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25 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621–1651)

Abstract: This chapter aims to lay out a broadly historical framework for interpreting Burton's *Anatomy*. After outlining the biographical and (selected portions of) the intellectual-cultural contexts of its composition, the chapter concludes with some suggestions for understanding the work as a whole and Burton's intentions in writing it, moving from the satirical preface to the main treatise, and addressing their relationship. The final section explores the text's reception and the main strands of its interpretation in modern literary scholarship.

Keywords: Melancholy, medicine, anatomy, science, religion, satire

1 Context: Author, Œuvre, Moment

The *Anatomy* surveys the world and human history, but Robert Burton spent a large part of what he called in the preface his “silent, sedentary, solitary, private life [...] in the University”, “penned up” in his study in Christ Church (“Democritus Junior to the Reader”: I: 3).¹ That description was part of his self-presentation as a humanistic scholar living the *vita contemplativa*, and in fact we know that Burton had several friendships and acquaintances in Oxford and beyond (Kießling 1988, xxx–xxxii). However, his claim never to have travelled far except imaginatively “in Mappe or Card” (I: 4) seems to be true, and leaving aside the *Anatomy*, his life has left only a rather light trace on the historical record (for biographical studies see Simon 1964, 11–58; Nochimson 1974; Bamborough 2004). He was born in the Leicestershire village of Lindley on 8 February 1577, into the ranks of the landed gentry as the fourth of nine children and the second of four sons. We know very little of his sisters, and not much more about his father Ralph, whose family estate was originally at Fauld in Staffordshire, but who had moved to Lindley Hall after inheriting it from his grandmother. Robert's mother Dorothy, *née* Faunt, was from an old landed family from Foston in Leicestershire. Her parents were both Roman Catholics, and one of her brothers was the Oxford-educated Jesuit emigré Arthur Faunt, a prominent figure of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Poland (Hausiewicz-Lavalee 2016, 13–14) whose defence of the veneration of saints against Lutheran and Calvinist critics would be

¹ All citations of the *Anatomy* in this chapter are to Burton 1989–2000, giving the Partition, Section, Member, and Subsection references (or, when appropriate, the title of the preface), followed by volume and page numbers.

cited by his nephew in the *Anatomy* (2. 1. 3. 1; II: 9). Robert's older brother William, who admired Arthur Faunt greatly, recorded that another maternal uncle, Anthony Faunt, had died in 1588 from "a passion of melancholy" suffered after his hopes of commanding the county's forces against the anticipated Spanish invasion had been frustrated by the Earl of Huntingdon (Burton 1622, 105–106).

Robert Burton received a classical humanist education. He was taught Latin language and literature (and possibly also rudimentary Greek) at King Edward VI grammar school in Nuneaton, though at some point he transferred to Bishop Vesey's School in Sutton Coldfield. Like his elder brother William, whose own career path proceeded from the law to antiquarianism via literary scholarship (Cust 2004), he proceeded to Brasenose College, Oxford, where he matriculated in 1593. His academic progress was initially not straightforward, and at some point, for reasons unknown, he withdrew from his studies. The Oxford antiquary Anthony Wood remarked that he had made "a considerable progress in Logic and Philosophy" at Brasenose (Wood 1691, 534), and we know that between 1594 and 1598 he bought several books suggestive of a strong interest in classical literature and languages (Kiessling 1989, 362–63); but otherwise we have no reliable information about him for these years until 1599, when he was elected as a Student at Christ Church. Some have speculated that in the intervening period he fell ill, and perhaps visited London to consult the popular astrological physician Simon Forman, whose case-books record the treatment of a twenty-year-old called "Robart Burton" for melancholy in the summer of 1597 (Traister 1976). But the evidence is thin.

In any case, Burton's studies proceeded smoothly once they were resumed at Christ Church. The Faculty of Arts at Oxford provided an education that was both wide-ranging and classical humanist in orientation, designed to give instruction in every area of human knowledge but also guiding students towards the ultimate goal of the mastery of classical languages and literature (Feingold 1997). Burton was put under the tutorship of John Bancroft, the future bishop of Oxford, with whom he would have studied rhetoric, logic, moral philosophy, arithmetic, and (if he had not already learned it at school) Greek, gaining his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1602. After three more years of study, which would have concentrated mainly on scientific and mathematical subjects such as geometry, astronomy, natural philosophy and metaphysics, he received his Master of Arts. Meanwhile, he started to write short poetic contributions for university verse anthologies, an activity which would continue intermittently from 1603 until near the end of his life (Burton 1977, 247–71). At this stage, though, his main literary interest was in drama. In August 1605, he contributed to a Latin pastoral comedy *Alba*, now lost, and performed at Christ Church before a reportedly unimpressed James I (Nochimson 1974, 98). In the following year, he began work on another Latin satirical comedy, *Philosophaster*, which was aimed at pseudo-philosophers and pseudo-scholars, but it would be another nine years before the play was completed.

