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SCHOLARSHIP ON ROBERT BURTON'S

THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

by

Matthew J. Bishop

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

by

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Utah State University, 2016

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The history of scholarship on Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* will be explored in this thesis, beginning with a biographical background of Robert Burton and a brief description of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The overall arc of scholarship on Burton's text began with a wave of early popularity in the seventeenth century, followed by a period of critical neglect in the eighteenth century when no new editions of the book were published. A renewed interest in the *Anatomy* in the nineteenth century led to a flurry of Burton studies in the twentieth century. The major trend in Burton scholarship has generally been a historical approach to studying the *Anatomy*, with a reader response methodology, championed by Stanley Fish, branching off as a major strand in the early 1970s. In the twenty-first century scholarship has clustered around exploring the historical context of the *Anatomy*, as exemplified by the research of Angus Gowland. A synthesis of historical and reader response research has recently been accomplished by Mary Lund. (35 pages)

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Matthew J. Bishop

Literary Review of Scholarship on Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

Biographical background of Robert Burton

Robert Burton was born in Leicestershire, England on February 8, 1576 and died in 1636. He was a fast learner in school and developed a remarkable talent for writing. He was also a prodigious reader with a remarkable memory for scholarly quotations that extended back to antiquity. According to his first biography, written by Anthony Wood and published in 1690, “no Man in his time did surpass him for his ready and dexterous interlarding his common discourses among them with Verses from the Poets or Sentences from classical Authors” (627). But his highest claim to fame is his extensive study published with the title *The Anatomy of Melancholy* under the pseudonym of “Democritus Junior” (named after the ancient laughing philosopher Democritus). The *Anatomy* was first published in 1621, followed by updated editions in 1624, 1628, 1632, 1638, and 1651. Burton was known by his contemporaries for both his laughter and melancholy, which makes his pseudonym seem fitting. He never married but concentrated his time on academic pursuits and associating with Oxford university scholars. He was admitted as a fellow at Christ Church in 1599. He tried unsuccessfully to attain professorial positions at university, but in 1616 he was made the Vicar of St. Thomas's Parish in Oxford. This vicarage, as well as the Rectory of Seagrave in Leicestershire which he was later given, remained under his authority until his death. From 1621 onward Burton revised the *Anatomy* through multiple editions.

There is some controversy over the manner of Burton's death. Shortly before his death in 1636 he had written the words to his own epitaph, which hint at a death by suicide: “Here lies

Democritus Junior, to whom melancholy gave life and death.” Adding further fuel to the rumor of his suicide is the remarkable accuracy of his own astrological prediction of the time of his death. The rumor of his suicide was repeated by his first biographer Anthony Wood, who reported that, according to the students that Burton had taught at Christ Church college, “he sent up his Soul to Heaven thro' a slip about his Neck” (628). However, Wood also offered evidence against the suicide by noting the fact that Burton's body was buried in the Cathedral of Christ Church, a place in which no suicide was allowed to be buried (626). A modern biographer, Michael O'Connell, dismisses the rumor of suicide by pointing out that Burton's firm belief in the astrological prediction of his death was sufficient to have seriously affected his emotional health and consequently his physical health. O'Connell writes that this “scare” could have brought “on a crisis of a pre-existent condition” leading to his death (33). Nevertheless, the possibility that Burton did indeed kill himself has not been entirely ruled out by Burton scholars, and the consensus among those who believe he committed suicide is that he accomplished it by hanging himself in his private room at Christ Church college after a lifetime of struggling with the pain of melancholy (of which he so eloquently wrote). By the time of the publication of his 1690 biography, Robert Burton was better known as “Democritus Junior” among scholars, thus demonstrating how firmly the *Anatomy* had become attached to his name (Wood 628).

Brief description of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

The Anatomy of Melancholy is a vast collection (circa 900 pages in the first edition) of Burton's treatises on the descriptions, causes, symptoms and cures of melancholy, a disease that was quite prevalent in early modern England. Because of its tremendous amount of quotations it has sometimes been described as a cento. Burton organized his book into a frontispiece (see fig.

1), introduction and three lengthy sections devoted to (1) causes and symptoms of melancholy, (2) cures, and (3) religious and love melancholy. Burton's survey of the phenomena of melancholy in all its various forms included the learning of contemporary scholars as well as those from the medieval period to antiquity. Generally speaking, Burton based his view of melancholy on a rational interpretation of medieval physiological texts that focused on specific biological causes and cures. However, to a lesser extent, Burton also included astrological and other irrational phenomena outside the domain of science in his survey of melancholy, perhaps in an effort to make his study all-inclusive and appealing to the largest possible audience. Due to his verbose writing style and tendency to digress, the topics of Burton's early modern scholarship are sometimes tangentially connected to the subject of melancholy. His sources, from whom he liberally quotes, include, but are not limited to, Galen, Aristotle, and Hippocrates. In addition to a vast array of quoted scholars, Burton also bolsters his text with the contemporary and traditional theories of medicine, astronomy, astrology, theology, human anatomy, and humoral theories. His notes that, according to humoral theory, the four main liquids, or humors, of the body are blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile), and black bile. Melancholy can result from an imbalance of the four humors with an overabundance of black bile. This ancient and medieval medical theory of humors was generally accepted by the consensus of early modern physiologists. According to Burton, the unbridled expression of emotions, the eating of a poor diet, or breathing foul air, as well as several other unhealthy activities, can cause an imbalance in the humoral fluids of the body, which in turn can cause melancholy. Thus, Burton characterizes melancholy as a disease that can be brought upon not only from an imbalance of humors at birth, but also through careless neglect of self-discipline.

