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**A NON-PATHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE INSPIRED BY ROBERT BURTON'S
ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY**

Abstract

The following paper seeks to discuss Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, giving a special focus to the complexities of love melancholy. In contrast to the interpretations of love melancholy as pathology, this work contends that it is an essential and universal phenomenon closely connected with passion and devotion. Burton utilizes humour, the inclusion of philosophical questions, and classical ideas to present love and melancholy as a construct of happiness and grief. As argued in the paper, calling into question the pathological view explorations provides an avenue for a multifaceted nature that combines romance, reality, desire, and fulfilment. It places love melancholy not only as a mental health disorder but as a philosophical one that examines people's feelings and interactions. Accordingly, the paper employs the philosophical ideas of Plato and Aristotle to show how spiritual development and empathy can result from love melancholy. Lastly, it implies that through love melancholy, it is possible to find meaning and become better as a person, as the feeling is said to encourage deep feelings of reflection. Hence, it acts as a source of wisdom in life and the complexity of one's feelings. By transforming the readers with self-knowledge, Burton encourages people recuperating from love melancholy to embrace and cherish it as part of the human experience that society does not approve of and is avoiding.

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Keywords: Love Melancholy, Non-Pathological, Anatomy of Melancholy, Melancholy, Robert Burton, Humour, Melancholia.

In his work, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton synthesizes philosophy, literature, and medicine proposed to analyse human feelings. His discussion of love melancholy can be viewed as a serious contemplation of the nature of passion and devotion (Burton, 1836). Burton has integrated sophisticated imageries, comedy, and philosophical reflection to disclose the essence of love melancholy as something other than a disease but as a human reflection of their existence.

Moreover, melancholy occupies an important cultural and philosophical place, as it tends to be a focal point of self or society's contemplation of the transience of life, struggles, and deeper emotions. For hundreds of years, it has been considered both a creative force and a problematic human condition, affecting many art forms and intellectual thought (Zininger, 1950). The exploration of human suffering, existential questioning, and the search for meaning, which can be traced back to literary and visual artists in literature, has made melancholy a subject of inquiry in the production of works that often resonate with audiences. Godbout, (2016) view melancholy as having had a significant influence on artistic production in various cultures, being a bridge between individual experience and broader social matters.

Consequently, this paper argues that invalidating the pathological view of love melancholy reveals its essence and philosophical meaning. In addition to its medical aspects, love melancholy reveals additional dynamic binaries between romantic fantasies and actual relationships, desire and satisfaction, and togetherness and loneliness (Godbout, 2016, p.55). It is a poetic commentary on human tendencies and feelings in relation to the questions of love, imagination, and passions at large (Zinninger, 1950). The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the non-pathological characteristics of love melancholy in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Burton in relation to the philosophical ideas of great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle (Burton, 1836). This approach reshapes it as one that provides philosophical wisdom, meaning that it should be embraced rather than treated.

Burton's Perspective on Love Melancholy

In *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the author describes human discontent and concentrates on various types of melancholy caused by love. In this vast context, he describes "love melancholy" as a special type of affection in which passion, desire, and despair are intertwined (Zinninger, 1950). He argues that love can put one into a state of joyfulness characterized by happiness, grief, and sadness. This reaction is mostly due to affection that has not been reciprocated, weakness in romantic relationships, or the pain that comes with the loss of love.

Distinguishing Pathological and Non-Pathological Elements in Burton's Work

In addition, he provides a detailed account of love melancholy. He logically and rhetorically explains its psychological, social, and experimental aspects. Moreover, he explains how love makes people develop thoughts that lead to psychological compulsion and thus create a worldview that separates real love from the reality associated with it (Godbout, 2016, p.55). For instance, Burton said that no passion was heavier than love, which disclosed the intrinsic duality of this emotion, as it inspires the spirit and causes spiritual and emotional emptiness (Burton, 1836). However, he also reports that passion that has no bounds is a free, wandering, vulgar, domineering threat, an unanswerable and devouring passion that can lead to rapes, incest, and murders. Sometimes, it is called jealousy after marriage, and before marriage, it is referred to as heroic melancholy (Godbout, 2016, p. 55). This binary occurrence illustrates the nature of love as a source of happiness and deep sorrow. Scholars like Godbout (2016) examine and explain how Burton's account of love melancholy provides a complex and refined distinction between the pathological and the non-pathological aspects of love. The pathological aspect includes the most severe forms or reactions related to the sadness of love, which causes different mental states, including depression and obsession. This undesired trajectory is manifested most clearly when people get lost in their passion up to the level of incurring physical harm. Also, they become prisoners of their passion, and they get

enslaved by their lovesick imaginations. For instance, the narration reports, "All my griefs to this are jolly, naught so harsh as melancholy" (Burton, 1836, p. xii).

