

Metamorphoses of the Spleen: A Lexical and Cultural Journey in Romania

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1. Introduction: the evolution of theories regarding the spleen

This study delves into the historical evolution of the term *spleen*, including its diverse meanings within medicine, psychology, and literature. Through an exploration of its semantic fields, the research sheds light on its transformative journey in Romania, especially during the process of modernization and re-Romanisation.

The spleen is a splanchnic viscus which served as an emblem of despondency and melancholic disposition across the annals of history. Throughout epochs, the spleen has captivated the intellectual pursuits of physicians, philosophers, and artists alike, casting it as an integral organ endowed with complex, occasionally opposing, functionalities. From antiquity to the 19th century, the spleen has been conceived as an integral component within the framework of the humoral tetrad. This paradigm revolved around the concept of four principal humours – blood, phlegm, cholera (yellow bile), and melancholia (black bile), each associated with distinct anatomical origins or filtration sites: liver, brain, gallbladder, and spleen. The concept of humoral balance intertwined with the equilibrium philosophy of Greek naturalist thinkers, engendering a synthesis between natural constituents such as earth, fire, air, water, and the bodily humours. Galen posited that dyscrasia, an imbalance in humours, led to illness – a theory which wielded substantial influence over the trajectory of medical thought.

In the 5th century BC, Hippocrates depicted in *On Ancient Medicine* the spleen as a soft, spongy organ with the capacity to absorb excess fluids, thereby playing a pivotal role in humoral balance (Hippocrates 1886: 22). The ancient humoral doctrine lacked consistency, different writings assigning illnesses to different humours. Some constants persisted, notably in Hippocrates' enumeration of autumnal diseases including enlarged spleen and melancholic disorders (*Aphorisms* III.22). In the 4th century BC, in *Timaeus*, Plato mentioned the spleen's role in

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maintaining the cleanliness of the liver and its ability to absorb impurities (Plato 1925: Vol. 9 Section 72c). In *On the Parts of Animals*, Aristotle (Aristotle 1882: III.7) described the spleen's complementary function to the liver, albeit with a relatively diminished significance, delineating their mutual contributions to the process of digestion.

In the 1st century AD, Celsus, in *De Re Medica* (Celsus 1837: Book III: 267), emphasized the collaborative synergy between spleen and liver in maintaining balance, any deviations causing illnesses. Thinkers like Erasistratus propagated the notion of the spleen being superfluous, linked to athletic prowess (Galen 1916: II.4), and in a similar vein, Pliny the Elder highlighted instances of spleen removal for the enhancement of running performance (*Historia*, XI, 80.11). The Empedoclean philosophers established links between natural elements and bodily fluids, aligning earth with black bile and, consequently, the spleen. This prefigured Galen's theory in the 2nd century AD, who ventured to discern four primary temperaments corresponding to the dominance of one among the four bodily humours: sanguine (blood), phlegmatic (phlegm), choleric (yellow bile), and melancholic (black bile).

In the 16th century, Vesalius (Vesalius 2007: 126) challenged Galen's theory of the spleen as a secondary liver, while still advocating its role as a filter for black bile. Despite doubts on the purging process, he rejected a direct link between splenomegaly and melancholic tendencies. With Adriano Zaccarello's 1549 first reported case of splenectomy in Western Europe, followed by Glisson, Malpighi, and Hewson's studies in the 17th and 18th centuries, fallacies were corrected, and the spleen was integrated into the lymphatic system.

This medical and philosophical historical development reflects in the Romanian terminology related to the spleen and its semantic field.

2. The spleen and the black bile

The pan-Romance lexical repertoire derived from Latin constitutes an ensemble that encompasses, among various semantic categories, designations pertaining to anatomy and physiology. However, the terminological elements denoting the spleen exhibit linguistic disparities across the Romance languages, both in direct anatomical contexts and in figurative expressions.

