

# Black Bile and Man's Best Friend: A History of the "Black Dog"

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Last Christmas while visiting my parents-in-law's farm on the western plains of New South Wales, I was bitten by Oscar, one of my father-in-law's dogs. It was a cheeky little nip on the ankle that failed to draw blood and earned him a smack and a scolding, but didn't stop him from repeating the offence a number of times over the week we were there. Quite some time later I discovered that Oscar did not belong to the family of dogs born and bred on the farm, all named by my father-in-law after his mother-in-law's brothers and sisters (Oscar was the exception: it was the name of my father-in-law's father-in-law, my wife's grandfather). He had been sent to them through the agency of a friend in Sydney because of a number of behavioural problems which made it impossible for his Sydney owners to keep him. One of those misdemeanours was to bite the visiting former US President Bill Clinton one morning as he took an early morning stroll somewhere in Rushcutters Bay. Naturally, my first reaction on learning this was immense pride, knowing that I had been bitten by the same dog that had bitten an American president. For a while, my boasting knew no bounds: apart from being a pair of charismatic devils, Bill Clinton and I had something else in common.

It wasn't long, however, before I returned to Sydney to the job which, while being merely adequate to the mortgage which we

had taken out the year before, had its own array of cares, frustrations and political games. In fact, it wasn't long before I had slipped into a kind of malaise, less intense than those which I had experienced in my twenties, but nonetheless pervasive, one which constrained the horizon of what I believed to be possible, leaving me with a sensation of being trapped, unable to do anything or go anywhere that might make a difference or relieve the suffering. Whatever it was that had taken hold of me dogged me wherever I went and showed no sign of letting go. In fact, I told a number of my friends that I was being visited by the black dog every day and couldn't see my way clear to be rid of him. A number of weeks passed and gradually I shook off that episode of depression. I threw myself back into my work, found pleasure once more in my studies and resumed the writing projects which I had not been able to face for some time.

One of those projects turned out, eventually, to be this essay. I had a personal interest in the history of the "black dog" and the opportunity to write about it and account for how this expression came into currency in English was a challenge I relished. To my mind, the crucial questions to be asked about the history of the "black dog" are these: why a dog? and why black and not some other colour? It struck me, however, before I delved into an exhaustive search of the literature that there was more to be learned from considering that episode with Oscar and my illustrious co-bitee than any history of the occurrence of that phrase in English literature. Oscar is not a black dog (he is a floppy-eared, piebald Jack Russell), but his misbehaviour embodied the deep ambivalence that the dog possesses in our culture. The dog is a companion, man's best friend as the cliché goes. As an object of

affectional touch and hugging, the dog serves basic human emotional needs.<sup>1</sup> But, paradoxically, the dog is valuable to us because it retains many of the characteristics of the wolf from which it is descended: a distrust of strangers and a marked territorialism (making it an ideal guardian of self and property); the ability to herd and hunt. Yet, for all that, a dog can bite (and does). The deep familiarity of the dog to the human sits alongside that part of its nature which is unfamiliar and alien, and it is the uneasy co-existence of these qualities that is the genesis for the term “black dog”. Then there is the blackness of the “black dog” which points back to a folkloric tradition and, beyond that, to an ancient philosophical theory of the humours. But before delving into that history, it is worthwhile trying to pin-point the moment when the term “black dog” entered into English as a specific description of depression: this has as much to do with the evolution of the term “depression”, in distinction from the earlier, more encompassing term “melancholy”, as it does with a sudden shift of the usage of “black dog” as a figure of folklore to a figure of personalised, psychological description.