Inversely, there are still rational explanations for the non-pathogenic symptoms as a result of normal emotional experiences with love and the strains that accompany it. According to Burton, a melancholy disposition can be redeeming as it helps one gain new perspectives on relationships that are at present in human life. He argues that "if all are melancholic, then melancholy can no longer really be regarded as a disease" (Godbout, 2016, p. 55). This statement can create reflection and analysis within personal and social relations as well as within the context of a romantic relationship. Thus, though love melancholy exposes one to suffering, it also puts together a full array of emotions that can create a possibility for growth and empathy for the people who are in love. Consequently, Burton has some good points that help to deviate from the stereotypical labelling of every feeling of melancholy as pathological, as not all emotions can be useful for shaping one's psychological and emotional self-growth.

The Blending of Classical References, Humour, and Philosophical Inquiry in Burton's Approach

Burton's work is characterized by a complex combination of irony and philosophy, with an emphasis on the concepts of love and melancholy. Burton uses irony and philosophy to give us profound reflections on the absurd and the contradictions of human love and melancholy through a satirical eye (Burton, 1836). Reading his work gives us the excuse to be peculiar with societal norms but to do so while engaging with his intensely philosophical ideas about suffering, desire, the human condition, and so on, with an ironic tone. Using Aristotle and the Stoics as his reference point for his observations, he contends that feelings of melancholy have been recognized through the ages (Burton, 1836). Apart from reinforcing his writing within the field of philosophy and culture through such intertextual references, they also bring his thoughts to a conscious level of human experiences. Burton's humour is a subtle but important aspect of his approach. It allows Burton to bring readers more intimately involved in content that is often uncomfortably heavy to deal with emotionally and philosophically (Burton, 1836). It is a coping mechanism that takes away the harshness of sorrow while also keeping a space for critical reflection.

Additionally, he adds humour, which lightens up the gravity of the topic of melancholy. He posits that love-melancholy is "heroical because commonly gallants, noblemen, and the most generous spirits are possessed with it" (Godbout, 2016, p. 59). This statement captures its essence, the foolishness of being in love, as well as its glory. The inclusion of irony alleviates the seriousness of the matter and gives a chance to reflect on the affective aspect of love. Burton's philosophical reflection also raises profound issues of love by answering the why and what. He also reflects on fate, free choice, and the existence of human beings in the creation of love melancholy (Rettig, 2019). Therefore, combining classical knowledge with humour

and philosophical reflections, he provides a diverse analysis to which a reader should apply himself to personalize it with their love experience. His ability to interconnect these elements regarding love and sorrow manifests his deep understanding of human feelings, encouraging people to turn their attention to contemplate the beautiful yet tragic feeling.

Philosophical Dimensions of Love Melancholy

Therefore, love melancholy reflects the profound aspects of human feeling and the search for life. According to Burton, it is a condition arising from one of the most basic driving forces in human life: the longing for companionship and wholeness. He reports, "He who does not feel the power of love is either a stone or an animal" (Godbout, 2016, p. 60). Thus, one is essentially a sufferer of extreme, depressive melancholia. It is not the miserable sickness of unrequited love or despair of romantic love but rather a status that defines the soul's search to find its divine self in another (Burton, 1836, p. 450). Hence, love melancholy is a reflection of the ontological dimension, where the human spirit is simultaneously filled with joy and sadness.