Meanwhile, Burton continued his academic career at Christ Church and began the parallel ecclesiastical career expected of him. In 1609, he was ordained as a deacon, and in the following year he took priest's orders. In 1612, Burton's learned and vituperative prose first appeared in print, in defence of the philological methods employed in the etymological dictionary of his friend Francis Holyoake, which was appended to the popular *Dictionarie* by the lexicographer John Rider. Burton then turned to the study of theology, obtaining his Bachelor of Divinity in 1614. This was a conventional progression at Christ Church, but there was also a financial incentive (we know that he was supplementing his income in 1615 as a clerk of the Oxford market, a role which he reprised in 1617 and 1618) as the BD may well have been an informal prerequisite for the award of a church living. In 1616, accordingly, he was granted the college living of St. Thomas the Martyr in Osney, a western suburb of Oxford, where he acted as curate for the rest of his life. Although Christ Church encouraged its Students to study for the higher degrees in divinity, Burton did not proceed to the doctorate. The preface of the *Anatomy* indicates that at some point he had developed a marked distaste for theological controversy ("Democritus Junior to the Reader;" I: 21–22), but in all likelihood the main reason for this decision was that his scholarly interests in other areas, especially medicine, had grown stronger, and indeed that his preoccupation with the subject of melancholy had started to become a personal obsession (I: 7–8). Christ Church had long provided a hospitable environment for his literary enterprises as well as his studies, and rather than pursuing interests elsewhere, he committed himself fully to the task of reading and writing his major work.

We do not know when Burton conceived or started to write the *Anatomy*, but it was probably around the time that he entered his forties, and the work was almost certainly well underway by the time *Philosophaster* was first performed in February 1618. The first edition of the *Anatomy* was complete by December 1620, and published at Oxford in the following year. As the book sold well and Burton continued to extend it considerably in the following years, his efforts to secure patronage – a subject of some resentful and defiant commentary in the *Anatomy* – did eventually meet with some success, with the acquisition of church livings whose duties he would subsequently entrust to curates. After some years of scarcity, 1624 was relatively fruitful. Berkeley granted him the advowson (or right of presentation) of the substantial church living of Seagrave in Leicestershire, though as this was not vacant at the time he could not assume the rectorship – Burton shrewdly assigned the advowson to his brothers William and George and his cousin George Purefoy, to guarantee that the position would fall to him when it became available (Höltgen 1976b, 131–32). In the same year, he was also presented to the less financially valuable Lincolnshire benefice of Walesby by Frances Cecil, the well-connected dowager countess of Exeter, whose son Robert Smith he may have tutored in the early 1620s. In 1624 Burton was also appointed librarian at Christ Church. His enthusiasm for acquiring as well as reading all kinds of books, and his

frequenting of the Bodleian, must have been well-known, but the manifest learning of his own work would have confirmed his suitability for this position, which he held until his death. Last but not least, this was also the year when the second edition of the *Anatomy* appeared, increasing its length by one-fifth from 880 quarto pages to 652 of the larger folio format.

In 1628, a third edition of 762 folio pages followed, with an elaborately illustrated frontispiece by the Frankfurt engraver Christof Le Blon. Three years later, Burton resigned the rectorship of Walesby, apparently because Lady Frances had decided he should make way for the chaplain of her associate Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Middlesex. In 1632, however, he received a significant boost to his income when he was finally presented by Berkeley to the rectorship of Seagrave, on the death of the previous incumbent Edward Cooper. Despite having claimed in the third edition that it would be the final version of the *Anatomy*, 1632 also saw the appearance of a fourth edition, now 822 pages in length, which included a poetic exposition of the imagery of the frontispiece and other new prefatory material. After an abortive attempt to print another edition at Edinburgh, a fifth comprising 842 pages was finished as usual at Oxford in 1638. Burton died in January 1640, but a sixth version was issued in 1651 with the author's last corrections and a small quantity of new additions. In the thirty years that had passed since the appearance of its first edition, the book had grown by more than two thirds of its original size.

2 Basic Coordinates: Central Topics and Concerns

The challenges posed by the *Anatomy* for modern readers are considerable. By any standard, it is a large book with an extraordinary variety of content. Burton was an avid bibliophile and a voracious reader, and his work contains a significant quantity of material which was not well-known in his time and is now arcane. It contains a wealth of scholarly references, and a flood of quotations in poetry and prose, mostly in Latin but occasionally in Greek;

Burton sometimes supplies his own loose translations or paraphrases of these, but many are left untranslated. It has a large quantity of notes, originally printed in the margins, giving more references, quotations, and authorial commentary. From a historicist perspective, to achieve a solid understanding of the text even on the most basic and literal level, requires several things of us. At a minimum, we need some familiarity with the world of encyclopedic learning upon which Burton draws and with which the *Anatomy* engages: in disciplinary terms, this most obviously involves medicine, but also natural philosophy, astrology and cosmology, theology, moral philosophy, history, literary scholarship, mythology, and geography. Sometimes Burton glosses his terminology, but often he does not, and the experience of close-reading the *Anatomy* involves an often humbling realization of how much knowledge, now lost, is

being assumed by its learned author. To understand why Burton writes the way that he does, we also need some grasp of the character of the literary and intellectual culture that he inhabited: not just of late Renaissance humanism, but of its particular manifestation in Oxford in the first half of the seventeenth century. And to be able to see exactly what Burton is doing with his source materials, a large proportion of which were Latinate, we also need to be able to read them. Various translations of the Latin text given in the *Anatomy* are available to supplement those given by Burton himself, but however useful these may be, they always involve some adaptation or loss of meaning, and cannot serve as consistently reliable surrogates for the originals.

