The Beauty of Melancholy and British Women Writers, 1670-1720

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For my children, Luke and Julia,
and my parents, Glenn and Helen

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FOREWORD

This book began as an outgrowth of my interest in the psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva, whose most fascinating studies to me of the human psyche include her work on the relationship between art, abjection, and melancholy. Originally, I intended to write a longer book about "long" eighteenth-century literature and Kristeva's theories in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) and *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989). While writing my first study, *Fatal Attractions, Abjection, and the Self in Literature from the Restoration to the Romantics* (2019), which considers early British texts alongside Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, I realized that another study had emerged. What I wanted to say about Kristeva, melancholy language, and early British women writers belonged to a separate book. I have not tried here to repeat my initial arguments about literature and abjection that I made in *Fatal Attractions*. In *The Beauty of Melancholy*, I consciously avoid considering Kristeva's theory on abjection to concentrate attention on the argument I am making about melancholy language as a new aesthetic that early British women writers created during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—one that persisted for centuries. This so-called 'Kristevan' reading of late Stuart women writers offers a framework for understanding women's experience and relationship to their artistic experience and aims to help us rethink the purpose and expressions of language for women during this time. The leading ancient and contemporary theorists on melancholy, as I argue in the introduction, were men who neither understood nor accounted for women's intense experiences of suffering, most often from the outside world, but also from medical or mental health problems that had no satisfactory explanation or solution.

Struggling to find some explanation for their experience of depression, then called melancholy, many women writers were shunned, confined, abandoned, or even outcast. No one wrote fully on the condition of women's experience of melancholy during the late Stuart period, or at least no one articulated the relationship between the melancholic feeling and artistic creation or experience in the way Kristeva does—as a generative and creative impetus for women's art. While Kristeva does not trace her theory on loss and language through the works by women writers covered in this book, she does describe artistic creation from a perspective that allows us to

see these early British women writers accounting for their experience in a new way.

This book looks closely at the origins and the kinds of writing several women did in late Stuart England. Why did they write? What did they write about? Over and over again, we find texts in which women are writing about suffering, so many that no one book could discuss all of them. Their art was sometimes radically different from the men writing at the same time. Women employed their experience of melancholy to communicate through language the most private, inner feelings of pain and to speak in a new way about the causes for that pain, whether social or medical (or often both).

This new language of intimacy found a voice through multiple genres. A new literary form, the novel, early on dealt with human suffering, especially women's painful experiences in amorous relationships. Women's melancholy language shaped literature and made it new; it created a space for the emergence of the novel in England and transformed women's poetic expressions. By the late seventeenth century, women's melancholy dominated the stage as well.

This book is meant to start a conversation about the radical potentials for women's language and experience of suffering. I have not sought to 'apply' Kristeva's ideas on melancholy in each chapter as I applied her theory on abjection in *Fatal Attractions*. Kristeva, rather, is meant to inspire a new way of thinking about what women wanted and achieved through art for themselves and other women in late Stuart England. They were not just looking for a place or finding a niche in a male-dominated world. They transformed the literary market and the private world to one of intense, affective expression as a result of the feelings manifested by their experiences as women and creators. Reading texts alongside Kristeva's ideas on melancholy opens us to a new kind of expressiveness and understanding of women writers in late Stuart England.

INTRODUCTION

> "An infinite number of misfortunes weigh us down every day…All this suddenly gives me another life."[1]

> "With Aristotle, melancholia, counterbalanced by genius, is coextensive with man's anxiety in Being. It could be seen as a forerunner of Heidegger's anguish as the *Stimmung* of thought…"[2]

This book considers melancholy language in representative works by several British women writers in late Stuart England: Aphra Behn's *The Luckey Chance* (1686), Anne Killigrew's *Poems* (1686), Anne Conway's *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern* (1693); Mary, Lady Chudleigh's *Poems* (1700); Catherine Trotter's *Olinda's Adventures* (1693) and *Love at a Loss, or Most Votes carry it* (1701); and Anne Finch's "To the Nightingale" (1713). These writers provide a melancholy aesthetic in their works or depict depressed feminine figures reflecting artistic angst and a new discourse within language for articulating pain. Women often wrote about their struggles with depression or expressed frustration at a patriarchal world.

Many women traditionally drew on spiritual and religious language, feeling, and belief to inspire their art, but writers in late Stuart England wrote during a period of increasing secularization. While none of the women writers considered in this study openly disavowed religion, they sometimes looked beyond traditional forms and considerations of divine consolation, such as reading the Bible or seeking religious instruction from theological texts. Instead, these writers repurpose art, seeking self-expression through artistic innovation in melancholic language, or in Conway's case, writing their own philosophy to account for the experience of pain. Women writers often describe feeling despair or anger at the unfairness of life, frequently revealing a bleak understanding of the world and their place in it, and they explore melancholy as an aesthetic, leaving an artistic legacy to later eighteenth-century women writers.[3]

The prevalence of melancholy during the seventeenth century grew in literature after Robert Burton's poetic explanations of suffering were published in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), a widely read text. The leading philosophical text in England on melancholy during the period,

Burton's *Anatomy* explained little about women's actual experience of depression, however, relying instead on ancient ideas that tied women's pain to medical misunderstandings about their menstruation cycles. This would hold true for centuries. As Jennifer Radden explains, even as late as the mid-nineteenth century, "attributions to the phases of female reproductive biology—puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause—[was evidence] of women's proneness to mental disorder," and there was a strong belief in the relationship between women's reproductive systems and the brain.[4] In the *Anatomy*, Burton often falls back on stereotypically gendered models from ancient writers, mainly Aristotle and Galen. For men, melancholy might produce artistic genius, while in women, it was most often considered a sign of madness.

