paintings of Christ's effigies, known until that moment. For the authors, Dürer, in his self-portrait, praises his artistic achievements.

Dürer takes his self-portrait with a very clear approach to the image of Christ. This is the influence of Neoplatonism in his work, more precisely of esotericism, in his own portrait, as we see in Panofsky and Delumeau (1984). This is a kind of approximation with the divine and with the pantheistic doctrine, which is central in Neoplatonic philosophy, especially in esotericism.

Figure 7.
"Self-portrait", Albrecht Dürer, Munich, 1500



Source: Wikimedia Commons, 2017.

"Melencolia I"

When we faced with engraving, it is possible to immediately perceive the number of geometric objects contained there. One observes the square, the sphere, the polyhedron, the balance, elements that refer to precision, Mathematics, and Geometry. One of Dürer's great passions consisted, precisely, of the issues related to proportions in works of art. This problematization led him to write deeply about this subject, to the point of being considered one of the first theorists on symmetry in the German Renaissance. This data, of course, is very important for the interpretation of the work, since it encompasses mathematical and geometric elements. Adding this data, it is possible to propose, once again, that "Melencolia I" (Figure 3) has its meaning, or at least part of it, in the artist's own life.

Here it is possible to make a connection between the work of the geometer in relation to melancholy and the "Saturn tradition". As Hautecoeur (1963) recalls, the art of geometry belonged to one of the seven liberal arts. As we explored earlier, Geometry - or the measurement techniques, in general - was considered, since the Pythagoreans as a "divine art"; the way in which man could know and explore the "divine secrets" of nature. In this

way, the craft of mathematical geometry was linked to contemplation, very similar to that one which brought acedia to the monasteries of the Middle Ages. That is, Saturn, the patron of the Renaissance, was also the divinity of Geometry.

The investigation carried out in this work may agree with authors such as Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl (2012), who refute the idea that the work may have an interpretation of mental illness. Even though theorists have expressed certain negative characteristics of melancholy, in Dürer, it seems, there is no claim that the work would refer to a mental patient.

If we carried out this interpretation in our research, we would be going against the whole cultural context that involved the artist and inspired him to create the gravure as a tribute to melancholy. It is the result of a tradition that has dragged on since the Aristotelian conception of "man of genius and melancholy", and which was improved by the Neoplatonic, as the state of mind of the great sages. Another reason why we do not consider the characteristics of pathology in "Melencolia I" is precisely in the symbols present in this work. If Dürer wanted to expose a sick spirit, symbols would not be necessary. The symbology present in the work, especially related to Geometry, shows the connection between melancholy and intellectual activity, in addition, of course, to a possible reflection of the state of mind of its own author.

Thus, we have to consider the following key concepts for a satisfactory interpretation of "Melencolia I": melancholy, Neoplatonism, and esoterism. In the context of these three concepts, and starting from the understanding about what we have already spoken on the issue, for example, of the Neoplatonic conception of melancholy, we will now consider, more intimately, the relationship between esotericism and the engraving. Take the relationship between Dürer and Agrippa (2012), for example.

The aspects of the work that reveal its esoteric character lie, of course, in its set of symbols and the number "I" in the title. The key to decoding this number, as Alcides (2001) points out, is found in Agrippa's "Three Books of Occult Philosophy" (2012) which, as we explained, considered three levels of melancholy: imaginative melancholy, rational melancholy and

mental melancholy. Thus, "Melencolia I" is contained within the aspect of imaginative melancholy that corresponds to the levels of the mechanical arts, to the aspects of the craft of the geometer. This is a very coherent interpretation, as the work makes clear reference to Geometry and the mechanical arts. Alcides (2001) alludes to the number "I" stating that it belongs to the levels of melancholy proposed by Agrippa (2012). Once again we have an idea of the esoteric influence on Dürer.

Paula (2014) expresses very well Agrippa's influence on Dürer. Thus, there is no doubt that Dürer has received esoteric influences through two sources: Neoplatonism and Agrippa. Another point in Paula's argument (2016) indicates that melancholy produces sadness. This argument is neither at odds with the "generous melancholy" proposed by the Neoplatonists in Florence nor in opposition to the Aristotelian theory of "Man of Genius and Melancholy". Both approaches contemplate the idea that the search for knowledge must lead man to a certain degree of isolation and contemplation, which, often, can be understood as sadness. However, this sadness is not characterized as a mental illness.

One observes the union that Dürer makes between the practice of "geometric art" and melancholy. It is from this union that our interpretation of Dürer's melancholy and his studies around Geometry and symmetry arises. In addition to his love for the arts, our artist was convinced that he could achieve great knowledge through the study of the exact sciences. However, just as acedia reached medieval monks, melancholy affected Renaissance scholars and also affected the Nuremberg master.

It is possible to point out, however, that Dürer regrets the limitations of rational knowledge. This interpretation is fundamental when resuming Dürer's quotation (apud DELUMEAU, 1984, p. 50), in which the artist comments on the limitation of knowledge. But, despite regretting, Dürer is not discouraged by acedia. He is accompanied by melancholy, however, he knows that the best treatment for Saturn's negative influences is the relentless search for more knowledge, for more science.

Final Considerations

The spirit of the German man was in a “watershed” moment. On the one hand the Renaissance and on the other the great religious questions that shook the country culminating in the Protestant Reformation. Dürer outlined in his work the melancholy for the search for knowledge. He proposed to man, influenced by the issues of his time, experienced by apocalyptic uncertainties and presages, to remain on the journey of the eternal search for knowledge. This search never ends, and the man should let himself be carried away by the “furor divinus” and sail between the rational and religious, between faith and reason, in their eternal journey in the search for knowledge.

Obtaining knowledge was Dürer's great message to appease his melancholy and the melancholy of man in general. His intention, in the foreground, was for a proposal directed to

esoteric knowledge. His approach to Agrippa's texts, for example, was essential for the valorization of esotericism. His conception of three degrees of melancholy reflected in Dürer as an alternative, so that the master of Nuremberg could envision obtaining the highest knowledge, “occult” knowledge. However, it is necessary to point out that, although the work brings us all these indications, it is not possible to establish Dürer's degree of involvement with esoteric issues, much less to propose that he belonged to any initiation group. Our evidence pointed out that this genius of German painting, as well as other intellectuals of his time, came into contact with Florentine Neoplatonism and the esotericism that blossomed from this.

Finally, Dürer immortalized melancholy humor in “Melencolia I”, a topic so debated in Western culture. He took advantage of this same theme to encompass social issues of his time.

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