This is not the place for substantive treatment of all of the numerous contexts relevant for understanding the *Anatomy*, either whole or in part, but some introductory remarks can be made about Burton's humanistic intellectual setting with regard to the most prominent features of the text. The first of these is his humanistic literary method, which is both encapsulated and explained in the satirical preface, "Democritus Junior to the Reader". As Burton makes clear, the torrent of learned quotations, allusions and citations that comprise the bulk of the text of the *Anatomy* expresses more than the typically humanistic reverence for antiquity found in many learned books in this period. This is, of course, integral to Burton's chosen compositional method, which is to assemble his text in the form of a 'cento', a patchwork of passages taken from other books and stitched together by an authorial commentary; as he says, this "shewes a Schollar" with a "roving humor" at work (I: 11, 4). In humanist circles, writing a cento was taken as an ostentatious demonstration of learning as well as of ingenuity – though for Burton's friend Thomas Hobbes it was a manifestation of "learned madness" (Hobbes 1994, 63) – but the form was also known to place heavy demands upon readers. As the Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius had warned in his *Politica* (1598), a celebrated cento that probably provided a model for Burton, to understand and appreciate this kind of writing the reader must attend to the distinction between the words of the author and those of the sources being extracted, and think about the creative process by which quotations acquire different or additional meanings in their new setting (Lipsius 2004, 231–34; see Tucker 2010 and 2013). This also applies in the *Anatomy*, where Burton says of himself that "as an Author, I use more liberty, and that's only taken, which was to my purpose" (I: 19), thereby inviting his readers to discern how his quotations have been put to use. We are also led to consider the distance between the text and the author, who throughout the book performs a kind of literary ventriloquism that always leaves the possibility that his own view may be unexpressed or withheld: "it is a *Cento* collected from others, not I, but they that say it" (I: 110). Whilst Burton's own words in the book convey his views frequently enough, his commentary shifts through different registers, sometimes affirming and sometimes criticising his sources, sometimes expressing an attitude of sceptical or bemused detachment, and sometimes leaving his readers to form their own view.

The preface to the *Anatomy* also presents the book in more general terms as an incarnation of typically humanistic rhetorical *inventio* and *dispositio*. Employing the Senecan metaphor much beloved of his fellow humanists, Burton explains that his work has been assembled in the manner that a Bee “gathers Wax and Hony out of many flowers, and makes a new bundle of all” (I: 11), by reading, digesting, and disposing the matter taken from other books. Contemporaries would have detected a clear allusion to the practice of compiling a commonplace-book, which was not only well-suited to the systematic accumulation of material for inclusion in the ever-expanding *Anatomy*, but also to its abundant literary style. As many critics have noted, Burton’s prose exemplifies the style described by Erasmus in *De copia*, characterised by variety of subject matter and expression, and achieved by the piling up, expansion, and amplification of arguments, examples, comparisons, and other rhetorical devices (Erasmus 1978; see Schmelzer 1999). Whether the relentless and occasionally meandering style of the *Anatomy* is to be taken as self-expressively conversational rhetoric, an expression of linguistic excess that is calculated to undermine the systematic attempt to reduce the material on display to some kind of order, or an indication of anxiety that the scholarly enterprise to digest the body of human knowledge in a world where the printing press was accelerating its growth to unmanageable proportions, it serves as an eloquent testimony to the productivities and tensions of the eclectic intellectual world of late humanism.

Other features of the *Anatomy* express the influence of the particular subspecies of humanistic culture that was prevalent in contemporary Oxford. Its strikingly frequent use of Roman poetry, especially the works of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal and Persius, not only reflects Burton’s personal literary preferences, but also the strong emphasis on poetry that was distinctive of the classical language and literature teaching at Oxford (Feingold 1997, 253). The same can be said of the more generally encyclopedic content of the work, which gives what can look at first glance to be a mainly medical treatise a markedly Oxonian humanistic character. The prevailing ideal in Burton’s university was the classical one of the ‘general’ scholar, the polymath who was in possession of knowledge in every branch of the arts and the sciences, and capable of putting this knowledge to use in eloquent speech and writing. In this vision, all the disciplines, whatever their manifest differences, were fundamentally interconnected, with common origins in the languages and learning of antiquity and common goals in the cultivation of knowledge, moral virtue, and Christian rectitude (Feingold 1997, 216). The intermingling of sources from an occasionally bewildering variety of disciplines found on the pages of the *Anatomy* gives direct expression to this conception of scholarship (Murphy 2014).

All readers of the *Anatomy* must also be struck by its indebtedness, evident in both the form and the content of the book as well as in its main subject, to medical learning. For all his evident love of literature, Burton wrote of himself that he was “by my profession a Divine” but “by mine inclination a Physitian” (I: 23); he was not trained in medicine, but was by contemporary standards a knowledgeable autodidact,

in possession of an impressive quantity of learning about melancholy, and well-versed in the principles of diagnosis and therapy as well as the natural philosophy that formed the basis for medical doctrine. In the conclusion of the first edition he mentions circulating his work amongst friends in Christ Church and the university, including “some of our worthiest Physicians, whose approbations I had for matters of Physic”, and says with some plausibility that he received “good encouragement” from them (Burton 1621, sig. Ddd3^r). Medical terminology and discourse proliferate throughout the book. The dissective terminology of the main treatise, divided into three “Partitions” which are further subdivided into “Sections”, “Members” and “Subsections”, expresses the art of anatomy, as do the visually striking synoptic tables – of a kind found in other late Renaissance medical works – placed before each Partition. The tools of learned medicine are also frequently employed within the treatise. Perhaps most conspicuously, Burton routinely uses division, a dialectical topic that was central to medical logic, and again one appropriately used by an anatomist. This is used, for example, to generate much of the structure of the first Partition, being applied to human diseases in general, diseases of the head, the body, the soul, the species of melancholy, and then to its causes, symptoms and prognostics. Particular Subsections dealing with multiple subjects are also organised, sometimes less rigorously, by the way in which Burton subdivides their contents, which is typically indicated in the titles. Other significant devices of Renaissance medical literature are prominent: the structural arrangement of kinds, causes, symptoms, prognostics and cures, which reproduces the sequence commonly found in contemporary works of pathology; and common topics scattered around the text, such as definition and equivocation (1.1.3.1; I: 162–63 and 1.1.1.5; I: 136–39), which Burton uses to anchor his expansive and periodically digressive writing in the commonly accepted understanding of the subjects in hand.

