Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves is welcome and eminently successful companion piece to Moriarty’s Early Modern French Thought. Readers who were engaged by that earlier book will find much to like here as well—wide-ranging erudition, subtle textual analysis, and lucid, well-paced prose. The book offers a persuasive case for the claim that there was a form of psychological study emerging in the early modern period, grounded in a neo-Augustinian conception of original sin, which left a profound mark on subsequent developments leading to the kind of individualism that we recognize as one of the hallmarks of the modern period.


In this very extensive analysis of the interplay of medical and religious discourse in England, Claire Crignon-de Oliveira focuses on the complex relationship between the concepts of melancholy and enthusiasm. As the book’s title suggests, its main focus is on the works of Burton and Shaftesbury in the early seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, but it also contains material on authors writing in the years between: Méric Casaubon, Henry More, Joseph Glanvill, Thomas Hobbes, Thomas Willis, John Locke, Thomas Sydenham, Nicholas Robinson, George Cheyne, and John Trenchard amongst others. Its central task is to show how Burton’s innovative classification and description of enthusiasm as a product of “religious melancholy” inaugurated a form of polemical discourse in which medical and psychological concepts supported and gave shape to religious-political concerns, and which in the hands of various authors, culminating with Shaftesbury, subsequently underwent a series of transformations with significant implications for contemporary theories of human nature and society.

The book opens (part I) with a general account of the medical, spiritual and demonological aspects of the concept of melancholy in The Anatomy of Melancholy, and proceeds by showing some of the political implications of this work by turning to Burton’s portrayal of collective melancholic pathology. Burton’s rather perplexing assertion that bodies politic may suffer from mel-
ancholy—which I shall revisit below—is explained in terms of sympathy and contagion, and this approach is then shown to undergird Burton’s diagnosis of collective religious melancholy afflicting Christendom in the final part of the *Anatomy*. The most influential aspect of Burton’s analysis of the spiritual dimension of melancholy is to be found in his somewhat fragmentary account of enthusiasm as a form of excessive religious zeal, and in part II we are given a careful and lucid treatment of its systematic development, elaboration in the works of the Cambridge Platonists, where it is instrumental in their critique of puritan spirituality. As Crignon-de Oliveira recognises, however, seventeenth-century theories of religious melancholy and enthusiasm also raised prickly ethical and juridical issues concerning physiological determinism and moral responsibility: were such religious melancholics and enthusiasts to be pitied and treated with physic, or blamed and imprisoned or persecuted? We are shown how contemporary discussions of such questions employed the idea of “partial delirium” and drew upon medical and psychological accounts of mental aberration in which the imagination rather than reason were damaged.

Part III of the book is concerned with the ways in which medical doctrines of melancholy and enthusiasm were drawn into Restoration debates about religious toleration and freedom of conscience. On the one hand, we are presented with pamphleteers urging the persecution of dissident groups, who argued that the health of the body politic required the quasi-surgical removal of such pathological entities; on the other, we meet (amongst others) Shaftesbury, arguing for toleration by referring to contemporary medical doctrines of the healthy organism in which heterogeneous elements must be granted the liberty to circulate freely, as long as they keep within certain limits and so do not damage the wellbeing of the whole. Throughout the book, parallels are drawn between Burton and Shaftesbury, and its conclusion is explicitly concerned with the ways in which both authors’ engagement with the subject of melancholy constitute reworkings of the classical enterprise of moral philosophy as a “spiritual exercise.” However, Shaftesbury is also shown to have formulated a conception of melancholy and enthusiasm in relation to human nature and society that differs radically from that of his seventeenth-century predecessors, in that he recognises the place of moderated and civilized versions of both conditions within the happy, flourishing human life and community.
There is much to be admired here. It is an ambitious author who attempts to traverse, as announced at the outset (7-8), the two very different political, religious, and intellectual worlds of Burton and Shaftesbury, and the close focus upon the points of harmony, conflict and tension between the medical and religious concerns within the material under discussion yields many interesting results. Although there is much repetition, the exposition is generally precise, the analysis is consistently thoughtful and probing, and in contrast to some existing accounts of this territory, great care is taken to articulate the complicated relationship between melancholy and enthusiasm clearly throughout. In particular, the discussion of the tension between humoral determinism and individual liberty within theories of mental derangement illuminates the moral and social complexities posed for contemporaries by melancholy and enthusiasm very effectively.