Burton agrees with Galen that a lack of self-control of one's emotions and passions could

heat a person's yellow bile, degenerating it into an unnatural form of black bile. Burton says this predicament causes people to "degenerate into beasts" and transform into melancholy monsters (Shilleto i.128). He appeals to his readers to carefully manage their emotions lest they bring upon themselves the disease of melancholy, which will make them unproductive members of society and could result in suicide. His stress on the ethical responsibility a person has to avoid melancholy distinguishes his book from earlier medical texts. His emphasis on controlling the passions is a hallmark of his writing and he devotes 190 pages of the *Anatomy of Melancholy* to the dangers of not governing one's emotions. The warning language Burton uses is evocative of the confusing terror and hopelessness of melancholy madness. For example, he warns of the danger of becoming lost in a "labyrinth of...miseries" (Shilleto i. 138). Once a person gets the melancholic sickness it is very hard to cure, and the person is usually left to wander in pain. In the broadest sense, Burton included everyone in his reading audience because he believed that nobody is immune from becoming trapped in the labyrinth of melancholy, not even highborn royalty or intellectual scholars like himself. Burton was a man of expansive ideas and labile emotions, which is sometimes reflected in rambling and seemingly contradictory passages of the *Anatomy*. At times, Burton's language in the *Anatomy* becomes obsessive and frenetic and seems to indicate that he is worried that his own melancholy will overwhelm him. In his book, he assumes two narrative voices, his own anxious voice and the corresponding voice of scientific reason of his pseudonym Democritus Junior. Although the foremost expert on melancholy of his time, Burton is clearly worried about the danger that melancholy poses to his own health. Burton believes that by keeping busy by reading, studying, and writing, the effects of melancholy can be diminished and held at bay. Hence, his purpose in writing the *Anatomy* is not only to help other people but also to help himself. For centuries, since its first edition was published in 1621,

scholars have struggled to come to terms with the complex meaning and message of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Perhaps overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the text, the typical strategy employed by scholars was to simplify its complexity into a single genre category. Generally speaking, scholarly interpretations of the *Anatomy* have spiraled through the centuries in a repeating cycle of alternatively viewing it as a serious text of knowledge or a frivolous but entertaining book of prose.

Scholarship on *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

It seems that Burton himself had a particular genre in mind for his study: a Latinate philosophical text. He originally wanted to write the *Anatomy* in Latin (as was the custom of the time for professional scholarly tomes), which evidently indicated that he intended his text to be taken seriously as a philosophical treatise. Unfortunately for Burton, his publishers refused to publish his work in Latin, deeming the language a potential liability to general sales, so he compromised and wrote it in English. Burton subsequently apologized to his readers for writing his study in English, as well as for his background as a theologian writing a book on Physic. This seems to indicate that he feared his readers might classify his book into a religious genre due to his theological background, whereas he wanted his book to be classified in the genre of Physic. Based on the evidence collected and analyzed by Mary Ann Lund in *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England*, Burton's contemporary readers of the *Anatomy* seem to have generally responded to it as if it were in the Physic genre, seriously reading it for help and understanding about the ubiquitous disease of melancholy (as Burton had hoped and expected they would.)

By the late seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century, the *Anatomy* was generally no longer viewed as a helpful guide for avoiding or alleviating melancholy, although it

was still held up as an example of impressive scholarship and collection of wisdom gleaned through the ages. For example Thomas Fuller in *The History of the Worthies of England*, a lengthy grouping of famous Englishmen published after Fuller's death in 1661, notes that Burton's *Anatomy* is “an excellent book...wherein he hath piled up variety of much excellent learning” (239). Ignoring its literary qualities and philosophical soundness, Fuller characterizes the *Anatomy* as a philological book, and acknowledges its huge popularity by declaring that “Scarce any book of philology in our land hath in so short a time passed so many impressions” (239). Anthony Wood, in his 1690 biography of Burton, generally agrees with Fuller's assessment and notes that the popularity of the *Anatomy* is also evidenced by the many cases of writers stealing passages from it with or without crediting Burton as the source (ii.652).

The mid- to late-eighteenth century generally saw the rise of a casual readership in England that did not view the *Anatomy* as a serious exploration and cure for melancholy, but a book to be read for pleasure, filled with entertaining wit and clever satire. In his introduction to a modern edition of the *Anatomy*, Holbrook Jackson notes that the irony of this melancholic text becoming a light-hearted entertaining read was unintended by Burton because he “was no hypochondriac, and had no intention of compiling a doleful work” (xvii). Not only was the *Anatomy* generally not taken seriously in the late eighteenth century, but the disease of melancholy itself began to generally be viewed with some measure of skepticism. The history of the public panic over the disease of melancholy in the previous century was viewed as a quaint overreaction of the older generations. The lukewarm interest in the *Anatomy* among eighteenth-century readers is evidenced by the fact that no new editions of the book were published in that century. However, in America, a small revival of reading the *Anatomy* as a serious text on philosophy and morality was led by late eighteenth-century statesmen including Benjamin

Franklin.