As many historians have found, the content of the *Anatomy* also provides a valuable conspectus of the orthodox medical doctrine, with a few modifications and innovations – most notably the inclusion of jealousy and religious melancholy as distinct subspecies of love melancholy – that prevailed in England and across most of Europe in the later Renaissance. This is usually referred to as ‘Galenic’, but as the plethora of physicians quoted and cited by Burton well testifies, medicine in this period was a *mélange* of influences from different periods and places. Burton writes in awareness of the fruits of humanist philology and occasionally acknowledges the historicity of his sources (e.g. 2.4.1.1; II: 209–11), but the *Anatomy* typically puts its authors in conversation with one another with little regard for their temporal or geographical distance, and draws out broad continuities between a dizzying array of writers: from the Hippocratic authors, Galen and other ancient figures such as Rufus of Ephesus and Aretaeus of Cappadocia, and Arabic physicians and philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroës) and Abu Bakr al-Razi (Rhazes), to a large community of medieval, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European medical authors, many of whom are barely known today

even by specialist historians of medicine. Indeed, the heaping up of citations and quotations in the *Anatomy* is fundamental to the cento form, but it is also amenable to the character of learned medicine in the Renaissance. Even as medical knowledge incorporated developments in anatomical dissection pioneered by Vesalius and others, as well as a growing interest in direct observation and the study of particular case-histories, it remained largely textual in England and continental Europe well into the middle decades of the seventeenth century (Maclean 2002). For the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, university-trained doctors drew upon an ever-expanding, and mostly Latinate, body of knowledge that was disseminated throughout Europe in medical books of many different kinds, and at its centre was the exegesis of canonical works, which were commented upon, adapted, and incorporated in diverse and often sophisticated ways. However it might appear today, there was nothing out-of-date about the bookish approach to knowledge – medical or otherwise – taken in the *Anatomy* when it was first published, or indeed when the sixth edition appeared in 1651.

After the satirical introduction, Burton presents what he calls his “Treatise” (I: 112), a term that announces a methodical discussion, and it is here that the subject of melancholy is, as the subtitle on the frontispiece states, philosophically, medically, and historically “opened & cut up.” Medical learning evidently dominates in large parts of the first and second Partitions, and it also informs the discussion of erotic and religious melancholy in the third Partition, but it is worth noting that occasionally it is totally absent from the *Anatomy*. Typically, Burton uses medical knowledge to structure his discussion of melancholy and ground it in contemporary physiology, but then, depending on the subject in hand, he expands (or as he often says, “dilates”) it by incorporating quotations drawn from a range of sources including poetry, scripture, theology, moral philosophy, history, mythology, astrology, geography, travel literature, and also popular proverbial wisdom and ballads. And indeed, the combination of so many different kinds of knowledge and literature, much of which has now been largely forgotten, is undoubtedly one of the great pleasures of the *Anatomy*. But this aspect of the book does pose questions. By incorporating so many quotations, Burton has created a text that is polyphonic in the extreme, and for some readers, the result is linguistic excess, chaos, and confusion (Schmelzer 1999; Williams 2012). Uncertainty and endemic scholarly conflict are certainly recurring themes in the *Anatomy*, as is the impossibility of imposing a final order upon the multifarious and virtually infinite particulars that its author’s quest for knowledge has excavated. Indeed, it would be surprising if the multiple and often conflicting perspectives on the territory of melancholy and its environs provided by so many physicians, theologians, philosophers and poets across the ages could be harmonised. Sometimes Burton does not try, and even seems to revel in exposing disagreements and leaving them unresolved (for some instances in the first Partition, see 1.3.3.1; I: 418–19 and 1.2.1.5; I: 204–205; in the second Partition, see 2.4.1.4, II: 221–22, and also the general commentary at 2.2.3.1; II: 55–8).

However, there are important conceptual coherences and thematic continuities in the *Anatomy* that prevent it from disintegrating into fragments. One of these is found in Burton's recurrent concern with the moral psychology of the disease, which combines the ethical resources of classical humanism with Christian (specifically Augustinian) spirituality and applies them to the medical understanding of the effects of melancholy on the soul. The disease comes in many different forms, but in the first Partition it is clearly stated that melancholy is a condition of corrupt imagination (1.1.3.2; I: 163–65), which causes malfunctioning perceptual powers and erroneous, irrational judgements (1.1.2.7; I: 152; 1.2.3.2; I: 250–55). The mental symptoms vary in each particular case, but in all its forms melancholy can be seen as a psychological condition of misperception and faulty cognition, whether of the self, of others, of the world, or of God, resulting in extreme and disturbing emotions, intellectual errors, and moral or spiritual vices. Correspondingly, there is a therapeutic concern for the management of the soul's passions and correction of its errors which is ongoing in the book, but most evident in two places. In the "Consolatory Digression", the *Anatomy* presents a carefully Christianised version of classical practical ethics, aiming to "ballance our hearts with love, charity, meeknesse" and "patience", as well as "pacifie our selves by reason", or, if necessary, to "divert by some other object, contrary passion, or premeditation" (2.3.6.1; II: 187; see Gowland 2012). In the "Cure of Despair", which Burton substantially expanded in the second and subsequent editions of the book "at the request of some friends" (3.4.2.6; III: 425), he delivers another consolation that extracts the resources of contemporary 'spiritual physic' – much of which has a Calvinist complexion – for the afflicted conscience, to supplement the medicinal therapies to give comfort for religious melancholics suffering from spiritual despair (Schmidt 2007; Lund 2010; Sullivan 2016). The object of Burton's therapy varies with the modulations of the prose: sometimes it is the generic sufferer of a form of melancholy; sometimes it is the friend of such a sufferer; sometimes it is explicitly the reader, who may not be melancholic – at least, not yet – but stands to benefit nevertheless from physical, moral, and spiritual self-vigilance. "Nowe goe and bragge of thy present happinesse, whosoever thou art", Burton writes at the end of his discourse on the multiple causes of melancholy,