However, there are also shortcomings. Crignon-de Oliveira is more comfortable discussing the milieu of Shaftesbury than that of Burton, and there are several peculiarities and problems with her account of the latter. Some of these do not do too much damage to the overall thesis. For example, the assertion that Burton theorizes the collective melancholy of bodies politic by drawing upon the occult concept of sympathy (as formulated by Fracastoro) is purely speculative and unsupported by the text of the *Anatomy*, which offers no such explanation but simply refers to Botero and states that the melancholy of such states can be “easily perceave[d] by their particular Symptomes.” However, the general emphasis on the collective, epidemical status of melancholy for Burton is undoubtedly correct. Similarly, the claim that there is no definition of melancholy in the *Anatomy* (54) is flatly contradicted by the text, which clearly settles on a conventional medical definition of the disease as a species of *delirium* in which imagination or reason are corrupted, and which is usually accompanied by fear and sorrow (1.1.3.1). Still, Burton does voice serious doubts elsewhere about the applicability and usefulness of such a definition. Unfortunately, there are also more serious omissions from this account. Most obviously, Burton’s well-known status as a humanist, and that of the *Anatomy* as one of the last great monuments of Renaissance humanism in England, receives no discussion whatsoever. The very substantial differences between the different editions of the *Anatomy* published in 1621, 1624, 1628, 1632, 1638 and 1651 are also completely overlooked. (Here the author has not been assisted by the editors of the
otherwise excellent Clarendon edition, who chose to catalogue the multitude of textual variations in appendices rather than signal the most substantial changes in the margins of the main text in the manner of modern editions of Montaigne—but it does not take much effort to discover that Burton’s argument about religious melancholy alters significantly in the different versions, and one cannot simply ignore this.)

Other omissions will frustrate some readers more than others. Although it is a lengthy book, there is relatively little detailed exploration of the political and religious contexts of the works under discussion, and large portions of the historiography of the period are neglected. What we have instead is a largely detached investigation of the workings of discourse, occasionally seasoned with contextual interludes and allusions. There is undoubtedly a rich and sophisticated body of Francophone scholarship on the subject of melancholy (most notably in the output of Jackie Pigeaud and Jean Starobinski) with which Crignon de-Oliveira fruitfully engages, but whilst this quasi-Foucauldian approach does yield insight, for some historians and literary critics it will seem problematic. On the purely theoretical level, it is not clear whether the changes in conceptions of melancholy, enthusiasm, and human nature generally, are to be attributed to external contextual pressures in the domain of religion and politics, or whether—as is sometimes implied by this type of analysis—the discourse itself has an inherent logic that tends towards particular ends. It is on the empirical level, however, that the defects of the book are most obvious: its account of areas of religious and political conflict, especially where the recent historiography has been contentious, is very problematically restricted. There are references to the work of Roy Porter, Michael MacDonald, Michael Heyd, and Lawrence Klein, but effective contextualisation of this material now surely requires coverage of the scope of recent arguments amongst historians about republicanism, civil society, and politeness, and about the theological nuances of English Protestantism throughout the century. Because Renaissance humanism is never mentioned, we are left to wonder about the transformation of moral-philosophical discourse in the century; and the very minor role given to Stoicism in this account, given its importance in the Anatomy and absolute centrality to Shaftesbury’s enterprise, is perplexing. Crignon-de Oliveira has almost nothing to say about Shaftesbury’s political career.
Despite these objections, this remains an intelligent and thought-provoking book. It may be profitably read alongside other accounts of seventeenth-century science, religion, and politics.


In the canon of French verse, the didactic and scientific poetry of the seventeenth century has not met with great favor on the part of the general public; nor has it elicited vast attention within the scholarly community. Philippe Chométy’s impressive examination of this body of poetry does much to fill this lacuna, and his study represents an important contribution to the field. Examining the works of poets ranging from the great to the forgotten, from La Fontaine to Magnon, Chevalier, and Vion Dalibray, Chométy displays both vast erudition and scrupulous methodological rigor in calling attention to a rich and fascinating literary corpus, the understanding of which is revealed in the multiple tensions and paradoxes embodied therein. Faced with the pronounced task of disentangling and elucidating the various problematic issues inherent in these works on both a theoretical and textual level, the author succeeds admirably in bringing to light the essence of these poems within their literary, social and philosophical contexts.

The difficulty of this undertaking is evident in the very nomenclature required to characterize the poems studied, for the province of their scope is varied and wide, embracing the philosophical, scientific, moral, and didactic. The author notes that the seventeenth century could classify them all under the rubric of “philosophie,” in as much as the word itself, as evoked by Chevalier in his Nouveau Cours de philosophie en vers français, referred to the “connoissance/Des choses que l'esprit humain peut penetrer” (273). For the basis of his study Chométy has chosen the designation la poésie d'idées.

But problems presented themselves beyond the question of terminology. For in an era of Cartesian rationalism, the very attempt to discuss in poetic tropes and cadences such matters as philosophical systems, the history of ideas, the nature of the cosmos, mathematics, natural sciences, or the latest scientific discoveries occasioned skepticism as to whether the genre of poetry