Burton drew on Galen's *On the Affected Parts* (ca. 165 B.C.) and Aristotle's *De anima*, two authoritative ancient sources on melancholy in the period. Aristotle's "Problems Connected with Thought, Intelligence, and Wisdom" in his texts, *Problems* (2nd century B.C.), connects melancholy with brilliance in men, a widespread belief during the late seventeenth century, not women. Galen's section on melancholy in the third book of *On the Affected Parts*, the *Diseases of Black Bile*, describes melancholia as resulting from the imbalance of the four humors: blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile. Excessive black bile indicated the presence of melancholy and a problem with those mysterious, unseen forces, the animal spirits, thought to flow throughout the body. In ancient humoral theory, when the body's humors become unbalanced, vapors can overtake the mind, producing melancholy, thought to be an excess of black bile. [5] Hippocratic and Galenic humoral theory was undergoing evaluation by sixteenth and seventeenth-century medical thinkers but would nevertheless continue to persist throughout the seventeenth century in medical practice and treatment of suffering patients. Historically, natural philosophers turned primarily to Aristotle, who argued that melancholy feeling was a problem of the soul in *De Anima*, explaining that the soul regulated the body and mind.[6] While new models of the body were advanced by the sixteenth century, such as Andreas Vesalius's *De humani coporis fabrica* in the 1540s, the old beliefs in Hippocrates and Galen still persisted, however useless they remained to treating illness, especially in women.[7]

Standard theological arguments in the medieval period and Renaissance about melancholy held that it was caused by demonic possession.[8] The sixteenth-century physician Johann Weyer tied melancholy to women and witchcraft in *De praestigiis daemonum* (written between 1561-2), arguing:

> More often, however, that crafty schemer the Devil thus influences the female sex, that sex which by reason of temperament is inconstant, credulous, wicked, uncontrolled in spirit, and (because of its feelings and affections, which it governs only with difficulty) melancholic; he especially seduces worn-out, unstable old women.[9]

This century was arguably the most dangerous for older women and women suffering from a mental illness, as women were believed, according to Weyer, to be "*singularly* deluded by the Devil" and participants in elaborately contrived ceremonies of demon or devil worshipping.[10] Because of historical interpretations from Genesis about Eve's susceptibility to the serpent and her (and Adam's) disobedience of God, the superstition developed about women's falling for the devil's tricks. Mental illness was thus just a manifestation of enthrallment, and women were more prone to accusations of witchcraft and more likely to be killed as a result of deeply held superstitions, such as the beliefs about melancholy that Weyer provides in his misogynistic text.[11]

While these superstitions still persisted in the seventeenth century, philosophers began to question widely held beliefs about the body and mind. Rene Descartes reevaluated both ancient and contemporary wisdom in his philosophical examination of emotion and helped to redirect consideration of emotions to the body rather than to supernatural causes. In *Les Passions de L'Ame* (1649), he argues that the animal spirits travel within nerves that tremble throughout the body.[12] According to Descartes, the animal spirits carry melancholy and other passions along nerve pathways.[13] These passions include surprise, love, hate, erotic desire, joy, and melancholy.[14] One passion could overtake another, producing conflicting emotions within a person and therefore nervous fits.[15] Excesses in the passions might set off terrible nerve vibrations, with resultant outward physical trembling. [16] Women were particularly seen as suspect to excessive emotional displays, and Descartes accounts for hysteria in women, ultimately validating long held false narratives about women's minds and bodies. He does not, however, condemn them to the devil or argue that evil spirits cause them to suffer.

In England, William Harvey's discovery of the circulatory system in 1616, and later Thomas Willis's findings on nerves, also reshaped discussions about melancholy.[17] The prolific medical writer Walter Charleton wrote extensively on the passions, including depression; his work helped to disseminate new ideas during the seventeenth century, and he particularly generated interest in understanding love melancholy and sexual passion.[18] Charleton collaborated with Harvey in the 1640s; in the 1650s, Charleton and Harvey worked with several leading anatomists in Oxford, including

Willis, Thomas Millington, Christopher Wren, and Richard Lower.[19] Willis and Lower especially studied nerves and brain operation;[20] they sought to discover the exact role that nerves play in emotion.[21] Their combined efforts and conclusions on the passions are examined in Charleton's *Natural History of the Passions*.[22] Following Descartes, Charleton explains that the mind has authority over the passions, and in his fictional work, *The Ephesian Matron* and the medical text, the *Natural History*, he looks closely at forms of love melancholy. Charleton's *Natural History* is informed by Willis's explanations of the nerves in *Cerebri anatomenervorumque descriptio et usus* (1664), an important medical text on the brain and the role that nerves play in emotion. Charleton employs Willis's ideas to consider movement and changing expressions of human passions in the *Natural History*.[23]

Willis's findings on nerves held great significance for women in the seventeenth century. The revision on the language of passion set a cultural pattern that persisted for the next century, as nerves became a fashionable condition and one mainly associated with women, believed to be more susceptible to nervous fits and hysteria than men were. Women writing during the height of the medico-philosophical debates in the late seventeenth century on nerves entered an ongoing conversation about the passions in their texts, which reflect their working out of a new melancholy aesthetic in their art.