Within Șăineanu's dictionary (1938), as well as Scriban's dictionary (1939), the term *splină* is defined as the organ situated between the stomach and the false ribs. A second meaning of *splină* in both dictionaries is "disease of the spleen". The verbal derivatives *a se splina*, with variations such as *a se splini*, *însplina*, and *însplinoșa* (pertaining to a swollen spleen), are listed particularly referencing cattle that overeat. Certain 19th-century dictionaries list the verb *a se splina* with reference to spleen distension in humans as well. An associated adjective, *splintatic*, is formed to denote an individual afflicted with a diseased spleen or displaying hypochondriac tendencies (Pontbriant 1862, Cihac 1870, I, Gheție 1896, Șăineanu 1938, Scriban 1939). Additionally, neologistic derivatives make an appearance in Laurian and Massim's dictionary (1876), albeit sporadically and primarily influenced by the Italian language: terms such as *splenalgie*, *splenectomia*, *splenectomicu*, *splenificare*, and *spleno-*. Notably, the term *splenomegalie* emerges solely in DER 1966.

The etymology of the term *splină* traces its roots back to Latin, specifically the term *splen*, *splenem*, originating from the Ancient Greek σπλήν, and doublet of *lien*, *lienis*. This etymological lineage finds substantiation through a trifold foundation (Ciorănescu 1966, Cihac 1870, I, Philippide 1894, Pușcariu 1625; Diculescu 1924–1926). Firstly, in Istro-Romanian and a distinct linguistic cluster within western Romania, *splină* emerges with the variant *spliră*, a manifestation exclusively observed in words inherited from Latin that underwent rhotacism, as seen in *spliră* in the language spoken in Transylvania. Secondly, *splină* retains existence, albeit with marginal phonetic variations, within certain Italian dialects, Sardinian (*ispièna* / *isprene*), and Old French (*esplen*). Lastly, the presence of the term is evident in the three southern Danubian dialects – Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian (*splină*), and Istro-Romanian (*splire*). The proposed derivations from Neogreek (σπλήνα) (Cihac II, Tiktin, Scriban) or Slavic origins (Rosetti 1940: III, 92) remain implausible when one considers the presence of rhotacism in Istro-Romanian and Transylvanian variants (Petcovici, Dacor., X 32). The *Lexicon of Buda* (LB 1825) proposes a Greek etymology (σπλην), but also lists *liēn* as etymon.

Regarding a more distant origin of the word *splen*, various dictionaries (e.g. de Vaan 2008) indicate its derivation from the Proto-Indo-European root **spelghn-*, which was used to denote the spleen and related concepts like milt. This root gave rise to similar terms across various ancient languages, such as Sanskrit *plihan-*, Avestan *sperezan*, Latin *lien*, Old Church Slavonic *slezena*, Lithuanian *blužnis*, Old Prussian *blusne*, Old Irish *selg*, and Old French *esplen*. Despite this widespread usage, the exact reconstruction of the root remains uncertain. Vinereanu (2008: 774) states that the Latin form *lien* is inherited from Proto-Latin, whereas *splină* in Romanian exhibits cognation with the Greek σπλήνα, stemming from Thracian-Dacian origins. However, it is important to note that the Thracian-Dacian substratum remains elusive, thereby warranting caution against making such categorical assertions.

In Latin, both *liēn* and *splen* served to designate the anatomical spleen, each with their corresponding derivatives. It is notable, however, that the emergence of *splen* in textual records is notably traced to the imperial period (Meillet, Ernout 2001). Derived terms like *liēnōsus* and *liēnicus* were harnessed to delineate hypochondriacal conditions. Within Pliny de Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*, *liēn* finds its application across diverse contexts: it denotes remedies for spleen maladies (XXVI.48), alludes to instances of spleen pain or the spleen of animals (XXVIII.78), and the derivative *liēnōsus* is employed to convey the notion of “suffering from spleen” (VII.20). Nevertheless, Pliny also resorts to the term *splen*: “... ad remedia splenis et inflationes conditus ex aceto manditur” (capers “pickled in vinegar, are eaten as a remedy for diseases of the spleen, and flatulency”) (XXIV.74). Thus, in reference to the organ, he interchanges both terms. Furthermore, *lienteria*, a Greek-derived term (λιεντερία) signifying spleen-related disorders, emerges in Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* (XXIX.11).