It is mistakenly assumed that Horace was the first to make reference to the “black dog” of depression. There are plenty of dogs in Horace’s odes, epodes, epistles and satires, but nowhere are

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<sup>1</sup> Meyer, W. and Pakur, M. “Thoughts about the domestic dog as the catalyst for relations between humans and a body contact object for humans” *Schweiz Arch Tierheilkd.* 1999;141(8):351-9.

they described as black. In the twenty-seventh ode of the third book, Horace writes of several evil omens, among them

...praegnas canis au tab agro  
rava decurrens lupa Lanuvino  
fetaque vulpes

which James Michie translates as

...a pregnant bitch, a vixen  
Swollen with cubs, or a grey she-wolf lolloping  
Down from Lavinium".<sup>2</sup>

There is certainly a strong tradition emanating from this, which later includes the black dog as a sign of bad luck or as a sign of the Devil, as in Goethe's *Faust*, where Mephistopheles first appears to Faust in the form of a black dog<sup>3</sup>, and as mentioned by that seventeenth century scholar and anatomiser of melancholy, Robert Burton, who writes of a superstitious person that "every black dog or cat he sees he suspecteth to be a Devil."<sup>4</sup> But these instances are more

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<sup>2</sup> Horace. *The Odes of Horace*. Trans. James Michie. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970. pp.194-95.

<sup>3</sup> Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust*. Trans John Anster. London: Harrap, 1985. p. 68

<sup>4</sup> Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1927. p. 328

than a millennium apart, and a vast tradition of pagan as well as Christian folklore intervenes.

Elsewhere Horace writes of “atra Cura”, or “black care”, and it is this recurrent phrase which has been mistranslated as “black dog”, most notably by the Victorian scholar Sir John Conington who, in 1869 translated this passage from the seventh satire of the second book

adde, quod idem  
non horam tecum esse potes, non otia recte  
ponere, teque ipsum vitas fugitives et erro  
iam vino quaerens, iam somno fallere Curam;  
frustra: nam comes atra premit sequiturque fugacem.<sup>5</sup>

as

Then too you cannot spend an hour alone;  
No company's more hateful than your own;  
You dodge and give yourself the slip; you seek  
In bed or in your cups from care to sneak:  
In vain: the black dog follows you, and hangs  
Close on your flying skirts with hungry fangs<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Horace. *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. p. 234

<sup>6</sup> Horace. *The Satires, Epistles and Art of Poetry of Horace*. Trans. John Conington. London: George Bell, 1902. p. 102

when in actual fact a more accurate translation is something like Fairclough's:

And again, you cannot yourself bear to be in your own company, you cannot employ your leisure aright, you shun yourself, a runaway and vagabond, seeking now with wine, and now with sleep, to baffle Care. In vain: that black consort dogs and follows your flight.<sup>7</sup>

Not a canine fang in sight! It is possible to sympathise with Conington's imaginative depiction of black care as a black dog simply because the expression is now, and was before Conington translated, in common parlance (not to mention the rhyme of "hangs" with "fangs"). But there is nothing in Horace to suggest a "black dog" either here or elsewhere where "black care" appears. In the first ode of the third book, Horace writes

post equitem sedet atra Cura

which is translated by Michie as

behind the horseman squats black care<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. p. 235

<sup>8</sup> Horace, *The Odes of Horace*. pp. 138-39.

and which, if it was not for the malignant connotations of the word “squat”, could well be a description of a dog, much like one of my father-in-law’s, perched on the back of his speeding motorcycle, tongue lolling joyfully in the breeze. By the time we trawl through all of Horace and read, in the eleventh ode of the fourth book, that he recommends a good song as a remedy for the “ravages inflicted by black care”<sup>9</sup> it is clear that his “black care” has much in common with our “black dog”. The real question is, why is it black?

Aristotle was among the first of the ancients to divide everything into four constituent elements: fire, earth, air and water, which were formed by combination of the four primary qualities of matter: cold, heat, wetness and dryness.<sup>10</sup> In turn, Hippocrates theorised that the human temperament and physique were determined by the presence in the body of four humours which corresponded to the four elements. These were:

sanguine	–	blood (air, moist and hot)
melancholic	–	black bile (earth, dry and cold)
choleric	–	yellow bile (fire, dry and hot)

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<sup>9</sup> Horace, *The Odes of Horace*. p. 241

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle. *The Physics*. Vol 1. [2 Vols.] Trans. Philip H. Wicksteed & Francis M. Cornford. London: William Heinemann, 1929. pp.51-57.