[. . .] brag of thy temperature, of thy good parts, insult, triumph, and boast; thou seest in what a brittle state thou art, how soone thou maist be dejected, how many several waies, by bad diet, bad ayre, a small losse, a little sorrow or discontent, an ague, &c. how many sudden accidents may procure thy ruine, what a small tenure of happinesse thou hast in this life, how weake and silly a creature thou art. *Humble thy selfe therefore under the mighty hand of God. 1. Pet. 5. 6.* know thy selfe, acknowledge thy present misery, and make right use of it.

(1.2.5.5; I: 380; cf. 1.3.2.1, I: 408)

Sometimes, we may suspect, the object is also the author himself – "And why not? *Cardan* professeth he writ his booke *De Consolatione* after his Sonnes death, to comfort himselfe, so did *Tully* write of the same Subject with like intent, after his Daughters departure [. . .]" ("Democritus Junior to the Reader"; I: 7).

Other thematic continuities in the *Anatomy* come more closely into focus when it is read in its immediate historical context, not only as an artefact of Burton's humanistic intellectual and literary milieu, but more concretely as his response to the political and religious tensions of early Stuart England. From 1610, all graduands at Oxford had been required to take an oath of allegiance to the crown (Clark 2002, 88), and like most of his colleagues Burton explicitly supported the monarchy. But for him the condition of the body politic, for which the king was ultimately responsible in contemporary eyes, was a provocation to bitter discontentment. The list of grievances is long, and expressed in a heavily moralised vision that cleaves fast to the traditional model of classical humanist politics, and resists the contemporary allurements of both 'reason of state' thinking and conceptions of divine-right monarchy. The morally corrupt court, the capricious and failing system of scholarly patronage, the idle and useless aristocracy, the material neglect of the kingdom and the welfare of its populace, the grasping and contentious lawyers, the needless bloodshed and false glory of military conflict, and the widespread degeneration of moral virtue, are all lamented and denounced as enervating moral and political vices that render the body politic "melancholic" ("Democritus Junior to the Reader"; I: 66–85).

Most seriously of all, for Burton, the English commonwealth was suffering from a grievous loss of social stability and spiritual rectitude that had been triggered by confessional religious strife. The latter theme appears in the preface and in various places in the main treatise, but it is fleshed out in most detail in the final Section of the book, where the author's religious views colour the text most vividly, and indeed give rise to invective and polemic. Burton was undoubtedly committed to the Reformed English Church, but this part of the book does not reserve its ire for Roman Catholicism, non-Christian religions, or atheism. Its most pointed and controversial attacks, which are progressively sharpened in the expanded editions that appeared in 1624, 1628, 1632 and 1638, are upon those within the Protestant camp, most prominently the radical Calvinists and puritans, who are ridiculed for their 'enthusiastic' claims of direct divine inspiration and denounced as fomenters of melancholic despair. Here, however, Burton faces a difficulty. The *Anatomy* expresses regret that after its necessary Reformation, Christendom has dissolved into warring religious sects and confessions. Burton finds himself unavoidably committed to the notion of a unitary religious orthodoxy, and a theological middle ground later called Anglicanism. Yet as he knows very well, the identity of this 'middle ground' was itself the subject of deep and intractable dispute, and thereby also a cause of ongoing conflict and religious melancholy. As he cannot bring himself to accept religious toleration, there is seemingly no way out of this deadlock, only the refuge of nostalgia. In his lamenting of the divisive and destructive effects of the Reformation (1.2.2.6; I: 244), in the end Burton comes to share the religious longing of his brother William, who had a similar loathing for puritans and the fanatical excesses of zealotry (Cust 2004), for a lost society where the worship of God is a source of harmony and continuity with the past, and where spirituality rears rather than dejects the soul.

Perhaps the most important thematic consistency in the *Anatomy*, however, is found in the structure of Burton's engagement with his readership via his book. The text dramatizes a self-therapeutic encounter between an individual author and his books, and the world through his books. The reader is drawn in, first as an observer, and then, to the extent that he or she accepts Burton's arguments and heeds his warnings about our own vulnerabilities, as a participant who can follow a similar course. There is something deeply classical about the structure of this encounter, which follows the passage of the ancient 'spiritual exercise' (Hadot 1995, 210–11). The pursuit of self-knowledge leads to an understanding of what the self shares with others, and devolves into the pursuit of knowledge about the common repository of human nature: its frailties as well as its capacities, its divine purpose but also its mortality, its potential nobility but its real madness. What starts with individual melancholy, then, must move to the common melancholy of humanity (cf. Screech 1983). The labile and Protean persona of Democritus Junior conceals elements of Burton's individuality, but this is essential to his performance in the 'common theatre' of the world as the means by which he can universalize his melancholic condition, easing if not dissolving his own petty discontents as he shares in and sympathises with the common misery and madness. However fragmentary and chaotic the *Anatomy* might appear at first sight, its governing impulse is to draw out the continuities that can be detected as threads running through the diversity of human history, that connect the melancholy of the present with that of the past, and the melancholy of the author with that of his readership and the rest of humanity.