In theatre, Plautus (*Comoediae*) employs *liēn* metaphorically, to allude to the distension of the spleen: “nam iam quasi zona liene cinctus ambulo” (En. For now I walk, girded with my spleen as though with a belt. *Curculio*. Act II). Caelius Aurelianus (Aurelianus 1722: 392), the Greco-Roman physician, writer on medical

topics, and translator from Greek to Latin of a work by Soranus of Ephesus, *On Acute and Chronic Diseases* (circa 5th century AD), deploys *liēn* to signify the spleen, and *liēnicis* to denote remedies for spleen-related afflictions. But *splen* is also largely used in the classical era, e.g. Columella, *De agricultura* (Book 7, Ch.10, Section 8): “Solet etiam vitiosi splenis dolor eas infestare” (Diseases of the spleen usually affect them).

Medieval Latin texts maintain the use of *splen* (e.g., “De splenis cura”, in Benedetto Crispo’s *Carmen medicinale*, 8th century). Subsequently, texts from the 13th century and onward witness the persistence of *splen* in describing spleen-related matters. The spleen continues to appear in a pronounced affiliation with the liver, thereby perpetuating the traditional perspective wherein these organs were perceived as cognate entities: “Ac epatis viciū vernix splenisque recidit” (And the varnish of the liver and spleen withdrew. Milano 1950, *De controversia hominis et fortune*). The term *splenis* is mentioned in Carrara’s discourse in the 15th century, revealing its sustained significance (*Bucolicum carmen*).

Scientific treatises written in Latin employed the terms *liēn* and *splen*, whereas the vernacular language spoken in what constitutes present-day Italy employed an alternate term, *milza*, to denote the spleen. A comparable situation unfolded in France, where Latin medical manuscripts employed the term *liēn*, while its colloquial equivalent *rata* emerged as early as the 10th century: “lien, quam rustici ratam vocant” (the spleen, commonly referred to as rata. TLFi 1994). By the 13th century, *rate* was firmly established in the French lexicon. In Spanish, the reference to the spleen took the form *bazo*, with attestations dating back to the 14th century. Similarly, in Portuguese, *baço* emerged in the 15th century.

In the Romanian provinces, Latin medical texts preponderantly employed *liēn* to refer to the spleen, whereas the spoken language adopted a term derived from *splen* (*splina*). Regarded as the earliest printed medical book in Transylvania, *Sanitatis studium ad imitationem aphorismorum compositum* (1551) was authored in Latin by the urban physician Paulus Kyr (Kyr 2010). Drawing from Hippocrates’s aphorisms and other sources, it imparts insights on “traditional dietetics.” Anchored in humoral theories, the book mentions the spleen (*liēn*) in relation to black bile (Kyr 2010: 205). A subsequent scholarly contribution written in Latin in the 18th century is the medical thesis on hypochondriac melancholy elaborated by *Oosterdyk* (1756), who mentions *atra bilis* (black bile) in connection with the spleen (*liēn*), while expounding upon therapeutic interventions aimed at restoring humoral equilibrium.

Nonetheless, within the *Dictionarium valachico-latinum* (Anonymus Caransebesiensis), the earliest Romanian lexicon composed in Latin script around 1650, the Latin equivalent for *splina* is *splen*, while the term *liēn* is conspicuously absent. The omission of the term *liēn* underscores the close affinity between the Latin etymon *splen* and the Romanian term *splina*. The term *splina* is also recorded in 1649, in *Lexiconul Slavo-Român* (Samaritan 1938). In Negulici’s dictionary (1848), rendered in Cyrillic characters, the term *splina* lacks an independent entry, yet it surfaces within the definition of *splenație*: “durere de splina” (pain in the spleen) and *splenatic*: “despre splina” (regarding the spleen). In Laurian and

Massim's dictionary (1876, II), *splină* takes the form *splena*, and Piuaru (1822) uses the variant *spline*.