A resurgence of interest in the *Anatomy* as a serious work of scholarship during the nineteenth century seemed somewhat unlikely due to a common perception of Burton as a wondrous spinner of prose but generally out of touch with important contemporary issues. For instance, in Charles Lamb's *Last Essays of Elia*, published in 1833, Burton and the *Anatomy* are characterized as follows: "I do not know a more heartless sight than the reprint of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. What need was there of unearthing the bones of that fantastic old great man, to expose them in a winding-sheet of the newest fashion to modern censure? What hapless stationer could dream of Burton ever becoming popular?" (45). In 1893 a landmark edition of the *Anatomy* was published that influenced scholarship studying it as an anatomy with a serious purpose. The editor, A. R. Shilleto, used the earliest editions of the *Anatomy* as his source material because no copy of the original text existed. Shilleto's edition of the *Anatomy* would be a cornerstone for Burton scholarship for years to come, through the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the next.

Another significant proponent of Burton scholarship near the turn of the twentieth century was the medical scholar and physician Sir William Osler. In the late nineteenth century he became one of the co-founders of the renowned Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, and today is generally considered a father of modern medicine. He wielded enormous influence on rehabilitating Robert Burton's reputation as a serious scholar. His authoritative declaration in 1914 that the *Anatomy* is "the greatest medical treatise written by a layman" catalyzed renewed activity in Burton scholarship. (252, qtd. in Jackson xxiv). According to William Mueller, "Sir William Osler [was] the first critic to emphasize the serious intention of [Burton] and the serious nature of his work; Burton is viewed not chiefly as a man of learning or

as a literary curiosity, but as a man concerned primarily with his expressed purpose of showing the causes, symptoms, and cures of melancholy” (“Frontispiece” 1074).

Inspired by Osler and other scholars, Mueller wrote an article that framed the *Anatomy* as medical scholarship devoted to the causes, symptoms, and cures of melancholy, titled “Robert Burton's Frontispiece.” Mueller theorizes that the introduction, especially the frontispiece, of the *Anatomy* was a microcosm that explains the book as a whole. Burton's frontispiece (see fig. 1) consisted of a full page graphic divided into ten plate engravings of artwork arranged around a central box of text listing the title, author, and publisher. All ten plates have some connection to the subject of melancholy and graphically contain depictions of Democritus, jealousy, solitude, love melancholy, hypochondria, superstition, madness, borage (an herbal cure), hellebore (another herbal cure), and Democritus Junior.

The first two editions of the *Anatomy* did not have a frontispiece. Burton's decision to include a frontispiece of engraved artwork in the *Anatomy's* third edition was in response to the desires of his readers, according to Mueller. Furthermore, the numbering and key of the frontispiece in the fourth edition was in response to the needs of his readership. Although Mueller's mid-twentieth-century study is grounded in the artwork and text of the *Anatomy*, he seems to anticipate the reader-response methodology that would become very popular in the late twentieth century. For example, Mueller shows Burton's attentiveness to his readership through quotations such as this: “Burton's reader, having perused four such woeful studies of victims of melancholy, needs some reassurance; the author obliges by presenting two plates containing cures for the disease” (“Frontispiece” 1085). Mueller's study influenced future Burton scholarship by popularizing the view that the beginning of the *Anatomy* is a kind of shorthand for the rest of its contents. Mueller followed up on the success of his article by publishing a concise

book, *The Anatomy of Robert Burton's England*, which served as a general overview of the *Anatomy*. In addition to presenting the *Anatomy* as a scholarly precursor that influenced the progress of science towards modern medicine, Mueller also provides a historical background that showcases ways in which Burton's text represents and responds to the theological and social-political movements of early modern England.

The early work of twentieth-century scholars such as Mueller brought Burton to the attention of one of the major twentieth-century critics, Northrup Frye. In 1957 Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* was published, which contained four essays “on the possibility of a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism” (3). Although his book isn't specifically focused on the *Anatomy*, Frye does mention Burton and the *Anatomy*, particularly in his fourth essay, “Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres.” Frye argues that the *Anatomy* is not an example of Menippean satire, as it had been previously categorized by other twentieth-century Burton scholars, because early modern Menippean satire followed the ancient format of “philosophus gloriosus,” a satire against philosophies, which Frye believed was not applicable to the *Anatomy*. Instead, Frye classified the *Anatomy* in the “anatomy” genre, a decision that was largely agreed upon by subsequent scholars up until the 1970s when Bud Korkowski published his rebuttal, “Genre and Satiric Strategy in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*,” which argues against Northrop Frye's classification of the *Anatomy* because the term “anatomy” was historically used in Burton's era (1575-1650) as a catch all term for “poems, treatises, devotional works—in short, for such a variety of forms as to render hopeless any idea that 'anatomy' ever implied a specific genre” (75). Korkowski argues that the *Anatomy* does indeed conform to Menippean satire, and that Frye's definition of this type of satire was historically inaccurate. Korkowski's Menippean satiric characterization of the *Anatomy* prevailed

in the consensus of Burtonian studies over Frye's "anatomy" characterization for much of the rest of the twentieth century until a new generation of Burton scholars in the twenty-first century, notably Mary Lund, dismissed the applicability of Menippean satire to the *Anatomy*.