There was overall a variety of artistic perspectives on women and sexuality during the late seventeenth century, and Marilyn L. Williamson argues that women particularly were interested in the place of women's bodies in literature, "from the pious Mary Astell, who wrote as if the body and desire hardly exist, to Aphra Behn whose central theme was sexuality or Delariviere Manley whose gospel was sexual love."[24] Women sought to discuss erotic desire openly and yet knew the boundaries and the resistance to writing about their bodies; to create art or enter patriarchal discourse might draw criticism or, as Christine Battersby argues, the charge and label of madness.[25] The more women left the private world to 'expose' themselves publicly, the more risk they took on. As Sarah Prescott reminds us,

> The years from 1660 to 1780 witnessed profound changes in the circumstances of women's literary production as a cultural world primarily dominated by manuscript circulation slowly gave way to a marketplace for literature dominated by print.[26]

This book teases out the beginning of this journey for women writers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and looks at the different

ways women articulated their melancholy as they wrote the body. They claim for themselves the melancholic mood as an artistic one.

To understand how these women writers understood and reframed the discussion about melancholy and women's experience of suffering in their art, I turn to the twentieth-century French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva, whose radical work on melancholy in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989) provides an alternative psychoanalytic perspective for considering melancholy discourse created by women experiencing alienation, depression, and anguish in earlier periods. Kristeva offers a theoretical lens for understanding loss as a significant and ongoing perspective on life experience that finds expression through art and language. Early women writers, I argue, created a new expressive mode, revising existing models to account for their own losses during a time of cultural and political transitioning in England. According to Kristeva, melancholy often asserts itself through religious doubt, in the crumbling of virtue, and in the failure of religion culturally.[27] Her theory tests the relationship between art and melancholy, and each of the women writers I examine in this book questions or rejects stereotypes about women's suffering provided by ancient writers on melancholy. What they created instead was a new discourse that emerged during a time of intense questioning and doubt in institutions and religious authority.

During the Restoration, expressions of religious uncertainty were more strongly asserted culturally, and models of piety were held up for ridicule or rejection, especially by intellectuals. Even those distancing themselves from Charles II's rebellious court often found religion to be inadequate to explain feelings of loss. Several of the women writers self-identifying as Christians in this study, including Chudleigh, still look to alternatives in their models for inspiration. Disadvantaged, women writers enter language through loss. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva describes the artistic expressions of loss as a confrontation with the failure of religious authority.[28] These early women writers are, in Kristeva's language, "foreigners to their maternal tongue,"[29] melancholy artists alien to their language and as such figures operating in the depressive affect.[30]

Kristeva explains that the melancholy cast of mind can generate its own art. Excesses of affect produce new languages and modes,[31] and the depressive mood becomes language.[32] Signs become arbitrary because "language starts with the negation of loss."[33] We see evidence of this in all the works I am considering in this book. These texts examine signs of a disintegrating world for women. Behn's *The Luckey Chance* features a world of psychic void, where the heroine, Julia, experiences the betrayal and loss of the erotic object, Gayman, a Don Juan figure. In the process, she

loses what Kristeva calls the psychic self, an inner self that emerges during times of transformational angst.[34] The attraction to Don Juan, Kristeva argues, is the replacement of the phallic mother.[35] What results is a new artistic beauty in sadness, with an attempt at replacing the lost thing mourned through the consolation in art.[36] This attempt by the artist generates the production of the melancholic discourse, with the beauty lasting only as an artifice, ephemeral and imaginary.[37] In *The Luckey Chance*, for example, Behn signifies this imaginative aesthetic in the garden dream Julia creates for her lover, who cannot comprehend her meaning.

The melancholy mood increases during periods witnessing the downfall of political and religious idols;[38] we see this happening especially during the Restoration. Such a collapse creates what Kristeva describes as "Prisoners of Affect"[39] and leads to depression and anger,[40] but also artistic pleasure, a form of wistful pleasure in melancholy *jouissance*.[41] Melancholy grants signification to "mute" things,[42] like the nightingale Finch imagines in her poem, "To the Nightingale," a figure for the woman writer whose tongue has figuratively been removed. This is an important way of thinking about women's art in the period because even seemingly powerful women were often abused, marginalized, or forced into positions of silence. Art can become for some women a substitute for prayer,[43] and we see women writers drawing strength from their creation and repurposing of art rather than from religious devotion, even in the more religiously orthodox writers, such as Killigrew, Conway, or Chudleigh. Art signifies the melancholy moment, an actual or imagined loss of meaning resulting in an overwhelming desire informing art and aesthetic activity.[44]