The term *splină* maintains a consistent presence across the Romanian provinces. In the 16th century, it occurs in Coresi's *Carte cu învățătură* (1914: 507), where the author enumerates the liver, spleen (*ficații și splina*), and heart, in relation to blood, cough, and bile (*hiarea*). In the 17th century, *splină* is mentioned in *Pravila lui Matei Basarab* of 1652 (Basarab 1962: 572). The humoral tetrad found in Matei Basarab's book exhibits variations from the Hippocratic model, despite acknowledging the Hellenic physician as a source. The humours enumerated by him differ from those listed by Hippocrates; analogous to Coresi's approach, an inconsistent mention of cough finds its place within the humoral framework, therefore it is likely that the Romanian authors worked with similar sources. Furthermore, the term *hiare* refers in their work to both yellow and black bile, emanating from organs traditionally regarded as a pair: the liver and the spleen. The lexical variations *fiare* and *hiare* (archaic terms for "bile") are used, the latter being notably prevalent in association with the concept of black bile. E.g.: "sîngele răsufală pre nas, iară fiarea plăviță pre urechi, iară hiarea neagră pre ochi" (blood pertains to nasal exhalation, yellow bile to aural processes, and black bile to ocular functions. 572-573). A closely analogous narrative, characterized by a shared depiction and lexicon, is encountered within another Romanian chronicle from the late 17th century, which correlates black bile, of cold and dry nature and emanating from the earth, with the spleen (Candrea 1999: 136).

Of note, as recounted by the chronicler Nicolae Costin in *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* (circa 1700), the earliest documented Romanian autopsy conducted on the body of King Duca in 1685 revealed that "maiul cel negru i-au fost sănătos" (his black *mai*, i.e. archaic for liver, was healthy. Costin 1845: 37). Interpreting this through the lens of theories differentiating yellow bile from black bile, it can be deduced that the phrase "maiul cel negru" is likely indicative of the spleen instead, thereby bestowing a distinctive designation within the onomasiology of the spleen.

Progressing into the mid-18th century, references to *splină* can be found in the earliest medical works written in Romanian. Translated from Greek in the mid-18th century, *Alegerile lui Ippocrat* (Hippocrates' Aphorisms) refers to *splină* (Srafincean 1997: III 19) and the autumn diseases: "Iar toamna să întâmplă multe ..., și zăpăciri și dureri de splină" (In the autumn many ailments..., disturbances and pains in the spleen occur). Another significant medical treatise in Romanian is *Meșteșugul doftorii* (Chisacof 2017), an anthology of medical texts spanning various epochs, including antiquity. Rendered from Greek into Romanian between 1760 and 1770, the manuscript incorporates a concise account of Galen's medical contributions, referencing the term *splină*. In Amfilohie Hotiniul's *Gramatica fizicii* (circa 1790: Amfilohie 1990: 175), the term *splină* is also mentioned, particularly within the discourse on anatomical structures. This Romanian translation from Italian into Cyrillic script also encompasses references to the humoral theories.

Medical practice remained largely an art rather than a science until the modern era. The scientific underpinnings of medicine emerged in Europe during the Enlightenment, marking the advent of true scientific medical practices. The origins of Romanian medicine coincide with the establishment of the Romanian state.