Generally, Burton paints the picture of this desire and describes love as a torment, a disease of the soul, a fever, a fire, a frenzy. Such figurative expressions point to love as melancholy, not only as a type of mental disorder but also as containing feelings in its literal meaning (Sutherland, 2022). Consequently, it is an emotion that reveals that eternal happiness and passion cannot be achieved entirely without including the emotional and physical aspects. For instance, research shows that love physically brings about great sensations and feelings due to nervous transmission through the body (Rettig, 2019). In order to strengthen his argument, Burton included the philosophical work of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, who contend that man's desires are limitless, and the world is a limited place (Burton, 1836, p. 450).

Furthermore, love melancholy is a form of pain and has the potential to provide one with self-reflection. As a result, people are forced to answer the questions of their existence by meeting their own desires (Godbout, 2016, p. 60). Love melancholy likely establishes a mode of rhetorical sentiment by which subjectivity and the longing it provokes become the key to comprehending it and other prospects of human life. Burton, like Plato, speaks of desire as the desire for what can never be possessed; 'love is a perpetual thirst, it can never be satisfied... we are never filled with possessing; and still, we desire more' (Burton, 1836, p. 451)

Connections to Classical Philosophy

By using the traditional philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the theme of love melancholy, Burton strengthens his claims. In his book *Symposium*, Plato portrayed love as an indication of unfinished business since people needed to look for their other half. This sort of love is referred to as eros, which is the love associated with

sexual or romantic affection (Sun, 2019). Initially, the gods were scornful of humans and cut each of them in half. When two matching halves find each other, they are infatuated with each other, with their friendship, and with love that they cannot stand being separated (Sun, p. 494, 2019). This concept tallies with Burton's assertion that love melancholy is a process that constantly torments the soul. According to him, it is a result of the inability to attain the perfect and the constant search for completeness. In this passage, Burton explicitly states: 'The most familiar and common cause of Love is that which comes by sight, which conveys those admirable rays of beauty and pleasing graces to the heart... this is a most violent passion, this powerful love, "that conquers all and reigns supreme in the affections" (Burton, 1836, p. 445).

Aristotle's philosophy goes a step further in validating this claim. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he defines love as a reciprocal desire to do what is best for their partner. In agreement with this line of thought, Burton stated that love is the cause of all that is good and great, the purpose of life, and the way to get to heaven (Burton, 1836). Finally, by depicting love melancholy as a productive disposition originating in the pursuit of the good, he links his meditations to the principles of Aristotelian teleology in which love is seen as a way towards discovering superior virtues.

Furthermore, Burton uses divine madness from Plato's book *Phaedrus*. According to Plato, love is a kind of ecstasy, a divine spark, a madness that makes the soul strive for true beauty (Sutherland, 2022). Similarly, the depictions of love melancholy in Burton's works imply that the melancholic lover is obsessed with a burning passion, a divine affair to the heart. These qualities become part of a profound, devastating formula of madness that defines love melancholy as a state that is both a curse and a gift (Burton, 1836). It ties people to their earthly needs while elevating them to supremacy. So, through classical contexts, Burton places love melancholy into a literary philosophical context and turns it into an existential value.

The Role of Imagination and Idealization in Love Melancholy

Both imagination and idealization are a focus in Burton's comprehension of love melancholy. According to him, the melancholic lover creates a picture of the beloved, and mostly, their appropriation of them is rarely true (Rettig, 2019). Such an act of imagination serves to increase the passion of love melancholy as the lover is constantly pulled towards the ideal object yet never able to reach it. According to Burton, imagination makes the mind shape things that are not existent (Burton, 1836). This observation shows how one's imagination is a sign of their delusions about passion and love.

On the philosophical aspect, love is the work of Plato that best explains melancholy. When speaking in the Symposium, Plato shares his account of the lover's journey from physical attraction to the upper realm of contemplated beauty, an endeavour mediated by imagination (Zhao, 2024). Likewise, Burton continues to

argue that love melancholy directs people towards what is supreme through their idealizations while at the same time entangling them in the experience or suffering of desire (Sutherland, 2022). Thus, it underlines another complementary aspect of imagination as both an agent of creativity and an indicator of misery.

Burton also reports that free imagination may be destructive and may worsen the existing state of sadness with time. He recounts, "Methinks I court, methinks I kiss, methinks I now embrace my mistress... Such thoughts may still be my fancy move, so may I ever be in love" (Burton, 1836). This statement focuses on how one cannot get real with one's lover due to idealization. Nevertheless, Burton does not completely exclude the idea of imagination but rather describes it more as a natural and perhaps even required part of love melancholy.