phlegmatic – phlegm (water, moist and cold)<sup>11</sup>

The influence of this ‘humoral’ pathology has persisted through the middle to this day, with its heyday being in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. ‘Sanguine’ and ‘phlegmatic’ are still common descriptions of character and ‘melancholy’ is a common adjective (even if markedly different from its meaning in the seventeenth century) used to denote sadness. The word melancholy originally, and unequivocally, meant madness, but included within its broad ambit anxiety, sadness and delusion. Timothy Bright’s *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) illustrates nicely the supposed relationship between the pathological condition of melancholy and its physical, humoral basis:

The perturbations of melancholy are for the most parte, sadde and fearful, and such as rise of them: as distrust, doubt, diffidence, or dispaire, sometimes furious and sometimes merry in apparaunce, through a kinde of Sardonian, and false laughter, as the humour is disposed that procureth these diversities. Those which are sad and pensive, rise of that melancholick humour, which is the grossest part of the blood, whether it be iuice or excrement, not passing the naturall temper in heat whereof it partaketh, and is called

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<sup>11</sup> Hippocrates. *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates*. Vol 1. [2 Vols.] Trans. Francis Adams. London: The Sydenham Society, 1849. p.161ff

cold in comparison onely. This for the most part is settled in the spleane, and with his vapours anoyeth the harte and passing vp to the brayne, counterfetteth terrible obiectes to the fantasie, and polluting both the substance, and spirits of the brayne, causeth it without externall occasion, to forge monstrous fictions, and terrible to the conceite, which the iudgement taking as they are presented by the disordered instrument, deliuer ouer to the hart, which hath no iudgement of discretion in it self, but giuing credite to the mistaken report of the braine, breaketh out into that inordinate passion, against reason.<sup>12</sup>

By far the most comprehensive resource we have regarding late renaissance thinking about melancholy is Robert Burton's massive *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which first appeared in 1621 and which he continued working on until his death in 1640. Burton was a scholar who lived all his life at Oxford; it is said that for amusement he would wander down each day to the canals where he would laugh at the profanities and swearing of the boatmen. The *Anatomy* is a work of genius which combines medical knowledge with enormous erudition, humour, poetry and fantasy. Its treatment of the theme of melancholy is more than encyclopaedic: its byzantine partitions, sections, members and subsections deal variously with the causes of melancholy and its cures, of love-melancholy and of myriad digressions from an

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<sup>12</sup> Bright, Timothy. *A Treatise of Melancholie*. New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1940. p.102.  
Bright's Treatise was an important source for Burton's *Anatomy*.

overwhelming number of sources (including Horace). It is clear from the *Anatomy* that melancholy is a broad category of madness, unreason as well as what we would term depression. There is no reference in it to any “black dog” specifically associated with, or embodying depression or melancholy. Rather, black dogs appear in a superstitious sense, as noted above or in a supernatural sense as when Burton, citing the authority of the sixteenth century Italian polymath Girolamo Cardano, notes of terrestrial devils that “they sometimes appear in the likeness of hares, crows, black dogs”.<sup>13</sup> *The Anatomy of Melancholy* remained one of the most popular and widely read books for succeeding centuries, appearing in 40 editions and it was the favourite reading of Samuel Johnson, of whom Boswell remarks: “Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, he said, was the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise.”<sup>14</sup> Doctor Johnson is also the first person in English who is recorded as having referred to the “black dog” as an embodiment of psychological depression.

It therefore makes sense that the term “black dog”, used as a description or name for depression, came into usage some time between 1640 and 1779. In a letter to Mrs Thrale, Johnson remarked that

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<sup>13</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. p. 169

<sup>14</sup> Boswell, James. *Life of Johnson*. Vol 2. [6 Vols.] Ed. George Birkbeck Hill, Rev. L. F. Powell. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934. p.121

The Black Dog I hope always to resist, and in time to drive, though I am deprived of almost those that used to help me . . . When I rise my breakfast is solitary, the Black Dog waits to share it, from breakfast to dinner he continues barking, except that Dr. Brocklesby for a little keeps him at a distance . . . Night comes at last, and some hours of restlessness and confusion bring me again to a day of solitude. What shall exclude the Black Dog from a habitation like this?