Each of the works considered in this book examines the idea of melancholy as a new artistic mode. What is lost in faith is replaced by the new object, and the writing is substitute for the divine experience.[45] In particular, Kristeva examines poetic acts and the nature of loss,[46] arguing that the disconsolate and grief-stricken artist, beyond solace, relies on poetic acts: "art of poetry asserts itself as the memory of a (posthumous harmony…)."[47] The self's doubling generates the lost thing, producing the melancholy and literary androgyny, [48] an important perspective for considering women writers in a patriarchal world adopting a traditionally male role. As writers and creators of art, they inhabited masculine artistic identities and often acknowledge this dual identity. Suffering becomes sensual, a power and torrent of passion, what Kristeva describes as the "hysterical affect," though not in its pejorative historical context for women.[49] She argues that art forms soothes the despair[50] and anger.[51] What women writers cannot locate in spiritual realms, they discover in artistic ones.

Rather than offer direct comparisons between Kristeva's theories in *Black Sun* and the primary texts, I employ Kristeva's major ideas on melancholy in moments of cultural transformation as a way of interpreting women's new affective aesthetic discourse. This book is divided into five chapters:

Chapter One, "Love Melancholy in Aphra Behn's *The Luckey Chance*," considers the love melancholy experienced by the heroine, Julia, gambled away by her husband to her lover, Gayman, who fails to recognize or connect emotionally or spiritually with Julia. Julia's realization that she lives in a world ungoverned by the divine but by mere chance produces her feelings of loss and forlornness. Chapter Two, "Anger and Depression in Anne Killigrew's *Poems*," considers Killigrew's expressions of anger at censuring men rejecting her as an artist. Though she draws on religious symbols to communicate her angst, Killigrew's speakers in a number of her poems cannot find consolation in the divine, dwelling instead on the bitterness of her position. Chapter Three, "Catharine Trotter's Melancholy Heroines," examines the deep tensions that the young heroines experience in frustrated love. Olinda leaves her social world and religious beliefs to embrace a lover who proves untrue, and like Behn's Julia in *The Luckey Chance*, Olinda realizes that she is subject to chance and fate; likewise, each of the heroines in Trotter's only comedy must come to terms with their often mercurial world. Chapter Four, "Sinking Spirits: Anne Conway's Physico-Theology of Pain and Mary Chudleigh's *Poems*," looks at the physical experience of pain that Conway experienced. A longtime sufferer from debilitating headaches, Conway wrote extensively to physicians and philosophers, ultimately writing her own philosophy to deal with the purposes and meaning of her suffering. This chapter argues that Conway likely influenced the poet, Mary Chudleigh, who expresses deeply felt melancholy and suffering throughout her poetry. Chapter Five, "Symbolic Loss in Anne Finch's "To the Nightingale,' " considers Finch's use of poetic symbols to describe her experience of suffering as a women writer. She treats melancholy in her poem through an elaborate system of signs to convey feelings of poetic angst. Each of these women writers turns to the world of art to express their melancholy, creating a new discourse within an aesthetic of pain.

CHAPTER ONE

LOVE MELANCHOLY IN APHRA BEHN'S *THE LUCKEY CHANCE*

> "A sad voluptuousness, a despondent intoxication make up the humdrum backdrop against which our ideals and euphorias often stand out, unless they be that fleeting clear-mindedness shredding the amorous hypnosis that joins two persons together."[52]

Though she is often studied, read, and celebrated as a freethinking writer advocating for women's autonomy and the rejection of religious restriction, Aphra Behn most often depicts melancholic heroines coming to terms with depressing circumstances or situations, including unhappy relationships with men. Marriage was a well-known source of pain for women in the late seventeenth century, and many plays, including comedies, look closely at the problems of married life. Annette Kreis-Schink explains that marriage was a desperate situation many women faced, as social and legal questions emerged throughout the period about women's rights within marriage. There were a number of early modern debates about the appropriate levels of physical violence towards women.[53] Throughout the seventeenth century, conduct books appeared giving advice on these topics, often advising husbands on the necessity of correcting their wives.[54] How common men's more extreme physical abuse or poor treatment towards wives was in the period remains unknown, though attitudes generally began to shift away from men assaulting women. Even so, physical violence against women was still legally allowed in England during the late seventeenth century.

Cruelty to women concerned Behn, who writes about women's emotional pain throughout her career. The permissibility of domestic violence created an overall hostile culture to women, who had no real recourse, and the poor treatment of women became a popular topic in literature. Socially, women were told to be obedient to their husbands or other male family members if unmarried. While it was becoming less accepted to harm women physically by 1700, women still had little agency. Behn often considers unhappily married women and the alternatives they might choose to overcome an unpleasant and unavoidable marital situation.