The Risks of Glorifying Melancholy

Although Burton's attitude toward these feelings is positive, showing how love and sorrow interdepend, there are severe consequences of that approach. However, Stoicism and Epicureanism painted melancholy in love to illustrate the dangers of idolization in its extremes (Gill & Polat, 2024). The Stoics, who were urging people to build their emotional strength, agree that one must avoid nurturing melancholy as it might result in developing pathological patterns of reliance on occasional moods (Gill & Polat, 2024). Although they teach that morality and reason are the sources of true contentment, Burton's investigation runs the risk of romanticizing suffering and fostering a vicious cycle of hopelessness and longing rather than a route to mental stability.

Furthermore, Melancholia is linked in the Hippocratic literature to "aversion to food, despondency, sleeplessness, irritability, restlessness," as well as prolonged fear and sadness (Rettig, 2019, p. 8). The delay of internal motions like the circulation and flow of blood, gastric juices, and food stops also characterizes it. It traces certain profiles of sadness, blackness, sluggishness, and stagnation in the people who undergo it.

Similarly, the Epicureans include the concept of pleasure and the minimization of pain. They claim that only giving importance to sadness reduces the quality of happiness in life (Rider, 2019). Hence, it is valuable to keep people aware that it is perfectly normal to experience passionate feelings and develop a life of sorrow, which may prevent someone from pursuing a happy one (Sagdahl, 2021). One must compare these viewpoints and decide whether one will gain a true understanding of oneself while dwelling on the sorrows of love or whether one should develop a pathology that embraces grief.

Burton's lens in this work has philosophical expressions of the benefits of love and the dangers of comfort in sorrow. The messages presented by the Stoic and Epicurean thoughts promote an important discussion about the aspect of joy and the importance of seeking it and a purposeful life within the sphere of love (Sagdahl,

2021). They also indicate that being in love has to be healthy. Therefore, Burton views love and melancholy on very complex historical and philosophical grounds.

Love Melancholy and the Human Condition

Love melancholy highlights a great array of fragile feelings, aesthetics, and existence. It expresses passion by presenting accompanying feelings of loss that are enshrined in love (Sagdahl, 2021). These two are vulnerable moments in human life; for instance, love exposes one to pain and, at the same time, prepares one for beauty (Gill & Polat, 2024). As explained by Burton, love can cause depression and melancholy, which opens up another dimension where one can discover more about themselves and the people around them (Lovink, 2019). Thus, it enables people to deal with their emotions, including desires and fears. This introspection brings beauty out in human casual interactions, emphasizing the beauty within love and its association with loneliness and separation.

Also, love and melancholy make people aware of our existential issues. It makes one think about love and being loved and shows how unstructured and concrete real human emotions are (Lovink, 2019). This emotional spectrum is not only a background of sorrow and pain but also a prerequisite for enjoying life's temporary joys. Pleasure and pain in love show that between the lines of happiness lies the meaning of life and true nature (Galetz, 2019). Hence, love in any manifestation involves beauty and pain.

Ethical Considerations: Does Love Melancholy Foster Empathy or Hinder Reason?

As already indicated, the ethical implication of love melancholy covers areas of empathy and reason. When one has undergone love melancholy, one stands to understand the subject of empathy. Burton himself recognizes this duality when he writes, "Love is a voluntary affection, and desire to enjoy that which is good... It is a mixed affection, to love that which is beautiful and faire..." (Burton, 1836, p. 433). This mixed affection fosters both empathy and clouded judgment. People who face the emotions coming from love also become sensitive to other people's emotions (Gill & Polat, 2024). The process promotes tolerance and empathy as people come to terms with other people's problems. Studies show that it is easier to empathize with individuals if one finds a partner who helps them through pain or personal improvement (Galetz, 2019).