Returning to the mid-twentieth century, the publishing rate of books in America increased dramatically in the 1950s due to the "general industrial growth after World War II," as well as "rising educational levels [and] the importance of higher education (stimulated by the GI Bill...)" (Harlan and Johnston 395-6). It is not surprising then, that as the 1950s drew to a close, a short but well-researched book by Lawrence Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam*, a study entirely focused on Burton's *Anatomy*, was purchased by a curious readership of scholars and laypeople alike. Within the succinct 116 pages of *Sanity in Bedlam*, Babb offers readers a concise yet informative overview of Burton's *Anatomy*. Writing for a new generation of *Anatomy's* readers, Babb's study is quite accessible to the scholar and laypeople alike, and his writing style is user friendly. As Sir William Osler famously noted decades earlier, the *Anatomy* is "the greatest medical treatise written by a layman" (252, qtd. in Jackson xxiv). Therefore, it seems appropriate that a study of the *Anatomy* that was accessible to laypeople (but with critical depth that would also appeal to scholars) would eventually be written in book form, as attested by this publication of Babb's.

One of Babb's purposes is to help the reader negotiate the twists and turns of the *Anatomy's* unfolding: "For the book is very long; its content is heterogeneous and not too well ordered; its timeless elements are confusedly intermingled with the obsolete. Neither its meanings nor its merits are immediately obvious" (Babb xi). While acknowledging the scholarly publications of the past, Babb says, "There remains a certain vagueness, however, about the nature and purposes of Burton's book, and its reputation is consequently less than it deserves" (xi). Babb also believed that the historical context of the *Anatomy* was somewhat muddled as

well because of the modern mindset that sometimes imposes meaning on early modern times. Babb uses the modern parlance of “science” as an example, and notes that when researchers speak of the early modern sciences, “we call them sciences for lack of a better word, and in discussing them we often allow the modern connotations of *science* to obscure their true nature” (59). In this regard, Babb's overview of the *Anatomy* builds upon the work of Mueller by attempting to improve our understanding of the *Anatomy's* historical background without the bias of a modern scientific viewpoint. Babb's overall appraisal of the *Anatomy* is generally positive, but he does qualify his praise for Burton with statements that imply that the contents of the *Anatomy* aren't always as logically sound as its overall framework. For example, he states that “the distribution of material in the book is not quite so logical as one might expect” (4), and “[Burton] continually makes extended excursions into tangential fields...which sometimes are frankly digressions” (6). The section Babb is most critical of consists of the forty pages that Burton devoted to “Air rectified. With a digression of the Air.” Babb writes, “This section should consist of advice on what to do about climates and weathers that cause or aggravate melancholy” (6). But Babb laments that “no really definite opinion takes shape in his discourse on astronomy” (63). However, Babb isn't singling out Burton for criticism, but is rather placing him in the context of seventeenth-century literature of science in general, which Babb characterizes as “a perplexing confusion of the old and the new” (60). However, regarding “the subject matter promised by the title” of the *Anatomy*, Babb states, “Burton fulfills his promise with a comprehensive and detailed treatment of the subject of melancholy in the sense in which his contemporaries understood it” (2) And regarding the *Anatomy's* message as a whole, Babb offers this analysis: “Burton offers comfort for a long list of human miseries and calamities. The melancholy reader presumably will be able to find among the many topics the one which fits his

case, and the reading of the pertinent passage will ease his sorrow and therefore his melancholy” (7). Thus Babb sees Burton as a sympathetic humanist because of the *Anatomy's* “animated satiric representation of human life, in its perceptive explanations of life's harshness, and in the sympathetic counsel and consolation which the author extends to all whose burdens are too heavy” (7).

A shift occurred in Burton scholarship in the early 1970s that steered the direction of Burton scholarship towards reader response methodologies. A leader in this movement was Stanley Fish. In his book *Self Consuming Artifacts*, Fish devotes a fifty-page chapter, “Democritus Jr. to the Reader,” for an analysis of Robert Burton's *Anatomy*. He groups Burton together with other writers whose texts seem to fall apart due to lack of supporting structure and evidence. Fish makes the argument that the *Anatomy* is an example of how the symptoms of melancholy in a writer can affect the structure of his or her text. He presents Burton as a man of expansive ideals and quickly changing emotions, which is reflected in his contradictory passages of the *Anatomy*. The text itself is shown to be symbolic of the symptoms of melancholy with its disjointed passages, illogical arguments, sudden changes in emotional tone, rambling arguments that skip tracks from one disjointed thought to another, and in some cases incomplete syntax. Fish argues that the disorganization of the text is a mirror of Burton's psychological makeup not just in its content of ideas, but also in its presentation. The *Anatomy* is also very entertaining to read, according to Fish, who showcases Burton's clever irony and entertaining satire. The enjoyment of reading the *Anatomy* had attracted readers to Burton's text for hundreds of years, and Fish's study brought the enjoyment factor into the mainstream of twentieth-century Burton scholarship. Fish's influence in this regard extends into the twentieth century as well. For example, in the introduction of the 2001 reprint of the *Anatomy* edited by Holbrook Jackson,

William Gass revisits Fish's notion of the entertainment value of reading Burton's incomplete thought processes. However, Gass frames Burton's seemingly rambling writing as being more clear in its communication than perhaps Fish would concede. Gass quotes at length a rambling passage in which Burton lists the many chameleon shapes a writer can turn himself into. But Gass clarifies that “the sentence does indeed unravel, but into a flouncy tuffet, not into a maze or a stew. Meaning, motion and emotion are superbly fused. It achieves the tone of a tirade that, in the midst of its fury, smiles at itself, recognizes itself as a recital of fearful changeabilities and confident clichés.” Gass says it is “delicious” to listen to the moments when “Robert the Ranter rails” (xv-xvi).