Evolving from the era of Phanariot rule, Wallachia and Moldavia underwent a process of state modernisation lasting approximately a century, culminating in the Great Union of 1918. This era laid the groundwork for modern Romanian medicine, marked by the application of scientific methodologies, thus revealing a temporal lag in the medical progress compared to Western Europe. For example, reminiscences of antiquated theories persist in Romania even in the 19th century. In medical works, the spleen continues to be perceived as an adjunct to the liver: “Splina... poate fi socotită drept organ ce atîrnă de ficat” (Spleen... can be viewed as an organ that adjoins the liver. Kretzulescu 1843: 299); “năsăditurile maiului și a splinei” (the swellings of the liver and spleen. Fătu 1851: 100). Medical language retains a latent state, vernacular expressions interweaving with scientific terminology (e.g., the archaic term *mai* continues to be employed to refer to the liver, alongside the scientifically designated term *ficat*). Another instance substantiates this hybridity: “La deschiderea trupului... se găsește mai la toate și totdeauna o îmbulzeală de sînge în splină (At the opening of the body... one finds in most cases and always a heap of blood in the spleen. Episcopescul 1846: 89).

3. Melancholy, hypochondria and spleen

The link between the spleen and melancholic temperament originates in the ancient Greek humoral medicine. The spleen was deemed to secrete or purge black bile, intricately linked to the manifestation of melancholy (< Gr. *melas* – black, *chole* – bile). In Latin, the equivalent was *atra bilis*, which has virtually disappeared from the global medical vocabulary except the archaic word *atrabilius*, describing a person with “too much black bile (Fortuine 2000: 69).”

The linguistic evolution of the terms *melancolie* and *melancolic* in Romanian can be traced through various stages. Beginning in the late 17th century, the term *mela[n]holie* appeared in works such as *Foletul novel*. The early 18th century witnessed variations within the same works, like *melanholie*, *melenholie* (Costin, *Letopisețul*) or *melanholie*, *melianholie* (Cantemir, *Istoria ieroglifică*). Later in the 18th century, *melanchonie* surfaced in Ienache Văcărescu’s writings (Văcărescu, *Istoria othomanicească*). The following decades saw the emergence of variants like *melahonie* (Șoanul 1891, written in 1733), *melagholie*, *melagholicos* (*Alegerile lui Ippocrat*), alongside *melancholie* employed by dr. Molnar Piuaru (1822), and *melanholie*, *melancolicos* (*Meșteșugul doftorii*). In the early 19th century, Greek-rooted forms persisted, coexisting with Latin influences: *melanholicos* (Potecă, în Soare 2013), *melanholie* (*Calendariu* 1818), *melanhonie* (Maior 1809), *melancholic* (Mairescu 1893).

Aristotle, in *Problemata*, was the first to correlate melancholy with genius. He discerned two types of melancholy: one stemming from cold black bile, causing depression and lethargy, and another of a hot nature, leading to genius and a somewhat manic state. During the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino elaborated on the connection between melancholic states and genius, associating melancholy with Saturnian influences. In his third book of *De vita triplici*, he integrated the melancholy syndrome within the concept of Saturnism leading to a solitude marked by either deviance or profound contemplative capacity. In the context of the

Aristotelian tradition, a discernible distinction emerges between hot melancholy characterized as pure, and cold melancholy identified as impure. This distinction culminated during the Middle Ages in the antithesis between diabolic sadness, prompting religious individuals towards worldly distractions, and utilitarian sorrow stemming from a sense of spiritual deprivation. This thematic exploration is further extended by Campanella (Campanella 1956: 1053), who expounds upon the differentiation between hot and cold melancholy.

These dimensions of melancholia are also discernible within Romanian culture, in a gradual progression from excess black bile and temperamental qualities, to states of despondency verging on madness, and the potential for demonic possession. But melancholia is also deemed a precursor to states of creative genius. The manifestations of melancholy hold pathological and physiognomic aspects, accompanied by behavioural, moral, and religious attributes. While initially referring exclusively to a bodily humour, over time, *melancholy* evolved to mean as a state of health characterised by the imbalance of this humour. Central to this discourse is the concept of melancholic patients possessing a feeble spleen, resulting in the blockage of evacuation pathways and the consequent buildup of excessive black bile. An illustration of the engagement with this theme can be found in the work of Oosterdyk (1756) who expounded upon the aetiology and symptoms of melancholy. Echoing the teachings of Hippocrates, he established a connection between persistent melancholic emotions, prolonged apprehension, and the presence of black bile – referred to as “*atrae bilis morbus*.” The correlation between the Latin *atra bilis* and its Greek counterpart, *melan khole*, persisted also in linguistic works. Negulici (1848), as well as Laurian and Massim (1876), incorporated the term *atrabilis* into their definitions, along with sadness and sorrow. Similarly, Cantemir (*Istoria ieroglifică*) described it as “*boală de voia rea, pătimirea întristării, fiarea niagră*” (ailment of weakened volition, malady of grief, black bile).