Behn's heroines often champion women's sexual freedom but also recognize its limitations. Their joy is tinged with sadness, and female characters frequently suffer from bouts of intense melancholy, even in comedies. Susan Staves argues that heroines in Behn's texts appear melancholy because of Behn's conflicted feelings about the social conditions for women, even at Charles II's court, which promoted sexual liberty generally, but not for women. Labelled a promiscuous woman herself, Behn likely felt tensions about her identity as a writer and may have expressed her feelings through her heroines.[55]

By the end of the 1670s, Behn's plays feature many depressed female characters, unhappy with the treatment they receive from husbands and sadistic lovers. Though Behn wrote for Charles II and members of his Restoration court and helped to shape the prominence of more secular values in literature, she disliked the sexism that was part of court life. Her works become more invested in looking at the psychological results for women as she struggles with a culture of antifeminist language, frequently appearing in popular comedies during the Restoration. Behn rejected abusive language and treatment of women, and her heroines in fiction and drama show her concern with the results of the melancholy that resulted from this abuse. Ultimately, Behn focuses much of her energy on the expressions and motivations for women's depression. Behn's works reflect her changing perspectives on culture and its potentials and consequences for women's emotional lives.

By 1685, Behn almost exclusively focuses on women's experience of melancholy in her works. One of her most dejected heroines is Julia in *The Luckey Chance* (1686). Julia is an unhappy heroine that reflects Behn's rejection of religion, which could have prompted feelings of loss that needed expression and recommitment to some new ideal. Julia finds it in her lover, forming great faith in the possibilities of love with Gayman. This comes up against his aggressive power struggle with Julia's husband. The differing visions between the lovers create hostility and ultimately unravel the lovers' relationship, as Gayman cannot let go of his need to dominate his mistress or see her as anything except an object he has won through gambling. The reliance on chance in the play and the blind meeting of the lovers deconstructs the idealistic world Julia initially imagines in her relationship with Gayman. She feels intense melancholy at the loss of this world. According to Kristeva,

> Conscious of our being doomed to lose our loves, we grieve perhaps even more when we glimpse in our lover the shadow of a long lost former loved one. Depression is the hidden face of Narcissus, the face that is to bear him away into death, but of which he is unaware while he admires himself

> in a mirage. Talking about depression will again lead us into the marshy land of the Narcissus myth. This time, however, we shall not encounter the bright and fragile amatory idealization; on the contrary, we shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the loss of that essential other. The shadow of despair.[56]

Such despair overwhelms Julia, leading her to a darkening vision of self that became a significant tension within Behn's female characters in fiction by the mid-1680s. The novel especially helped to communicate this kind of despair, and Behn was particularly interested in exploring melancholy in her longer works of fiction, a form that lent itself to psychological examination of the characters' feelings. Behn began, however, to depict depressed heroines in her plays as well. Rose A. Zimbardo examines Behn's treatment of women's conflicting emotions in *The Luckey Chance* and sees the emergence of deeper psychological complexity in this play, a foreshadowing of Behn's treatment of anxiety in her novels.[57] Behn wrote *The Luckey Chance* after beginning her most heightened treatment of love melancholy in the novel, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-7). Like *Love-Letters*, Behn's novella, *Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave* (1688), also treats the emotional lives of the characters with more attention, and melancholy arguably overtakes the plot. For both of these novels, the ending matters much less than the characters' articulations of melancholy, whether in frustrated love or overwhelming life circumstances.

The Luckey Chance equally draws its dramatic strength from the characters' melancholy, giving the most attention to the suffering heroine, Julia. Love melancholy drives the sexual tensions in the play, and it allows Behn to critique the ill treatment women like Julia receive by their lovers, who use them to achieve power or wealth.[58] Jacqueline Pearson argues that the darkness in the play at the end signifies women's loss, which Behn wanted to emphasize,[59] and the audience is left to work out the complexities of Julia's frustrations. Pearson suggests that Julia is a passive victim, one of the women in the play "needing clever lovers to help them to avoid victimization rather than escaping by their own wit and nerve, so passive that they cannot even choose what man they sleep with."[60] This reading blames women for the treatment they receive by men. Wives had no legal and very little social power, and Julia's husband gambles her away as property to another man, who claims her as a prize. Even Charles II's wife, a queen, ultimately had very little agency, as Anne Killigrew makes clear in several poems addressed to Queen Catherine that I will explore in the next chapter.

While Behn's Julia in the play does make choices, despite the men's abuse of her, she also becomes depressed. Her melancholy leaves her