And then goes on to speculate wistfully on an ideal solution to his predicament:

If I were a little richer, I would perhaps take some cheerful female into the house.<sup>15</sup>

The “black dog” is mentioned in several letters between Doctor Johnson and Mrs Thrale. For example, the first reference occurs in a letter concerning Mrs Thrale’s husband:

To Mrs Thrale  
October 31, 1778

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<sup>15</sup> letter 857 to Mrs Thrale, London, June 28, 1783. Johnson, Samuel. *Letters of Samuel Johnson*. Vol 2. Jan. 15, 1777 - Dec. 18, 1784. [2 Vols.] Ed. George Birkbeck Hill Oxford: Clarendon, 1892. p.309

Dear Madam,

Your letter seemed very long a-coming, and was very welcome at last; do not be so long again.

Long live Sir John Shelly, that lures my master to hunt. I hope he will soon shake off the black dog, and come here as light as a feather.<sup>16</sup>

To which Mrs Thrale replies from Brighton “My Master swims now and forgets the black dog.”<sup>17</sup> Johnson’s reply in turn continues the metaphor:

I shall easily forgive my master his long stay, if he leaves the dog behind him. We will watch, as well as we can, that the dog shall never be let in again, for when he comes the first thing he does is to worry my master.<sup>18</sup>

and then continues in a vein which suggests that the “black dog”, which seems to have afflicted Mr Thrale, has now been transferred to Johnson:

a vile one it is, but I hope if he is not hanged he is drowned; with another lusty shake he will pick my master’s heart out.

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16 letter 586 to Mrs Thrale, London, October 31, 1778. Johnson, *Letters*, p.73

17 cited in Johnson, *Letter*, p.73n.1 Piozzi Letters, ii.33

18 letter 591 to Mrs Thrale, London, November 14, 1778. Johnson, *Letters*, p.76

I have begun to take valerian.<sup>19</sup>

And then triumphantly declares some weeks later: “Now the dog is drowned.”<sup>20</sup> The phrase was not merely part of a private language between Mrs Thrale and Johnson; Johnson writes to Boswell with equal familiarity (and concern): “But what will you do to keep away the *black dog* that worries you at home?”<sup>21</sup>

It is Hester Thrale, however, who provides us with the greatest clues as to the origin of the “black dog” which peppers her correspondence with Doctor Johnson. In her diary, she writes

The *Black Dog* is upon his back, was a common expression some Years ago when a Man was seen troubled with Melancholy: we used to make of it a sort of *Byword* or *Hack Joke* here at Steatham, and in the letters I published between D<sup>r</sup> Johnson & myself, it is almost perpetually recurring.

Few People however seem to recognize its true Original; which may be found in D<sup>r</sup> Henry More’s Philosophical Works, where he tells us that Appollonius [sic.] Tyaneus told the Greeks how that Spirit which was the Scourge of the City where he dwelt, (Athens I think) appeared to him in Form of a large *Black Dog*:

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19 letter 591 to Mrs Thrale, London, November 14, 1778. Johnson, *Letters*, p.76

20 letter 592 to Mrs Thrale, London, November 28, 1778. Johnson, *Letters*, p.79

21 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*. p. 414

& leaping on his Back sometimes; – filled him with Melancholy for many Days after.<sup>22</sup>

Henry More was a philosopher and one of the Cambridge Platonists who was drawn to mysticism and theosophy in later life. His *Opera Philosophica* appeared in 1678, some thirty-eight years after Burton's death. The anecdote concerning Apollonius does not appear in Burton's *Anatomy* (although there are at least a dozen instances where he does) and most likely came from Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, with which More was obviously familiar, as it would have been his source. But this is of little import: with the same ease with which she wrote, Mrs Thrale later changes her mind regarding the origin of the saying:

I have mentioned the *Black Dog* as of Greek Original in this *Analect Book* sometime; but one may find it nearer home it seems: Cardinal Crescenza at Verona died mad, he had for many Years fancied himself pursued by a *Black Dog* & complained during his last Hours that nobody would keep that beast off his Bed. The Story is quoted in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, where I dare say Doctor Johnson read it.