In contrast, love melancholy can also act as a problem of rationality and decision-making. "This headstrong, irrefragable passion of love, tyrannizing over our souls... abuses our imagination with strange conceits" (Burton, 1836, p. 442). Emotions such as love make people act unthinkingly or make rash decisions. Emotions such as love make people act unthinkingly or make rash decisions that are not supposed to be made. For instance, lovers who are in an unrequited emotional state may participate

in self-destructive behaviours or make wrong decisions due to complications in their emotions rather than a rational mind (McKay et al., 2019). This division evokes a number of ethical issues concerning emotional interaction between humans and whether such interactions create real value understanding or promote irrationality.

Love, Melancholy, and the Catalyst for Self-Awareness and Personal Growth

Love melancholy is one of the most effective triggers of individual reflection. It denotes an experience that encourages the subjects to question their subjectivity, sexual yearning, and relationships (Galetz, 2019). Burton notes how this type of sadness arising from love illuminates one's soul; thus, people can find out things about themselves when they feel nostalgia. Forbidding love results in profound sorrow. For instance, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates how pain makes characters accustomed to their value perspectives and reconsider their priorities (Bartolomei, 2022).

Furthermore, the suffering process helps people develop strength that enables them to build better relationships the next time they engage in a relationship after a heartache. Moreover, it enables them to have a better understanding of what they want out of life or the relationship they are entering into (Galetz, 2019). In consequence, as people struggle between love and bereavement, they build up mechanisms that improve their endurance (Bartolomei, 2022). It benefits not only future romantic relationships but also other spheres of life because one is able to adapt to problems, which is a crucial trait in human beings.

Contrasting Views in Philosophical Thought

While Burton's outlook represents a consistent narrative on love and sadness, it strongly contrasts with other philosophical discourses of love and suffering by Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, and Emmanuel Levinas. In their works, these philosophers have different conceptions of love and longing, and they have different cases corresponding to these conditions. According to Schopenhauer, love is an urge of will and desire (Burton, 1836). According to him, love cultivates all species; thus, people are entangled in every form of suffering (Bazac, 2019). Unlike Burton, who saw beauty in sadness, Schopenhauer saw love only in the context of suffering. He basically regards love as a concept that holds people in negativity and disappointment (Bartolomei, 2022). However, according to Burton, melancholy is useful as a form of valuing emotions and portraying deep experience that occurs within an individual and gives them insight into art and learning more about themselves.

With the publication of his "Anatomy of Melancholy" in 1621, Robert Burton laid the groundwork for thoughts about love melancholy that would resonate through hundreds of years (Bazac, 2019). Even though he wrote long before Schopenhauer,

Kierkegaard, and Levinas, his work sets up intriguing lines of text with those later thinkers, especially in relation to how they treat melancholy themselves.

Burton's characterization of melancholy as 'the character of mortality' directly connects with Schopenhauer's proclamation in 'The World as Will and Representation' that life oscillates 'like a pendulum between pain and boredom' (Bazac, 2019). Both writers thought of existence in terms of suffering, but Burton discovered redemptive qualities of melancholy that Schopenhauer essentially refused (Bartolomei, 2022). Like Schopenhauer, Burton asserts that 'all other pleasures are empty' next to melancholy's transformative insights, which parallels Schopenhauer's assertion that 'all other pleasures are empty' next to melancholy's transformative insights.

Burton's accounts of melancholy in 'The Anatomy of Melancholy' mirror Kierkegaard's 'The Sickness unto Death' in its description of melancholy as both despair and self-knowledge (Wang & Jiang, 2022). It is to be noted that Through love melancholy, which is a sweet passion mixt with bitterness, Burton prefigures Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" (Regier, 2023). Still, he is more one for reflection in contemplation than for an existential action. The two philosophers understand melancholy as a way to self-understanding; Burton has 'love melancholy makes a man turn inwards' anticipating Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity.

Burton's claim that love melancholy makes one aware of others' independence is a precedent in Levinas's concept of "the face of the Other" as a moral imperative (Wang & Jiang, 2022). This melancholic man is moved to compassion prefigures Levinas' ethics of responsibility. Nevertheless, while Levinas strove for transcendence through ethical practice, Burton was steadfast in the duality, which is melancholy — both torment and due to wisdom — of love, both enlightening and devastating.