Returning to Fish's assessment, whether Burton intentionally wrote his text as a grand joke, or whether he inadvertently wrote it that way, seems to be of secondary importance to Fish, who values the readers' response as his primary concern. Although the *Anatomy* may be an unreliable text, its value lies in its ironic humor (in the modern definition), given that Burton was self-diagnosed as a melancholic. But “the joke, of course, is on the reader” who is misled (308). Fish writes, “To a great extent the preface (and finally the whole of the *Anatomy*) is a series of false promises which alternatively discomfort the reader and lead him on” (304). Fish's assertion stands in direct contrast to Lawrence Babb's statement that regarding “the subject matter promised by the title” of the *Anatomy*, “Burton fulfills his promise with a comprehensive and detailed treatment of the subject” (2). As a reader, Fish's response to the *Anatomy* paints Burton as a master manipulator of rhetoric who avoids evidence and eschews logic in his claims, but nevertheless entertains his readers. Fish writes that Burton “pushes us, prods us, leads us on, trips us up, laughs at us, laughs with us, and makes us laugh at him. *He keeps us busy*” (italics in original) (349). Fish quotes Burton as follows, “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid

melancholy” (Burton 6). Burton argued that idleness was a cause of melancholy, and an ironic feature of the *Anatomy* is that although it might be nonsensical to some readers, it might actually cure melancholy, or at least allay the effects, by keeping the reader amused and busy. Fish states that melancholy, in all its distracting confusion, is finally something of a mercy” (349).

However, Fish qualifies this statement by noting that the consolation in the *Anatomy* is limited. He groups Burton together with other writers whose texts are self-consuming (e.g. Donne) and notes that Burton is different from these writers because he doesn't offer his readers significant consolation from the despair of his message. Fish writes, “it is as if the movement of Donne's *Devotions* did not include the reconciling prayer” (351). However, Fish sees the gloom in the *Anatomy* as amusing black comedy. The dark humor (in the modern sense) that Fish showcases, along with the playful irony and teasing satire of the *Anatomy*, made his study stand apart from other works in the early 1970s that examined the *Anatomy* as a serious compendium of knowledge (e.g. David Renaker's study in 1971). And, by and large, it was Fish's study that captured the excitement of Burton scholars as evidenced by their publications during the next two decades. In 1980 Fish generalized his theories in his book *Is There a Text in This Class*. Although there was never universal consensus among the varied opinions of Burton scholars, Fish's influence would loom large over the field and greatly influence the way scholars interpreted the *Anatomy* for much of the remaining years of the twentieth century until the landmark studies of the early twenty-first-century switched the prevailing paradigm to that of historical context research.

Despite the ascendancy of Fish's status in the early 1970s among Burton critics, some Burton scholarship carried on in previously established veins of research. Notable among these were concerns about the relationship of Burton's writings to his era's notions of geography and

astronomy. In particular, Richard Barlow, in “Infinite Worlds: Robert Burton's Cosmic Voyage,” delves deep into the *Anatomy's* “Digression of Air,” a section of the book that covers the geography and astronomy that was known at the time. According to Barlow, “Renaissance scholars have seen this chapter of the *Anatomy* as a piece of dialectic in which Burton is constantly moving back and forth from hypothesis to hypothesis, commenting on all the world systems” (291). The conclusion of these early scholars was that the “Digression of Air” was a “comprehensive, but jumbled, survey of the state of astronomy” (291). While respecting the opinions of the Renaissance commentators, Barlow takes issue with modern Burton scholars who have perpetuated the notion that the “Digression of Air” is a chaotic jumble of ideas. In particular, he disagrees with Lawrence Babb's statement that “it is impossible to state Burton's cosmological opinions” (292). According to Barlow, the source of the confusion regarding “Digression” is that “most scholars of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* base their assertions on Burton's early editions” and in the last edition fail to “discern Burton's position amid the array of astronomical speculations” (292). Barlow explains that in later editions, Burton changed his writing to be consistent with new astronomical findings. Barlow concludes that the text of the *Anatomy's* “Digression” not only endorses the cosmological theory of infinite worlds while dismissing Aristotelian astronomy, but is also an “epitome of the matrix period of early modern science” (302). According to Barlow, the meaning of the *Anatomy* can clearly be found by carefully following the development of his complex theses over the course of the text.