The disruption caused by an accumulation of black bile results in both physical and psychological imbalances. This gives rise to the melancholic temperament, expressed diversely in Romanian: “*jalnică și melanholică gândire*” (pitiful and melancholic thinking. *Calendariu* 1818: 51), “*haractirul melanholicșilor*” (character of the melancholic. Potecă, in Soare 2013), “*Temperamentul melanholic*” (Vasici-Ungurean 1830: 223), “*caracterul seu din natură melanholic*” (his character of melancholic nature. *Calendar* 1850: 28/7).

Melancholy becomes abulia, lethargy in *Foletul novel*: “*O, cum nebunește de mela[n]holie, cel om și cu adevărat nu știe ce mai pofteaște în ceastă lume*” (Oh, how maddened with melancholy is the man, and truly he knows not what he desires in this world. Vîrtosu 1942: 28). But melancholia is also immeasurable sadness, impacting not only humans, but also other creatures: an early 20th-century scientific journal recounts the case of an ostrich in Jardin des Plantes in Paris which perished due to a broken heart. Bereft of its companion, the ostrich yielded to melancholia, rejecting sustenance and dying shortly thereafter (*Nature* 1912-1913: VIII, 254). And Satan, too, succumbs to melancholy while pondering the brevity of his existence. (Budai-Deleanu 1953: 214)

Nearing the realm of pathology, melancholia becomes a mental affliction characterised by morbid sadness, delirium, hallucinatory episodes, and an all-

consuming fixation on self-destruction. Dr. Oosterdyk (Oosterdyk 1756: 5) describes the trajectory leading to melancholia, illustrating how a certain humoral ballast accumulates within the stomach and intestines due to the spleen's incapacity to purge it, thus sending noxious gases to the brain, which would disturb the mind in its functions: "et sic oriretur Morbus Melancholia" (and thus would arise the Disease of Melancholia). An evolution towards fatal melancholia is also expounded by Cantemir (Cantemir 1883: 168), where the melancholic individual swells, and "în sfirșitul tuturor, din boală în moarte va cădea" (ultimately, from ailment to demise he shall fall). In *Alegerile*, references are made to "patimile cele de nebunie, cele de melanholie" (the passions of madness, those of melancholia), while Ienache Văcărescu recounts death due to melancholia (Văcărescu 2001: 272). Costin also presents it as a malady (Costin 1845: 416): "au căzut în boală ce să chiamă melenholiia și și-au pus capăt zilelor" (he fell prey to an ailment known as melancholia and brought an end to his life). A primary catalyst for melancholia lies in the influence of the planet Saturn, engendering "melancholia to the spleen" (Șoanul 1891: 120). Hence, melancholia covers deviations marked by a spectrum of symptoms, eventually specialising to become synonymous with depression: melancholia metamorphoses into "a form of madness" wherein sadness and fear predominantly hold sway (Bianu 1910: 602).