Another existential philosopher who brings in another outlook is Kierkegaard. He suggests that love is intimately tied to anxiety and depression and arises logically from the nature of the human condition (Regier, 2023). Besides, he insists on the adventurous side of love, how to leap into the world of love, and how to turn it into a reality, but warns that too self-reflective an approach to love, too much fear of losing oneself, can also be fatal (Bazac, 2019). Although Burton recognizes that despair is inherent to love, he never takes this existential jump; he takes pleasure in the reflectiveness of emotion, in its part of existence.

In contrast, Levinas discusses love from an ethical perspective, focusing on the face-to-face relationship and the unique independence of the other spouse. According to him, love is a morality where one's partner or spouse is responsible for making the other happy, and the subject transcends the Eros' desire (Wang & Jiang, 2022). This aspect is not further from Burton's theme since he views love from its inward nature with a specific emphasis on self and the contemplation resulting from melancholic love (Wang & Jiang, 2022). However, where Levinas looks for unity and reason in love, Burton sees loneliness and sorrow as part of love. Thus, Burton's view is much sadder but far more realistic.

Relevance Today

Love and emotion are the crucial components of Burton's work. His depiction of melancholy as a dominant mode of existence is rather topical in the current philosophical reflection on love (Wang & Jiang, 2022). His broken-down categorization of love into romantic, platonic, and self is useful in the modern context where everyone approaches relationships differently. For example, his discussion of the role of unrequited love in causing trauma, with its influence on the formation of individual identity, is enriched by modern existential philosophy (Greve et al., 2021). Contemporary thinkers, including Søren Kierkegaard, argue that if love cannot be understood, then nothing can be understood with regard to humanity (Hang, 2021). Therefore, the information provided by Burton transcends history and also includes essential components that encourage further discussions as to what emotions are in these present times.

Love and melancholy remain prominent subjects of modern representations in literature, art, and digital subculture. Today's scholars and professionals strengthen Burton's argument towards people who experience incomplete love and existential anxiety (Greve et al., 2021). For example, works of authors like Haruki Murakami depict the pain of love, showing how it forms a person and their reality (Hang, 2021). In visual art, love has been described as beautiful suffering, and artists like Edward Munch and Frida Kahlo perfectly captured the suffering involved in love relationships within their works (Walden, 2023). Likewise, social media and other platforms have created new ways of expressing love and sorrow pertaining to romantic desire by showcasing places, poetry, and painting. Given the nature of modern relationships, the cultural depiction of love melancholy is an exploration of a society's experience and its investigation into its own experience (Galetz, 2019). For this reason, Burton's works remain relevant, weaving through society at present.

Conclusively, through *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton firmly and comprehensively defends love melancholy as not a disease but a part of human and philosophical existence. He educates the audience and highlights the essence of human life by citing classical philosophy, using humour and sidebar knowledge, and portraying love as the combination of joy and sorrow (Walden, 2023). Erotic love, as presented by Burton, is no longer a matter of medicalization but a way of viewing the lives of people, their desires, frailty, and dreams, as well as the opposition between the extreme and the normal (Galetz, 2019). These thoughts forcibly inspire people to understand their feelings and fantasies, which makes melancholy the key to understanding love and relationships.

From Plato and Aristotle's philosophical synthesis, the poetic and imaginative aspect of love melancholy is something that is not only painful but also rich in philosophical thought and represents the chance for man's introspection. It is a state that cultivates individual development and compassion to harmonize the opposites of active and passive love and private life (Hang, 2021). This type of view inspires readers and people to accept love melancholy as an inevitable part of life, as a force

that brings the reality of the overwhelming impact of love with all its changes on the mind and soul. Thus, this condition expounds the virtues of fragility as one of the great universal themes of literature: that love and sorrow are both sources of suffering as well as avenues of growth (Walden, 2023). Hence, it invites a critique of the philosophical notion that all melancholy is pathological and embarks on an existential discourse of meaning, fellowship, and wholeness.

Finally, through Burton, the melancholic lover is a seeker, not a simple sufferer, an individual on the quest for the divine aspect of love. As a result, the power and wisdom of craving or loss of love or affection is given a key to really understanding the self and spirit (Wang & Jiang, 2022). Love melancholy, therefore, is not only a torment, but it is quite the opposite—a triumph of human feelings, which has the potential to lead to understanding and appreciation of all the shades of love involved in the very essence of life.

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