abandoned and lonely, but not without some power in her life; in the end, she rejects both men. The focus on her love melancholy in the play coincides with Behn's attention to women's suffering, a concern that dominates literature by women in this period. By the early 1680s, Behn more vehemently derides men using violence against women in her works. In the novella, *The History of the Nun*, for example, one of the most complex works that Behn published, she examines the heroine's melancholy, which leads her to murdering two husbands. Love melancholy is comparable to the popularized and sensational "nun" narratives derived from translations and adaptations of actual tragic love letters from the ill-fated twelfth-century nun, Héloise, to her older priest-lover, Abelard.[61] In *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* Ros Ballaster explains that Behn's attention to love melancholy in her fiction comprises a new genre she helped to craft—amatory fiction.[62] Ballaster argues that Behn, like Catharine Trotter after her, drew on the epistolary form, French romance (mainly through the influence of the popular French writer Madeleine de Scudéry), the nouvelle, and the *chronique scandaleuse*. These genres relied on love melancholy to examine a range of emotional intensities in the female characters experiencing anguish. [63] Behn combined the emotional excesses she found in them with the new explanations about the mind and body in two of Walter Charleton's texts, the *Natural History of the Passions*, and an important source for amatory fiction in the period, his erotic fiction, *The Ephesian Matron*. Behn begins to work out a new aesthetic for women writers, one that drew on the artistic 'pleasure' of melancholy discourse, the recovery of something lost. Zimbardo suggests that Behn wanted her audience to experience melancholy as well, particularly in her plays.[64] The emotional language, as Dolors Altaba-Artal argues, "becomes closer to real life or to everyday conversation" and grants an "insistence on interiority," which anticipated the attention to emotion paid by later novelists to characters, especially women.[65]

The melancholy language in *The Luckey Chance* appears similar to the language in Behn's amatory fiction. In the comedy, two young women, Leticia and Julia, suffer as victims to the system of unhappy marriage to older husbands. They take much more attractive and younger lovers, Belmour and Gayman. An exile for six months, Belmour is believed to be dead already by Leticia. Grieving, Leticia must marry the sober and unappealing Sir Feeble Fainwoud, who contrives the story about Belmour's death to compel Leticia to marry him. Sir Feeble is pursued by the "ghost," Belmour, who makes him tell the truth so he can marry Leticia. Leticia's friend, Julia, and Julia's younger lover, Gayman, also experience difficulties in their relationship. Married now to Sir Cautious, Julia and Gayman are

forced apart by this unhappy marriage and by Gayman's financial and property losses. Gayman has mortgaged his estate to Sir Cautious. Tragically, Gayman is made poorer in his attempts to court Julia, who pays him back during an evening of mistaken identity. A gambler, Gayman wins a night of sex with Julia from Sir Cautious. Once Julia finds out that she is the wager between the men, she turns against both of them. The play interrogates the system of forced marriage but also looks at the problems between the lovers and the resulting melancholy of their miscommunications, a frequent topic in Behn's works. Gayman mistreats Julia when she tries to help him financially, and their love is compromised by the depressing material problems that compromise their relationship.

Julia feels strongly for Gayman and is prepared to give him money to help her lover find a way out of poverty, particularly as he incurred it because of her. Julia idealizes love, and Behn's attention to her disillusionment and suffering from Gayman's mistreatment is the central focus of the play. There is no equal love between Julia and Gayman, and they endure the effects of envy and pain, qualities commonly associated with love melancholy. Gayman sees Julia as a prize and nothing more.[66] Behn contrasts Gayman's materialism with Julia's belief in the "poet's dream" (1.1.60),[67] which leads her to experience love melancholy. Julia believes in true love, but her experience with Gayman compromises her ideal.

Initially, Belmour sets out to duel Gayman because he believes that Gayman has stolen his lover, Leticia. His first question to Gayman, "Whither is Honour, Truth and Friendship fled?" (1.1.58) is one that leads the main couple, Julia and Gayman, towards love melancholy rather than a harmonious union. By the end of the play, Julia questions these values in her relationship with her lover because of his objectification and misogyny. Gayman tells Belmour, "Why there ne're was such a virtue. 'Tis all a Poets Dream" (1.1.59-60). This sets up the primary conflict he will have with Julia, who interprets the idea of a dream very differently.

Behn compares their differing kinds of love in the play. For Julia, the "poet's dream" is an ideal. For Gayman, ideal love cannot exist. In Act Three, he wonders if the old hag (really Julia) has "care of her Honour?" (3.1.256). But Gayman disavows honor entirely, concluding that it "cannot be—this Age affords none so nice" (3.1.256-7). He cannot recognize Julia or the ideal love she offers to him, leading to her intense bouts and expressions of melancholy. Gayman also denies Belmour's definitions of friendship as an ideal that is nonexistent. Gayman's early conversation with Belmour constructs the framework for the play, which focuses on Julia's depression. Her sadness results from the material problems that make the ideal realm of love an impossible, visionary dream for Gayman, only "a

Poets Dream," and outside of the problems of real life that cause her so much woe.[68] The idol, once displaced, prompts a loss of meaning for Julia and a loss of self.[69]

Julia defines ideal love in the play; it bestows tranquility and inner serenity and exists outside of money. It is the idol that, once collapsed, cannot be redeemed. At the beginning of Act Three, Julia still believes that Gayman is her true love, and she constructs for them an ideal setting within a masquerade:

> *Cease your Wonder, cease your Guess,*
> *Whence arrives your Happiness.*
> *Cease your Wonder, cease your Pain.*
> *Humane Fancy is in vain*. (3.1.221-4)

This love song suggests that pain is not a natural state and does not belong in the utopia that Julia imagines. It argues for lovers to abandon knowledge of the outside world that produces suffering. No one should question love. Because she is a true believer in an idealized definition of love, Julia thinks that Gayman will see through the elaborate disguise to the fanciful utopia that she directs. The masque anticipates their sexual liaison. Masked, Julia has already given Gayman money without revealing her identity. She expects he will recognize her as a desirable woman purchasing a night of love with him. The song argues that ideal love brings joy to the lovers, like a wine:

> *Oh! Love, that stronger art than Wine,*
> *Pleasing Delusion, Witchery divine,*
> *Want to be priz'd above all Wealth,*
> *Disease that has more Joys than Health.*
> *Tho we blaspheme thee in our Pain,*
> *And of thy Tyranny complain,*
> *We all are better'd by thy Reign.*
> *What Reason never can bestow*
> *We to this useful Passion owe,*
> *Love wakes the Dull from slug[g]ish Ease,*
> *And learns a Clown the Art to please.*
> *Humbles the Vain, kindles the Cold,*
> *Makes Misers free, and Cowards bold.*
> *'Tis he reforms the Sot from Drink,*
> *And teaches airy Fops to think.* (3.1.190-204)

The song explains Julia's desires, and it endorses her ideal vision of a lover like Gayman. To Julia, an ideal lover can 'see' her and therefore must know

that she is not an old bawd buying sex from him. Her version of ideal love renews the faint hearted, offers mental clarity, and makes fools wise. Ideal love holds its own transformative power and helps lovers to see through any disguises.

In Behn's versions of ideal love in her works, lovers do not compete with each other. There is not the struggle for dominance or power. Instead, for ideal lovers, pleasure is shared equally. One lover will not challenge the other. It is a utopian vision free from pain, enlivening the lovers and giving them more strength together. Ideal love runs counter to jaded perspectives on love in the period that regarded love as an affliction that disempowers and victimizes the sufferers, primarily women. For Behn, love is not an experience of self-interested parties seeking power over each other. There is instead a mutual sharing of the emotional life. This is not possible with Gayman, who does not see through Julia's disguise as the old bawd; he therefore accepts the payment from the unknown woman and betrays Julia, his beloved. The knowledge that Gayman willingly accepts money for sex with another woman produces unhappiness and depression in Julia.

The shepherd's song describes the ideal of love that Julia wants. Even so, "the Joy of Love without the Pain" (3.1.246), which the chorus sings more than once, cannot exist. It is only an illusion for both of them. Gayman feels caught in an unfortunate world that has left him poor. He cries out to her in pain:

> Ah *Julia, Julia*! If this soft Preparation
> Were but to bring me to thy dear Embraces;
> What different Motions wou'd surround my Soul,
> From what perplex it now. (3.1.215-8)

Gayman's interpretation of the shepherd's song is entirely different from Julia's meaning. The song cannot enthrall him because he does not know that Julia is behind it to prepare their evening together. If he could discern the real woman behind the song, then he might be able to love her. Owing to this, Gayman cannot really love Julia in the way that she wants; he cannot see through any of the masks she wears throughout the play. Gayman's vision of the old hag clouds the real truth, that a much younger woman he actually wants has contrived this arrangement to help him. Even the sensation of touching her cannot overcome his revulsion for the older woman Julia pretends to be. Gayman's inability to see through the façade causes Julia's melancholy. Her body and the imagined body are collapsed during the deception. A false reality overtakes Gayman and exposes the problems in their relationship, as Gayman can never really know Julia.

Gayman's bleak misunderstanding causes Julia to see that her utopia cannot exist. When touching and seeing—tests of the natural philosopher to challenge the 'truth' of the emotion—fails, so too does the illusory love that Julia feels for Gayman. Their night together shows his total lack of awareness. He describes her in unflattering terms that humiliate her. She is rejected as an "Amourous Devil" (4.1.75), a "Proserpine" (4.1.75), a "silent Devil" (4.1.77), and "a Carcase…rivell'd, lean, and rough" (4.1.83-4). To him, the bawd who buys him remains a "Monster" (4.1.86) torturing him; she emasculates him. He is effeminized and disempowered in his mind as the object to be bought. Gayman cannot therefore feel anything but revulsion. Even if he had recognized Julia, he may have felt the same way. Behn leaves this idea open, that the buying and selling of love taint it, an idea she explores in other works as well.

Gayman and Julia spend two nights together, and both of them involve financial transactions that erode the idealized mental world Julia has built for herself. Julia orchestrates the first night, while her lover Gayman and her husband, Sir Cautious, direct the second one. The lovers remain in complete darkness about the real motivations and intentions behind the evenings.[70] Behn draws attention to the artifice of the relationship prior to the second encounter. Gayman, literally waiting in the dark, emerges for his prize, Julia, won from her husband. To complete the transaction, Sir Cautious brings the lovers together in a game, stating "the Candle's out" (5.2.193) because it "went out by Chance" (5.2.196), a declaration also about the decline of love in the play. It is a bleak lesson about the impossibility of real love and the resultant melancholy, especially for Julia, caught up in a system of chance. Even when she tries to choose her lover, she falls back into a cruel world that victimizes women and gambles with their bodies and hearts.[71] Men frequently imagined sexual liaisons as nothing more than a power play and a physical act, and Behn challenges such attitudes and the betrayal of women, whose bodies are commodified. She particularly reserves scorn for Gayman for his participation in this false world that seems to offer liberty to women, only to betray them later.