Moreover, astrology and the movement of celestial bodies give rise to a constellation of symptoms. Among them are the vapours of humours, reaching the brain and ushering in states of insanity. While not explicitly labelled as melancholy, Coresi's depiction bears a semblance to Oosterdyk's, albeit with a unique twist. Coresi terms it *moon disease* (lunacy, to preserve a common etymology), and attributes it to diabolic possession. He posits that the full moon intensifies the bodily humour (though he omits to name which humour), which ultimately reaches the brain and unsettles it (Coresi 1914: 81). Mental afflictions, often identified as demonic possessions, are attributed to the disturbance of the four humours (Coresi 1914: 275). Basarab (Basarab 1962: 554) also refers to this connection by explicitly linking black bile to diabolic possession, stating that one perturbed by black bile will resemble a soul besieged by demons. Another chronicle (Milescu 1845: 118) highlights that madness is a consequence of *drăcie* (devilish thing), equating it with melancholy.

In the 18th century, melancholy was redefined, gaining new cultural associations while preserving its original meanings. It became a European trend in the early 19th century, emerging as a hallmark of creative genius. The melancholic nature, synonymous with the artistic spirit, is marked by eccentricity, prodigious talent, solitude, and gloomy alienation, predominantly exemplified in Romantic literature. These idealised aspects of melancholy stem from the Renaissance's concept of artistic genius. Romanticism, albeit slightly delayed, also influences Romanian culture. "Nu-s melancholic ca Petrarca" (I am not as melancholic as Petrarch), declare Șt. O. Iosif and D. Anghel in *Sărmanul Yorik*, while Rebreanu contends that it suits a poet to be melancholic (*Răscoala*). Mihai Eminescu embodies Romantic melancholy in all forms, motifs, and themes, and the Romanian writer Ion Heliade-Rădulescu satirises the pretentious, self-proclaimed melancholic poets. But creative melancholy has the potential to become an ecstatic condition, as

conveyed in Emil Gulian's poem *Strofe pentru kermessă*: “extaz suprasensibil când ai melancolii...” (oversensitive ecstasy during bouts of melancholy). Indeed, the creative process can be arduous, plunging the artist into the depths of despair when the ideal remains elusive. “De obicei nu triumfi: alteori îți afli idealul, apoi deșeționezi: a fost artificial. Atunci: lacrimi, țipete, melancolie, disperare, sinucidere — un roman întreg!” (Typically, triumph is rare; sometimes, you discover your ideal, only to be disappointed: it was artificial. Then, tears, screams, melancholy, despair, suicide — an entire novel unfolds! Traian Demetrescu, *Scrisori găsite*).

Romanticism at its core embodies a deep melancholic sensitivity, suffused with nostalgia and a yearning for a lost paradise. It is a nostalgic longing that mourns over past worlds and laments the effects of modernization. The belief that the present is a profane era of decay paints a picture of a post-historical stasis leading to further decay. With Charles Baudelaire, melancholy evolves to signify existential malaise arising from heightened sensitivity and an incapacity to adapt to the real world. Borrowed from English, the term *spleen* emerges in 18th-century France to enrich the cultural motif of melancholy by encapsulating the notion of existential anxiety and alienation, as later reinterpreted and evidenced in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). *Le mal du siècle* stems from the symbolist movement and continues in Romania as well, into the early 20th century (with works of Petică, Macedonski, Fondane, Minulescu, Bacovia, etc). Prior to Baudelaire's *spleen*, the term had already been used in Romania primarily as an English national trait, and remained so even after it was established as *ennui*, as existential crisis. In Scriban's dictionary (1939), *spleen* is defined as a fanciful ailment characterized by inexplicable boredom that leads one to loathe one's existence and contemplate suicide; notably widespread in England. Alecsandri (*Călătorie în Africa*, cca 1840) described spleen as an English ailment, whereas Negulici (1848) defines it as a malady of the English, akin to a sense of languor and melancholy. Later, Duiliu Zamfirescu (*Levante și Kalavryta la Missolonghi*, 1879), and Caragiale (*Identitate*, 1909), referred to spleen as a specific British trait, along with coldness and boredom.