3 Aesthetics: Literary Strategies

The *Anatomy* contains much serious material, but from the start it plays games with its readers. The first involves trying to find the author, who presents himself pseudonymously on the title page as "Democritus Junior", and continues to refer to himself as such in the preface and elsewhere in the book. Jean Starobinski (1962, 23) once said of Burton that he is the monster in a labyrinth of his own creation, but he is also one who deliberately leaves traces. In the first edition, the "Conclusion to the Reader" ends by revealing Burton's college and real name (Burton 1621, sig. Ddd3^v); the second is technically anonymous, but contains several clues, including references to his family patrimony in Fauld and to William and Ralph Burton as his brothers (2.2.3.1; II: 66 and 3.2.5.3; III: 232); and the frontispiece of all the other editions also presents a small portrait of the author along with his family coat of arms. When the game continues in the prefatory satire, Burton's opening invitation to speculate about his motivation for concealing his identity quickly moves on to an account of the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus, explaining the author's choice of adopted forebear as a scholarly predecessor who also suffered from

melancholy and sought to understand and cure the condition. That there is more to the association than this, however, is indicated by the detailed account given later in the preface of the “Letter to Damagetes”, one of a series of letters purporting to be written by the famous physician Hippocrates of Cos (they were later forgeries, but nearly all Renaissance scholars considered them authentic). In the tale, which gives an account of how Democritus came to be known as the ‘laughing philosopher’, the citizens of Abdera summon Hippocrates to examine Democritus, who has concerned them with his apparently delirious laughter. The physician discovers the philosopher alone in his garden, thinking and writing about melancholy and madness, and surrounded by the corpses of dissected animals. Pressed for an explanation of his laughter, Democritus delivers a diatribe about the insanity of his fellow human beings, mercilessly castigating their intellectual failings and moral weaknesses. Contemptuous derision, as he explains to Hippocrates, is the only possible response to the perception of humanity’s stupidity, vice, and madness. The physician concludes that it is not Democritus who is mad, but the Abderans, and in fact the rest of humanity (I: 33–37).

This indeed is the main message of “Democritus Junior to the Reader”, a satirical *tour de force* that updates the “Letter to Damagetes” and ranges far and wide in its ridicule of the multifarious melancholic madness of the world as Burton sees it. Sometimes the preface has been seen as a piece of comic entertainment that is peripheral to his main aims, which are pursued seriously in the rest of the book (Burton 1989–2000, xxxii–xxxiii). Most critics now recognise, however, that the distinction between a playful ‘literary’ and a ‘serious’ scholarly text is unhelpful when applied to Burton’s work. Such an approach sits ill at ease not only with the fundamental moral purpose of satire, which in the Renaissance as in antiquity was a well-recognised literary vehicle for the denunciation and correction of vice, but also with what the author himself tells us. Near the end of the satire, we are promised “a more sober discourse” (I: 112) to come, but this is immediately undercut by a series of reverses: an admission that the author has failed to refrain from lashing out satirically in the rest of the book, an announcement that if he offends anyone he will deny or recant everything, and an obviously ironic presumption of “good favour” from a reader who from the beginning has been teased, mocked, denounced, and is then threatened in a Latin poem that dismisses anyone “mischievously idle” enough to criticise the author (I: 113–15). Even if the satirical mockery is not all to be taken literally, the subtitle given on the frontispiece indicates the preface ‘conduces’ to the rest of the book in a number of important ways. Perhaps most obviously, it serves as an introduction and guide to the key themes of the *Anatomy* by showing how the condition of melancholy, an “Epidemical” disease according to contemporary medical testimony, has spread through the world, afflicting men of every sort in their social, moral, and religious lives, and descending collectively upon families, cities, and states. With the partial exception of the intriguing utopian interlude, which presents a healthy mirror-image of the melancholic body politic (I: 85–97), there is almost

nothing substantial mentioned in the satirical survey of the world that is not expanded upon in the rest of the book.

