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## psychiatry in literature

### ‘I am the man that mirthless lives’

Daniel Philippe Mason

*Giles Earle His Booke* is a collection of lyrics and music set down between 1615 and 1626. Almost nothing is known about its author; the text itself exists as a single manuscript in the British Library. While many of the songs have been attributed to contemporary poets and composers, including Campion, Jonson and Shakespeare, a number are of unknown origin. Among these, most famously, is ‘From the Hagg and Hungry Goblin’, the first recorded version of the many ‘Tom of Bedlam’ songs about the folkloric figure of Mad Tom, most famous from his role in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. But the volume is brimming with deeply psychological pieces. Song after song strikes a deeply melancholic tone, but few are as powerful as an anonymous lyric found halfway through Earle’s book:

I am the man that mirthless lives,  
The only abject of the earth,  
To whom hard fate such fortune gives  
That wretched man may curse his birth.  
With torment so long tossed,  
And now in age so crossed,  
That dogged destiny doth decree  
To make a bloody war of me:  
A life so strangely posted  
With wars and surfeits wasted,  
That I but sit and sigh to see  
Myself in endless misery.

My meat and all with tongue I taste  
Turns to disease and troubled blood.  
My wits with woe do wear and waste,  
My reason scorns to do me good.  
My life, when it should flourish,  
Nature denies to nourish;  
But as a blasted tree doth fall,  
So waste I now with strength and all.  
Then farewell, sweet contenting,  
And welcome, sad despairing!  
Come, gentle death, come, come, I call,  
And rid me of my troubles all.

In 1932, *Giles Earle His Booke* was edited by the composer and writer Philip Heseltine, and published under his pseudonym Peter Warlock. Editing Earle’s book was one of Warlock’s last projects, before he was found dead of coal-gas poisoning during a period of deep melancholy. One cannot help but imagine the power of these words on Warlock in the dark months before his mysterious death.