Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Winfried Schleiner. *Melancholy, Genius and Utopia in the Renaissance*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1991, Pp. 350.

In the penultimate chapter of her cogent study entitled *Voices of Melancholy* (1971), Bridget Gellert Lyons, commenting on Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621, claims that Burton's definition of the term "melancholy" grew to such a point that it not only became "an enormous catch-all for causes and symptoms of disease" but also "the condition of mortality" itself (p. 147). She adds that "The most striking artistic feature of the *Anatomy*... is its conscious creation of unity out of diversity. Melancholy, broadly defined, serves as a unifying theme for a wide variety of subjects and experiences, and there is a great play of wit involved in ordering all the material under the various headings of melancholy" (p. 148). And she concludes, "In the end, all of human behaviour as Burton sees it can be viewed and expressed in terms of melancholy; it has become a metaphor large enough to include all of life and to give it artistic shape" (p. 148).

Lyons' admiration for the skill Burton demonstrates in giving "artistic shape" to a notion that without such shaping might lose all meaning because of the broadness of its definition contains within it, nevertheless, an implied criticism of Burton's all-encompassing definition of melancholy which turns it, in the words of an author not unfamiliar with the dramatic portrayal of the term, into "a barber's chair to fit all buttocks."

Lyons' criticism of Burton's all-encompassing definition of melancholy is essentially my major criticism of Winfried Schleiner's otherwise impressive and scholarly book on the subject. Schleiner attempts to examine the various *interpretations* of the term "melancholy" throughout the Renaissance period. In essence he traces how the positive relationship between genius and melancholy (which includes the power of prophecy and divination) first postulated in Pseudo-Aristotle's *Problem* – XXX, 1, and carried forward by such worthies as Ficino, Agrippa and Melanchton, was gradually called into question and undermined by other writers to the point where melancholy came to be regarded as a complex mental disorder born of an ailing imagination and subject to various forms of treatment, some remarkably humane, others less so. As I summarize it, the thesis of the book seems straightforward enough. However, in its presentation, Schleiner's

book is anything but straightforward, in part because, as I mentioned above in my reference to Burton's all-encompassing definition, the term "melancholy" is mad-deningly protean, and also because Schleiner is reluctant to reduce his discussion to certain aspects of melancholy that would help support the thesis he so admirably articulates in his introduction. Hamstrung by the broadness of the definition of the term itself – something for which he is not responsible – and unwilling to let any of it escape his notice – something for which he is responsible – Schleiner often ends up in areas of intellectual pursuit which, albeit fascinating, tend to leave his thesis behind panting to catch up to him.

A brief look at the table of contents will clarify what I mean. Chapter One traces the "tradition of genial melancholy," while Chapter Two examines critical reactions to it. In Chapter Three Schleiner moves the focus of his discussion from European attitudes to melancholy to the narrower area of melancholy and divination in England, an altogether legitimate and welcome reduction in scope. However, after this point the centre of the book no longer holds as Schleiner, in subsequent chapters, confronts the notion of melancholy as disease in Luther, Erasmus, and Cervantes; melancholy, witchcraft, and male impotence in Renaissance thought; melancholy, utopia and arcadia; melancholy in Shakespeare; and finally, melancholy in Milton. Each of these areas might properly be developed into monographs in their own right and Schleiner's discussions of these complex matters, hampered by space constraints in an already big book, often strike one as undeveloped.

For instance, in the chapter on utopia, a subject treated in about 25 pages despite the fact that the term gets top billing in the title of the book, Schleiner gives very little attention to Thomas More and melancholy despite the provocative leads given to him in Stephen Greenblatt's book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Then again, in the chapter on Shakespeare, Schleiner discusses melancholy in *Timon of Athens*, in one scene in *Twelfth Night*, in one scene in *King Lear*, and in a general way in *The Tempest*. Much of what Schleiner says about these plays is perceptive and fascinating; much of what he says about many things is brilliant, and his significant range of reference and wide-reading in arcane sources is humbling to someone less knowledgeable than he. But his book is unwieldy for all that, since he fails to control his material in order to present a unified study of the vast subject he has gone a long way in mastering.

At times, as I was reading this book, I got the feeling that Schleiner had done his best to stitch together articles he had written over the years on various aspects of melancholy and put them altogether between a pair of covers. I fear, however, that the tell-tale seams of discrete research projects are all too obvious. And despite the depth and intensity of the scholarship in this book, there are mechanical errors – numerous spelling mistakes and words omitted from sentences – which undermine the scholarly tone.

In short, Schleiner's book is one that everyone interested in melancholy in the Renaissance should read simply because it adds so much to the work already available on the subject. Having said that, however, I must add that the author might have produced an even better book had he resisted the temptation "to include all of life" in a piecemeal way in his discussion.

DOUGLAS H. PARKER, *Laurentian University*

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *Political Writings*, translated and edited with an introduction and notes by Patrick Riley. Second Edition. (Cambridge texts in the History of Political Thought). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 249.

Leibniz (1646–1716) is best known as a logician, mathematician and metaphysician; by training, however, he was a lawyer and made his living as the legal and political adviser to a succession of German princelings. Some of the writings in this collection result directly from his official duties; others represent more detached reflections on the nature of justice, authority and the state. Leibniz was born during the last agonies of the Thirty Years War; notions of peace, order and concord occupy a central position in his thinking, at all levels. His own efforts to promote peace and concord included attempts to reunite the churches of Christendom and to design a universal language in which all mankind could communicate and in which calculation would replace controversy. Concomitantly he strove to establish learned academies, to shore up the Habsburg Empire and to protect the states of Germany and the Low Countries from the rapacity of Louis XIV. Although he had little success in these endeavours, he did found and was the first president of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, and he assisted in raising the House of Hanover to the Imperial College of Electors and to the British throne.

Leibniz's "Manifesto for the Defense of the Rights of Charles III" (1703) was written to uphold the Habsburg claim to the Spanish throne against Louis's promotion of his grandson. His "Mars Christianissimus" (1683) – "very Christian god of war" – is a scathing satire on Louis's Christian precepts and bellicose practice. The "Portrait of the Prince" (1679), written for the edification of his own employer, presents the contrasting picture of a good ruler. Many of his writings are directed against Hobbes and his influence: these include the "Caesarinus Fürstenerius" (1677), selections from which are given here, the "Meditation on the Common Concept of Justice" (c. 1702–3), and the "Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorf" (1706). The Preface to his *Codex Iuris Gentium* (1693), included here in part, applies his principles of justice to the relations between sovereign states. The collections also contains several shorter papers and letters.