‘Democritus Junior’ pays close attention to his reader, and the preface offers a number of more specific steers towards what Burton sees as the appropriate interpretation of his book. Some of these are more forceful and easily detectable than others, and it is not always easy to be sure with an author who consciously follows in the footsteps of a figure who was notorious for his “Ironically passion” (I: 33). But several messages delivered in the preface rebound into the main work. The first is carried by the frequently repeated claim that melancholic madness is a universal human affliction. In the rest of the *Anatomy* the subject of the discussion is defined technically, in the terms of contemporary medical pathology, as a particular species of madness (*delirium*) that primarily affects the imagination (1.1.3.1; I: 162–63), and whenever Burton draws on medical sources he typically refers to this specific conception of melancholy as a disease. In the preface, however, melancholy is conflated with a general idea of moral, spiritual and intellectual madness, and also identified explicitly with a range of irrational psychological conditions to which human beings are generally subject, such as discontentment, fear, sorrow, or indeed any emotional perturbation (“Democritus Junior to the Reader”; I: 25–26, cf. 109–110). Careful readers will see that this tendency to expand the sense of melancholic madness beyond its technical confines resurfaces periodically in the rest of the book, especially when Burton is using non-medical sources and writing in a moral, religious or literary vein (in the first Partition, see, for example, 1.2.3.1–1.2.4.7; I: 246–371; in the second: 2.3.1.1–2.3.8.1; II: 125–207; and in the third: 3.2.3.1; III: 139–95 and 3.4.1.1–3.4.2.6; III: 330–446). We might wonder why he creates such an obvious tension with regard to the central subject of the *Anatomy*, not least because he is clearly aware of it. Perhaps it is to communicate, somewhat obliquely, a general scepticism about the inability of precise or overly narrow theoretical descriptions to capture the multiple complexities and dimensions of melancholy (1.3.1.4; I: 407–8). The clearest effect, however, is to broaden the reference of the medical theory into areas of human experience that physicians had generally been reluctant to address, encouraging readers to see the multiple connections between human physiology, psychology, ethics, religion, and history. More specifically, it presents to us the many ways in which our own physical, moral, and spiritual condition renders us susceptible to melancholic madness. Not everyone will suffer from the disease in its medical sense, but everyone suffers from some kind of melancholic irrationality and passion at some point in their lives. In a brief but critical discussion of different meanings of the word ‘melancholy’, which echoes a passage from the preface (I: 25) and enables him to make a move not found in any of his contemporary medical sources, Burton draws on the ancient ethical distinction between a transitory “disposition” and a settled pathological “habit”: anyone that experiences fear, sorrow or a disturbing vexation is melancholic in the former, technically improper sense, which actually describes “the character of

Mortality” (see Radden 2017). But whilst dispositional melancholy is formally distinct from the fixed, habitual pathology of melancholy properly speaking, our fallible predicament is such that, left unchecked, the disposition leads to the habit, as our mortal human nature draws us into a melancholy that is “fixed” and “hardly to be removed” (1.1.1.5; I: 136–39). Just as he signals in the preface, Burton universalizes melancholy for the readership of the *Anatomy*.

We are also given information about the author’s apparently paradoxical motivations, and about the way he has written his book. “I write of Melancholy”, he states, “by being busie to avoid Melancholy” (“Democritus Junior to the Reader”; I: 6). Burton’s own melancholy lies at the heart of the *Anatomy*, but it remains almost unknown, and the depths of his inner life are not delved into by a text whose regular direction of movement is outwards and away from the author. Burton says that when he began to write he had been suffering at the hands of his “Mistris *Melancholy* [...] my *malus Genius*”, and does provide a small detail when he describes “a kind of Impostume” – a swelling, which doctors would probably have attributed to a superfluity of the melancholic humour – in his head (I: 7). And he also claims authority on the subject of melancholy on the basis of his own experience of the disease, apparently providing the first usage of the word ‘melancholize’ as an intransitive verb in the English language (I: 8). Yet there is no Romantic or Proustian introspection here. The book may be labelled as an “evacuation” of Burton’s “burdened heart” and “pregnant head”, but there are few places where he writes directly about his own melancholic experience, and even these, such as the poetic meditation on bittersweet feelings and thoughts in the “Authors Abstract of Melancholy” (I: lxix–lxxi), which was first published in the fourth edition of 1632, tend to be heavily stylized. More commonly, his self-therapeutic verbalisation of the condition eschews autobiography in favour of writing about it in others. The *Anatomy* in this respect appears as a diversionary psychological exercise, comprised of the “playing labor” of reading and writing (I: 7), that eases the mind and wards off idleness in a search for knowledge that will ultimately be of benefit to all. That is one way for the melancholic cause to become the melancholic antidote.

The presentation of the book as a self-therapeutic enterprise, however, presents its readers with a dilemma, and it is one that reverts us to the central problem of the “Letter to Damagetes.” What is really to be cured: the universal melancholic madness of the world, or the particular affliction of Democritus? If our perception and understanding of the former arise from the latter, what are the consequences? Such questions are intimated in the preface – particularly by the author’s startling admission at the end that “I have anatomized mine own folly [...]. I have had a raving fit” (I: 112), and by his acknowledgement, first appearing in the “Conclusion” of the first edition but subsequently relocated to the preface, that having put himself “on the stage” for censure, “I have layd my selfe open (I know it) in this Treatise, turned mine inside outward” (I: 13; cf. Burton 1621, sig. Dddr). The paradox is familiar to readers of the Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* (1509), a work whose

influence on humanistic literature persisted into the seventeenth century, and to which Burton was clearly indebted (Colie 1967). A similarly unsettling effect is accomplished by the ambiguous authority of the presiding figure of ‘Democritus Junior’, which draws upon contrasting contemporary views of his predecessor: who is speaking, the paragon of experimental medical learning, who seeks to understand melancholy by dissecting and understanding nature? Or the philosophical satirist whose mockery of the mad world also serves as a symptom of his own melancholic discontent? Perhaps it is both.