Another critic notable for historical-based Burton research in the early 1970s was Richard Nochimson, who asserted in “Studies in the Life of Robert Burton” that in order to understand the “literary qualities” of Burton the writer, we must study and understand the life of Burton the person. Nochimson explores the “complex literary relationship” between Burton's authorial

persona and his readers. The importance of this relationship will remain a significant strand of Burton scholarship up to and including the twenty-first century. Nochimson believed that the state of Burton studies was “muddled” with “amazing carelessness,” which had resulted in general confusion in criticism of the *Anatomy* (85). While acknowledging that some aspects of Burton's life might never be known, Nochimson argues that clearing up falsities in Burton's biographical background would result in a more accurate reading of the *Anatomy*. Central to Nochimson's argument is that Burton's personality is so intricately woven into his text, that an understanding of Burton, “whether his actual personality or the personality created by his rhetoric,” is essential to understanding the *Anatomy* (85). Nochimson asserts that Burton's life was a balance between partial fulfillment and disappointments and that equal measures of his exuberance and melancholy feed into his research and rhetoric in the *Anatomy*. The main idea that Nochimson seeks to convey is that Burton's full range of positive and negative experiences in his life gives the *Anatomy* its shape, depth, tone, and sometimes explain its seeming contradictory passages.

The historicism vein of Burton research continued into the 1980s, as exemplified by Martin Heusser's “Interpretation Analyzed and Synthesized: Robert Burton's Methods of Controlling the Reader in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*.” Heusser claims that previous studies have missed the critical point that Burton gives his readers no “definitive formula of any kind to describe melancholy – let alone to cure it” (50). Heusser concedes that the *Anatomy* makes this argument gradually, letting it develop over the course of hundreds of pages, which is why he thinks previous scholars have missed it. And yet, according to Heusser, this argument is central to Burton's great contribution to the onward march of knowledge. Scholars and laypeople alike must not be deceived by bogus answers based on superficial research that oversimplify a

problem. Real answers can only be found by a thorough analysis of breadth and depth. And likewise, Burton scholarship must avoid the temptation to oversimplify the *Anatomy* with inadequate research. Heusser's challenge for greater scientific accuracy in Burton research was influential in later studies and became a defining feature of Burton scholarship in the twenty-first century, as exemplified by the landmark publications by Mary Lund and Angus Gowland, which will be discussed in detail later.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, Samuel Wong brought together aspects of the research strands of Fish's psychological reading of the *Anatomy* as well as the scholarship of the historicists, in "Encyclopedism in *Anatomy of Melancholy*." Harkening back to Fish's psychological appraisal of Burton, Wong states that the *Anatomy* is "a vast psychic inventory amassed as therapy" (17). And, placing the *Anatomy* in its historical context, Wong demonstrates how it is a Christian-humanist response to the Baconian intellectualism of the seventeenth century. Wong sees the *Anatomy* as a hybrid between a medical manual anchored in humanism and a working diary of sorts that Burton used to alleviate his own suffering. Thus Wong argues that the *Anatomy's* pages are the fruits of Burton's personal therapeutic writings to cure his own melancholy, citing as evidence Burton's statement, "I write of Melancholy by being busie to avoid Melancholy" (Shilleto i.6). Wong's characterization of the *Anatomy* as encyclopedic goes beyond the notion of it being an archive of facts, and instead emphasizes Burton's compulsion to write down introspectively the fruits of his research as a means of alleviating his melancholic symptoms. The other side of the hybrid text, according to Wong, is that it actively responds to Sir Francis Bacon's intellectual encyclopedic theory of instauration or "confidence in the power of the human mind to discover the principles governing the multifarious forms of nature... a confidence also in the possibility of improving the physical conditions of human life through the

application of scientific knowledge” (Wong 59). Bacon's theories, as popularized by his texts *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organum* (1620), had significant influence on seventeenth-century scholarship, and a major rebuttal against these Baconian ideas was Burton's *Anatomy*. Burton thought that the obsession with intellectualism was misguided and fruitless because it largely ignored theology. Thus, according to Wong, Burton's response “to an intellectual regime increasingly dominated by Bacon's thought” promotes the supremacy of theological therapeutics (19).

Burton studies in the twentieth century covered much ground on a variety of topics, such as E. L. Black's 1949 article “Burton the Anatomist,” in which he compared the *Anatomy* to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This particular line of investigation into the dramatic elements of the *Anatomy* seems to have not gained traction and has remained a minor thread in Burton scholarship. On another topic, original research on the lyrical prose elements of the *Anatomy* generally extended from the time period of Rosalie Colie's *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* in 1966 to Stanley Fish's *Self Consuming Artifacts* in 1972, although the *Anatomy* continued to be categorized as lyrical prose for many years following. The anti-intellectualist bent of Burton's rhetoric was a feature of Burton scholarship in the last quarter of the twentieth-century, from Korkowski's “Genre and Satiric Strategy” which argued that the *Anatomy* was an attack against the intellectual pride of the early modern era, to Samuel Wong's “Encyclopedism in *Anatomy of Melancholy*” which argued that the *Anatomy* was a Christian-humanist rebuttal against Baconian intellectualism. In 1986 Michael O'Connell published a short, reader friendly biography simply titled *Robert Burton*. Although it didn't break new ground in Burton scholarship it revived interest in the *Anatomy*. In 1993 Gail Kern Paster refueled general interest in the *Anatomy* by exploring the early modern notions of passions and the physical body

in *The Body Embarrassed*. Her study built upon the research of Lawrence Babb and other historicists by interpreting the *Anatomy* through the lenses of the early modern environment it was produced in, as opposed to the lenses of modern science.