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<sup>22</sup> Thrale, Hester. *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs Piozzi) 1776 – 1809*. Vol 2 1784-1809. [2 Vols.] Ed. Katharine C. Baldesrtone. Oxford: Clarendon: 1942. p. 784

And then sniffs somewhat disapprovingly:

That Book has been exceedingly pillaged.<sup>23</sup>

We know that Johnson was besotted with Burton's *Anatomy*, as were many of his contemporaries, including Laurence Sterne, and even those of the Romantic era such as Keats and Byron. It is reasonable to suppose that Johnson, who was essentially endowed with a scholarly and critical faculty as well as being a poet, would have brought into parlance a metaphor he picked up from his reading. The other point worth making is this: Johnson chose to use a phrase that derived from popular expression, influenced by his knowledge of, and deep reading in, the subject of melancholy. Why did he not refer to his bouts of "black dog" as melancholia? Because by the time Johnson was writing, melancholy had ceased to be an important concept of pathology and psychology and had become instead a widely used adjective to describe sadness – and anyone who has experienced depression will know that neither "depression" nor "melancholy" is not adequate to describe what William Styron calls "a howling tempest in the brain."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thrall, *Thraliana*. p.870. The anecdote is not quite so detailed in Burton: "Cardinal Crescence died so likewise desparate [as Francis Spira, an Advocate of Padua] at Verona, still he thought a black dog followed him to his death-bed, no man could drive the dog away." Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, p.984

<sup>24</sup> see Merriam-Webster Online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/wftwarch.pl?100704>

Nonetheless, it is Johnson's correspondent Mrs Thrale who provides us with evidence that the original phrase which anteceded hers and Johnson's use of it was "the *Black Dog* is upon his back", used to describe someone afflicted by melancholy. And from where did that phrase originate? From the mass popularity of Henry More's philosophical works? Or from the common knowledge of Burton's *Anatomy*? Unlikely. In a footnote to Mrs Thrales' second derivation of the term, her editor, Katharine Balderstone remarks

The black dog is, however a common folk superstition. See Chambers's *Book of Days*, ii. 433.<sup>25</sup>

And Balderstone is indeed correct, although not nearly so much as she thinks. Robert Chambers' *Book of Days* was an exceedingly popular miscellany of significant dates, folkloric superstition and "popular antiquities" published in 1879. In the section relating to Spectre-dogs (October 11<sup>th</sup> – now a day I will forever remember as "black dog day"), Chambers writes that "spectre-dogs... occupy a distinct branch of English mythology [and] are supposed to exist in one form or another in almost every county."<sup>26</sup> He goes on:

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<sup>25</sup> Thrale, *Thraliana*. p.870n.2

<sup>26</sup> Chambers, Robert. *Chambers's Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection With the Calendar*. Vol 2. [2 Vols.] Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1879. p.433

To have the 'black dog on the back' has become a general phrase, though perhaps few who use it have an idea of its origin. The following anecdotes about spectre-dogs will illustrate this phrase, and shew how generally this branch of superstition is received.<sup>27</sup>

But the illustrations which Chambers provides do not convincingly make the link between the "black dog" as a spectral presence and the term "black dog" as a term relating to depression. The black dog apparition, which is one of three kinds of spectre-dog (the others being spirits or evil persons who have been transformed into dogs as punishment and evil spirits which assume the form and habits of hounds), has the same general characteristics wherever it appears:

It is described as large, shaggy, and black, with long ears and tail. It does not belong to any species of living dogs, but is severally said to resemble a hound, a setter, a terrier, or a shepherd-dog, though often larger than a Newfoundland. It bears different names, but is always alike supposed to be an evil spirit, haunting places where evil deeds have been done, or where some calamity may be expected.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Chambers, *Book of Days*. p.433

<sup>28</sup> Chambers, *Book of Days*. p.433

From there on several anecdotes are enumerated, one of which Chambers claims to have witnessed himself, two others of which were related to him by eyewitnesses and all of which relate to the supernatural. Some of these are well known: the Lyme Regis and Bungay black dogs, among others. Chambers distances himself from the veracity of all these manifestations (presumably including his own) by concluding that

it has been fully and satisfactorily ascertained that the goblin-hounds, which have originated such fanciful legends in almost every county, are merely flocks of wild-geese, or other large migratory birds.<sup>29</sup>

Obviously, the inference is that a spectral manifestation presaging misfortune or calamity, however doubtful in its authenticity, is the origin of a phrase which over one hundred years prior to his writing had come to mean a state of melancholy or depression. The inference is not without basis: in his anecdotes, the presence of a black dog induces anxiety, dread and so on in its victims, each of which belong to a general state of depression.