4 Reception and Theoretical Perspectives

The *Anatomy of Melancholy* has been many things to many different readers, and has had a long history of eliciting diverse and conflicting responses from literary critics. Since its publication it has been seen as a work of literary scholarship, an encyclopedic treasure-trove of learning, a satire that mixes and parodies a variety of serious and comic styles, a spiritual homily in disguise, and a book of consolation – to name just a few of the classifications. The multiple disagreements among modern critics about the *Anatomy*, which have revolved around questions of genre and overall purpose as well as more specific interpretative issues raised by particular parts of this very large and heterogeneous book, would have amused Burton, and are highly unlikely to be resolved soon. In Anglophone circles at least, probably the only area of broad consensus – and it is very broad – is that the *Anatomy* is a mixture of serious scholarly and playful literary elements. Beyond that, the contested rise of ‘historicist’ interpretation, and different attitudes toward authorial intention, have led to a striking proliferation of divergent approaches to the book. In one strand of interpretation, inaugurated in twentieth-century Anglo-American criticism by Northrop Frye’s rather casual classification of the work as a ‘Menippean satire’, and influentially elaborated in a reader-response analysis by Stanley Fish (1972, 303–52), is anti-historicist, either explicitly or implicitly, and presents the *Anatomy* as a complex, contradictory, and fundamentally ludic text that requires a sophisticated and often counter-intuitive hermeneutics, sometimes with postmodernist resonances, to reveal its paradoxical inner workings and aesthetic pleasures (Fox 1976; Heusser 1987; Daniel 2013, 155–99; Shirilan 2015). A second strand maintains an overarching emphasis on the various literary complexities of the text, but locates Burton at its centre and presents the *Anatomy* as the self-expressive product of his relation with his cultural environment. This approach has been more positively receptive of historical scholarship, often placing in the book in dialogue with early modern literary, medical and philosophical sources, and it has been marked more recently by an ‘affective’ turn in literary studies, where the subject of melancholy has become particularly prominent (Wong 1998; Williams 2001, 2003 and 2012; Trevor 2004, 116–49; Kitzes

2006, 123–50; Sullivan 2016). A third strand, in which the ironic and humorous elements of Burton's book are usually acknowledged but seen as either subordinate to or integrated within a more serious scholarly or philosophical enterprise, is fundamentally historical. The first significant interpretation of this kind was produced by Lawrence Babb (1959), but the most substantial manifestation of the historicist study of the *Anatomy* has been the publication of the Clarendon edition, which appeared in six volumes between 1989 and 2000, and lays bare the depth as well as the breadth of Burton's learning. The focus of subsequent historicist interpretations of the *Anatomy* (under which heading, as the content of this essay shows, I include my own work) has been varied, ranging from studies of the relationship between author and reader, and of the learning itself, to the moral, political and spiritual aspects of its discussion of melancholy. In this strand of criticism, the importance of locating the work in its historical context is usually acknowledged or taken as a given, and the *Anatomy* is viewed as a repository of Burton's intentions – even if these are sometimes difficult to detect or recover with a satisfying degree of certainty (Höltgen 1976a; O'Connell 1986; Vicari 1989; Kiessling 1988 and 1990; Tilmouth 2005; Gowland 2006; Schmidt 2007; Lund 2010; Murphy 2014; Knight 2013).

No matter where one stands, the publication of the Clarendon edition marked a watershed in Burton studies. Its six volumes, three of text and three of commentary, are now indispensable for any serious scholarship on Burton (1989–2000). In the meticulous commentary, John Bamborough, initially assisted by Martin Dodsworth, drew upon the labours of previous editors and scholars – most notably Arthur Shilleto and Edward Bensly – and took them substantially further, to verify or track down a large proportion of the thousands of quotations and references found in the book, and also explicated many of its more arcane passages. Even more valuable, however, have been the three volumes of the text itself. Burton repeatedly complained about the many errors in all of the editions published in his lifetime, and which significantly marred every previous version of the book printed before 1989. By purging the text of as many errors as possible, and also recording significant variants between the 1621–1651 editions, the Clarendon editors provided a version of the book that, in the absence of an authorial manuscript, comes as close as can probably be hoped to something that would have satisfied Burton himself. The Clarendon edition is, however, not beyond criticism. It is a 'Mischtext' incorporating material from the editions of 1621, 1624, 1628, 1632, 1638, and 1651, but takes the 1632 version as the copy-text because there is surviving evidence that Burton himself read and corrected read proof for this edition, and on the further grounds that this is the most error-free and not marked by the more modern compositorial preferences in spelling and punctuation found in the later editions. The result is therefore a peculiar hybrid, the product of a desire to achieve a text that is historically authentic but also accurate, leading to the manufacture of a new version which is substantially different from all of those which actually appeared in Burton's time. Without an authorial manuscript, moreover, the reliance on the Greg-Bowers approach to editing, which involves distinguishing between

accidental and substantive features of a text and has been the subject of criticism in recent bibliographical scholarship, is fraught with difficulty; some of the editorial emendations are at least questionable (↗ 1 Editing English Renaissance Texts). Perhaps most regrettably, the textual notes are placed at the end of the text of each Partition, rather than on the relevant pages (as in the Clarendon editions of Bacon or Hobbes). This makes the process of tracing textual variants and checking editorial interventions a tedious and almost prohibitively time-consuming exercise; it is not surprising, then, that the textual notes have not been prominently studied in recent interpretative scholarship on the *Anatomy*.

Nevertheless, in conjunction with Nicolas Kiessling's catalogue of Burton's personal library (Kiessling 1989), the provision of a generally reliable text in the Clarendon edition has put us in a far better position from which to understand what Burton was up to when he wrote the *Anatomy*, and to eradicate some of the more egregious errors that have tended to creep into Burton scholarship in the past. It does not, of course, resolve the most serious critical disagreements about how the work can or ought to be read, which will undoubtedly persist.

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