The twenty-first century has also seen a variety of studies published, many of which continue in the research vein of historical context promoted by Babb. In 2000, Nancy Siraisi argued in “Anatomizing the Past: Physicians and History in Renaissance Culture” that in order to understand early modern medicine we need to remove the blinders of twentieth-century methodology that have narrowed the focus of our research and expand our vision to include the full and eclectic range of seventeenth-century medical arts and sciences, even though some aspects (e.g. astrology, folklore, and superstition) may seem irrelevant to our modern conception of medicine. In particular, Siraisi asserts the importance that early modern scholars placed on anchoring their medical theories in classical philosophies and exploring their practical applications through narrative medical commentaries. Another example of how twentieth-century viewpoints have obscured our understanding of the early modern era is the notion of gender roles, a topic explored by Kaara Peterson in “Re-anatomizing Melancholy: Burton and the Logic of Humoralism.” Peterson's study reflects a growing interest among scholars in exploring gender roles in literature. She argues that the language of early modern texts can provide us with evidence of the development of medical theories from distinctive male-female categories to genderless conceptualizations of illness. Peterson believes that the historical march forward for gender equality has blunted the modern reader's sensitivity to the nuances of gender in early modern medical texts, such as the *Anatomy*. She notes, for example, that Burton doesn't generically apply his research on melancholy to both males and females, but differentiates specific ways in which the disease has different causes, symptoms, and cures for both genders.

Thus, Peterson believes that research should re-anatomize our understanding of Burton's text by exploring and explaining the gender-focused language.

Another important study in the early twenty-first century is Grant Williams' "Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*," which offers a critique similar to that made by Stanley Fish: the text of the *Anatomy* cannot support the weight of Burton's arguments and falls apart. Williams maintains that Burton's enigmatic text has long perplexed scholars because it is too expansive in scope to be limited to the genre of a medical manual that explores illness, yet too rooted in philosophy and medical cures to be categorized in the genre of prose-fiction. Williams argues that the meandering passages of the *Anatomy* cannot be easily partitioned into meaningful sections of learning that the reader can benefit from; it is actually a mess, a "disfigurement" of anatomy (594). While acknowledging that Burton's text is too complex to be truly labeled as an anatomy on melancholy as Frye had argued in the mid-twentieth century, Williams sidesteps the issue of genre and moves from the "what is it?" question to the "how is it done?" question. His interest lies in the way a text methodologically arrives at knowledge. And, in this regard, he concludes that Burton's inconsistent approaches to knowledge only yield a disfigured body of knowledge that fails the Socratic standard. Williams faults Burton for his inconsistent treatment of the subject matter of melancholy, his illogical methodology for exploring knowledge, and his erratic organization of facts and superstitions. Williams argues that instead of the *Anatomy* being a body of knowledge that readily enables its readers mastery over melancholy, it "overwhelms the reader with the undifferentiated difference of textuality" presenting a disfigurement that enables no such mastery to its readers (606). Furthermore, instead of "rescuing" the reader from the monstrous terror of melancholy, the *Anatomy* abandons its readers and leaves them to face

inadequately the monster. Although Williams' research was one of the first studies published in the new millennium, his work hasn't significantly influenced the course of Burton scholarship in the twenty-first century thus far. Instead, the general consensus among Burton scholars has gathered around the arguments made in the landmark studies of Angus Gowland and Mary Lund, both of whom offered a rebuttal to Williams' study by asserting that Burton doesn't so much contradict himself as qualify his statements by adding limitations and caveats to sharpen the clarity of his messages. However, this rebuttal is not the main argument made by either Gowland or Lund, who focus their attention on the historical context of the *Anatomy*. Due to the importance of their research, the remaining sections of this thesis will focus on their respective studies.

Angus Gowland

Angus Gowland claims in *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (2006) that Burton's overall message is that the myriad advances of scholarly knowledge across early modern disciplines had not led to a unified and credible understanding of melancholy. Gowland's assertion stands in direct contrast to previous research that had cast Burton as a promoter of particular schools of thought regarding melancholy or medicine. Previous research may have hinted at the notion that Burton was cynical of early modern medicine, but Gowland explicitly states this in no uncertain terms. Overall, Burton demonstrated skepticism for the extremes of both occultic medicine and Christian theology, and seems to give more credence to the practical medicine of Hippocrates than the theories of Galen. Gowland pushes back on various theories about the *Anatomy* that had been promulgated through the years. In particular, he disagrees with the notion that the *Anatomy* is a non-integrated collection of information and quotations. Instead, Gowland sees a unity of purpose that holds Burton's text

together. More so than previous writers, Gowland emphasizes that Burton presented his collection of quotations and paraded before his reader a long array of medical and neo-occultist theories of melancholy to illustrate that none of the approaches by themselves offered completely satisfactory explanations of the disease or provided one-size-fits-all cures. According to Gowland, Burton's message was that it was up to the reader to cure his or her own melancholy through study, reading, and the exercise of free will. This was a departure from the standard message of curative texts in the early modern era that did endorse specific theories and cures.