Hypochondria, also known as melancholy, transitions from humoral excess to pathological behavioural manifestations. The term originates from the Greek words *hypo* (below) and *chondros* (cartilage), referring to the region beneath the costal cartilage, where melancholy and anxiety were believed to reside due to the proximity of the spleen. In Romania, the term appears in Cantemir's writings (*Istoria ieroglifică*), referred to as *ypohondriac*, denoting an ailment that bewilders the imagination, and also in the phrase *melancholia ypohondriacă*. However, some dictionaries, such as the Lexicon of Buda, or Candrea and Densușianu's dictionary, do not include this term. In Laurian and Massim's dictionary, it is listed as *hypochondria*, serving as a synonym for *splena* and defined as a state of sadness, melancholy, self-loathing, and antipathy towards the world. Scriban includes hypochondriac in its present form, *ipohondru*, referring to individuals excessively preoccupied with their health, as well as to the anatomical region known today as the hypochondrium. Similarly, Șăineanu lists it as *ipocondru*, with meanings consistent with Scriban's definitions.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, medical literature frequently features terms like melancholia, hypochondriasis, vapours, characterised by tremors, syncope, nervous breakdowns, behavioural disturbances, and mood changes. By the 18th century, the definitions of melancholia shift between a disorder of the imagination and an imaginary disorder. This transformation is succinctly captured by Conu' Leonida, a character in I.L. Caragiale's play (*Conu' Leonida față cu reacțiunea* 1880): "A man, *par exemple*, for no apparent reason, due to his neurotic nature, entertains thoughts. He entertains thoughts? The whim takes hold; well! And then, from this whim, he falls into hypochondria. Then, naturally, he freezes." The literary theme of the imaginary invalid, plagued by fears of all kinds, emerges somewhat later in Romania, following the assimilation of the French model in the 19th century. Thus, even in 19th-century Romania, fits of hypochondria and listlessness are fashionable, exemplified by characters like Vasile Alecsandri's Coana Chirița, a parvenu who, feeling drained and asthenic, overwhelmed by ennui and hypochondria in the countryside, embarks on a journey to Paris.

Conclusions

The lexical representation of the anatomical structure denoted as the spleen in the Romanian language has undergone a convoluted trajectory, marked by unforeseen metamorphoses. Spanning from the framework of humoral theory to Baudelaire's evocative poetic spleen, this term has traversed diverse transmutations within both linguistic and cultural domains, engendering supplementary layers of signification across temporal expanses. This scholarly inquiry assumes the form of a diachronic examination, tracing the evolutionary trajectory of the Romanian terminology for the anatomical spleen. Concurrently, it embarks upon an exploratory journey into the auxiliary traditions and beliefs that have exerted influence upon its semantic oscillations. Moreover, the study encompasses an investigation of pertinent constructs in the discourse on melancholia, conceptualized as a pathological condition, encompassing physical, spiritual, and psychological disturbances. Its symptoms include apathy, depression, morbidity obsession, and madness. However, an alternative positive discourse, spanning from the Peripatetics through the Renaissance and into Romanticism and Symbolism, regards melancholia as indicative of genius and creative sensitivity, thus desirable.

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the evolution of terminology related to the spleen and black bile in Romanian, tracing its origins from ancient Hippocratic writings. The study specifically examines the evolution and various connotations of Romanian terms describing the spleen, extending its analysis to encompass its influence on lexicology, medicine, psychology, and literature throughout history. This research navigates the intricate pathways of melancholy, hypochondria, and the literary expressions of the spleen, weaving them together into a coherent narrative. Furthermore, it delves into their linguistic history over the centuries, identifying significant resonances in the evolution of the Romanian language and culture. The evolution of lexical and semantic transformations is closely intertwined with the development of humoral theories, notably black bile, spanning from ancient Greek and Latin times through the Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic eras. Starting from the theory of black bile and its associated organ, the spleen, to the various derived meanings of melancholy and hypochondria, the Romanian cultural landscape has undergone transformations influenced by these concepts, shaping the terminology as we recognise it today. Through a meticulous exploration of these intricate connections, this study seeks to unveil the historical, cultural, and semantic transformations associated with the term *splină* and its related semantic fields in Romania.