However, this explanation does not fully account for the use to which the phrase was put by Johnson and, following him, Sir

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<sup>29</sup> Chambers, *Book of Days*. p.434

John Conington in his translations of Horace, Sir Richard Burton in his translations of *The Arabian Nights* and in his letters, and most famously of all, Sir Winston Churchill. A brief consideration of the history of the metaphor in the hands of these famous exemplars tells us a lot about how it has developed over time, as well as from where it can be truly said to have originated. For example, the terms which qualify Johnson's metaphor: his black dog barks continuously from breakfast to dinner, it has teeth, it weighs on its victim and must be shaken off, threatening to tear out his heart – all of which agrees with the spectral tradition of the black dog. But it is also a curiously intimate manifestation: it waits to share Johnson's otherwise solitary breakfast, Doctor Brocklesby keeps him at a distance for a while and Johnson's main anxiety is that it be *let in* – all of which is in distinction to the black dog which typically appears at night on the road, in the hedgerow or in the ditch. There is much of the black bile in these metaphors, an anxiety which has internalised the spectral apparition of folklore and imbued it with the peculiar intensity of melancholy. It follows that subsequent references to the "black dog" retain traces of this fusion of the scholarly tradition of melancholy with the folkloric tradition of the spectral dog – Conington's translation of Horace is all fangs and dogged pursuit, but insubstantial nonetheless, and directly related to care or worry. The explorer and linguist Sir Richard Burton was said to have wrestled with the black dog after a great achievement, but this characterisation of depression has lost all physicality, despite the wrestling metaphor, and is merely akin to an abstract struggle, as with one's conscience. The most famous example of all, Winston Churchill's reference to his "fits of depression that might last for

months [as] the 'Black Dog'"<sup>30</sup>, represents the furthest remove from the expression's folkloric and melancholic/humoral origins: the "black dog" has become sufficient in itself as a synonym for depression, but remains in use because it is a powerfully personal description of an otherwise "clinical" disorder and still retains traces of its humanistic and folkloric origins.

While I have been successful in eluding or avoiding my black dog for some time now, I was interested to learn, after reading about Bill Clinton's quadruple bypass, that depression is one common side-effect of open heart surgery.<sup>31</sup> Although he is someone who seems never to have been subject to bouts of depression before, it would be interesting to know if, sitting up in his hospital bed, chatting with

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<sup>30</sup> Moran, Lord. *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival 1940 – 1965*. London: Constable, 1966. p.181

<sup>31</sup> From CNN, Larry King Live: Interview with Panel of Doctors Who Performed Surgery On Former President Clinton September 6, 2004

KING: Dr. Smith, a very common post-operative concept is some sort of depression, mild depression, sometimes serious. Have you found that to be true, and do you tell the president about it, to expect it? SMITH: I have found that to be true, and we did specifically discuss this with him, partly because we often do, but also because he actually raised the question. It is common. It is rarely anything that is not self-limited. I would have a hard time thinking of a patient who required real psychiatric treatment for typical post-operative depression. And we did talk about it a bit.

KING: But you do get -- I remember the weeps. You do get moments of really being down, maybe because, of course, it's your heart?

SMITH: I'm not sure entirely what's behind it, but that is definitely very common. I think we see this in 30 to 40 percent of the patients we operate on to some degree.

Hillary about how he was going to give up fried chicken and hamburgers for lentil-burgers and skinless, boiled chicken (and feeling, as he speaks, a small, unfamiliar pit of depression forming in his stomach), whether he caught a fleeting glimpse out of the corner of his eye of something that reminded him of that piebald, rascally pup that nipped him on the ankle in Australia two years before; only this would be a much darker beast, black as melancholy and perpetually on the periphery of his vision, much harder to pin down than any ordinary dog, yet somehow always there. It's possible. But I can't imagine Bill Clinton's black dog lasting for very long, can you?

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