Though Behn admired thinkers espousing free love and disliked traditional roles for women, she recognized the downsides for women as well. She frequently examines free love as a radical rejection of late seventeenth-century restriction on women and rejects Church teachings about the proper place of wives. In *The Luckey Chance*, the masque represents an alternative to traditional marriage. Gayman accepts a ring as he watches the performance. For Julia, this is a true marriage, not the false one with Sir Cautious. She takes the "sacred Vows to *Gayman*" (1.2.33) as an alternative and an argument for true love, which Gayman also

misunderstands. He cannot operate outside of the traditional systems and sees women only as prizes to be won from men. He regards the "ceremony," however, as witchcraft and a "Magick Art" (4.1.70) with "inchanted Palace in the Clouds" (4.1.71). It is, to him, not authentic; instead, it remains "Imagination all" (4.1.74).

Julia's ideal love collides with the social boundaries Gayman and Sir Cautious impose on her. Even in transgressing these rules, Gayman reinforces their existence. Her letter to Gayman tells him to "Receive what Love and Fortune present you with, be grateful and be silent, or 'twill vanish like a Dream, and leave you more wretched than it found you" (2.1.146-8). He cannot do it, and the dream vanishes alongside Julia's love for him. What replaces it instead is melancholy.

Despite espousing free love, Gayman cannot enjoy it or even recognize it. He remains caught up in the world of superstition and greed, viewing his night with the bawd through an anti-feminist lens. He sees the bawd as a witch and sexuality with her as a darkness bound to older theological and cultural beliefs about women's sexuality as the source of evil and fall of mankind. He rejects this and later admonishes Julia for enacting her bewitching masque with him. Gayman despises her role in the financial transaction, believing another object, the money, ruins their relationship:

> —I am awake sure, and this is Gold I grasp.
> I could not see this Devil's cloven Foot,
> Nor am I such a Coxcomb to believe,
> But he was as substantial as his Gold.
> Spirits, Ghost[s], Hobgoblins, Furys, Fiends, and Devils
> I've often heard old Wives fright Fools and Children with,
> Which once arriv'd to common Sense they laugh at.
> —No, I am for things possible and Natural,
> —Some Female Devil old, and damn'd to Ugliness,
> And past all Hopes of Courship and Address,
> Full of another Devil call'd Desire,
> Has seen this Face—this—Shape—this Youth
> And thinks it worth her Hire. It must be so.
> I must moyl on in the damn'd dirty Road,
> And sure such Pay will make that Journey easie;
> And for the Prices of the dull drudging Night,
> All Day I'll purchase new and fresh Delight. (2.1.170-186)

Despite his feelings, Gayman nevertheless clutches his newfound gold, earned through prostitution. He cannot recognize the gift Julia wants him to have in the masque. Love does not exist for him, only the gold providing

him with "substantial Security" (2.1.164). His love for gold over his mistress proves too much, as does the old bawd with "singing Fiends innumerable" (4.1.73). A liaison with her remains bound to the devil, a profanation that Gayman abhors.

Bought by the evil bawd, Gayman no longer holds power. Instead, he describes his relationship with the bawd as repulsive and demeaning. He sees her as an unappealing object, "a Canvas Bag of wooden Ladles" (4.1.84). Julia's final humiliation is complete, and by the end of the play her relationship with Gayman has come to its final act as well. Her experience is tied to the emotional perspective on love and the devastating consequence for women when they realize that the men they love cannot feel what they feel. Gayman concedes power to the bawd, and it taints his experience of sex with his mistress. He cannot feel anything, even sexual joy, because he does not control the bawd, a witch to him. The older woman's power compromises his need for dominance over her.

In Act One, Gayman begins to lose his identity, which he mourns through a sad letter sent to Julia, his mistress:

> *Did my* Julia *know how I Languish in this cruel Separation, she would afford me her Pity, and write oftner. If only the Expectation of two thousand a Year kept me from you, ah!* Julia *how easily would I abandon that Trifle for your more valued Sight, but that I know a Fortune will render me more agreeable to the charming* Julia*, I should quit all my Interest here, to throw my self at her Feet, to make her sensible how I am intirely her Adorer*. (1.2.1-6)

The women take control of him, and his confession to Julia also lessens his sexual power. Gayman's concentration on money in his letter sets up their eventual problems. Julia does not care about his poverty, only wishing to alleviate it, but they have opposite views of money and sex that are contrasted throughout the play—not in direct dialogue but through masks, from the initial epistle to the elegant masque. Only at the end, when the relationship is over, do they directly confront each other with their differing views of love and roles for men and women.

Julia's melancholy directly results from Gayman mistreating her. After he feels effeminized, he reestablishes his sense of self by exerting control over Julia, the prize offered by her husband. Winning her inspires lust in Gayman and melancholy in his mistress. Only through chance can Gayman, sword-less throughout the play, feel like a man. A night with Julia secures his debt to her husband. It is therefore an arrangement between the men, a traditional role that Julia rejects but Gayman endorses.