The bulk of Gowland's study explores the *Anatomy* in the environment of the early modern era. The scientific precision that Gowland employed in his investigation on how Burton's seventeenth-century environment affected and influenced his scholarship in the *Anatomy* effectively changed the game in Burton scholarship. Although other writers have placed Burton in the historical contexts of his time, none have gone so far as Gowland in surveying the early modern intellectual landscape to highlight the remarkable ways in which Burton stood out from the crowd of scholars and theorists. For example, Burton's refusal to advise his readers on a specific recommendation for a cure of melancholy, and indeed his non-endorsement in the *Anatomy* of any specific theory of melancholy, stands in direct contrast to the typical books of medicine of his era. And to further unshackle his treatises on melancholy from the narrow range of theories, and specifically to avoid "the constraints of medical doctrines about melancholy" (16), Burton combines melancholy and madness into one entity. Gowland views this as a strength in Burton's writing, departing from the conventional wisdom in Burton scholarship that it characterizes Burton as a naive scholar. In Gowland's words, the "Christian-Stoic conflation of melancholy with madness [in the *Anatomy*] permitted Burton to...expand the scope of contemporary arguments about the epidemic of melancholy" (16). While showing how medical

theories and scientific learning related to the illness of melancholy, Gowland includes an overview of humoral theories and several neo-Galenic therapeutics for melancholy. Burton attempts to reconcile old and new ways of thinking about medicine and scientific learning. His range of inquiry includes both neo-Galenic occultism and rational-scientific explanations of the symptoms, prognostics and cures of melancholy. The seemingly contradictory dichotomy of occultism and rationalism are hallmarks that distinguish the early modern era from the medieval. Gowland presents the *Anatomy* as Burton's attempt to resolve this conflict by fusing theology with medicine in a manner that doesn't entirely discount supernatural forces. Thus, Gowland builds upon the 1998 research of Wong, who highlighted Burton's theologically grounded rebuttal against “an intellectual regime increasingly dominated by Bacon's thought” (19), and Korkowski assertion, in 1975, that the *Anatomy* was an attack against the intellectual pride of the early modern era.

Gowland also delves into the nuances of early modern theology, and explores the tensions between theology and superstition. He asserts that the *Anatomy* acts as a mirror of sorts to these aspects of seventeenth-century England but also goes beyond mere reporting to an in-depth analysis of the times. Burton threaded a fine needle with his discussion of irrationality in theology. The fact that his book didn't stir up great controversies among his readership demonstrates that his text truly was a product of its environment in which “few in England would have openly disagreed that the extremes of Roman Catholicism and radical puritanism should be shunned” (166). Gowland also shows how Burton “established the framework of his theory of religious melancholy” and tackled the thorny issue of extreme superstitions that “swarve from this true love and worship of God” (161). The care and diplomacy with which Burton explores these religious issues seems to indicate that he is well aware of his constructed audience and

doesn't want to needlessly offend them with polemical writing (or damage the *Anatomy's* sales and prospects for future editions.) Another significant part of Gowland's historical inquiries in his text *Worlds* deals with the early modern political climate and philosophies regarding societal harmony. Gowland shows how Burton relies on ancient Greek sources such as Plato's *Laws*, the writings of Cicero and Seneca, as well as More's *Utopia*, to “fashion a model of the virtuous and healthy commonwealth, alongside its vicious, dysfunctional opposite” (241). The fruits of Burton's efforts yields a humanistic vision of societal reform, according to Gowland, whose book updates Babb's overview of Burton by incorporating important research (conducted after Babb's publication) on the influence that humanist writers (both English and continental) had on Burton's *Anatomy*. However, this humanist angle of inquiry hasn't been as influential on subsequent recent Burton research as the historical contexts explored by Gowland on early modern medicine, theology and politics.

Another important way that Gowland contributes to Burton scholarship is by giving us a composite portrait of Burton the author of the *Anatomy*, joining together the singular portraits that previous researchers had presented of either Burton the medical authority or Burton the compassionate humanist. Until Gowland's study, these two sides hadn't been integrated together. Overall, Gowland categorizes the *Anatomy* as belonging to the genre of Christian philosophical text, a decision that seems to be the current vogue in Burton scholarship and stands in contrast to Williams' 2001 dismissal of the scholarly habit of genre classification. Never losing sight of the author in his analysis of the *Anatomy*, Gowland provides a detailed and well-rounded portrait of Burton by synthesizing his many roles as physician, humanist, classicist, theologian, and politician. However, a common criticism of Gowland's study is that it neglects to explain how Burton employs humor as a treatment towards the cure of melancholy. A role perhaps not fully

fleshed out by Gowland is that of Burton the humorist. Although Gowland doesn't focus much of his research on the playfulness of the *Anatomy*, he does credit its humorous content for its popularity.

Taking the *Anatomy* as a serious study devoted to the management and cure of melancholy, Gowland explores the bottom line: does it work or not; that is, can it really cure melancholy? Taking Burton himself as a case study, Gowland explores how the act of writing and continual revision was intellectually stimulating for Burton, but at the same time was perhaps dangerous as well because scholarly studies were probably the causes of his melancholy in the first place (a relatively common phenomenon among scholars that Burton generally discusses in his sections about the miserable scholars). A particular piece of evidence that Gowland gives in consideration of whether the *Anatomy* "works" as a curative text is Burton's supposed suicide. Gowland demonstrates how Burton, perhaps anticipating his own suicide, or at least referring to his uncured melancholy, addresses the physician-heal-thyself issue when he writes, "they that cure others, cannot well prescribe Physicke to themselves" (299). Although Gowland doesn't explicitly take sides on the controversy of Burton's suicide, the credence he gives to the supportive evidence and the skeptical tone in which he presents the non-supportive evidence seems to indicate that he thinks Burton's death was indeed caused by suicide. However, Gowland notes that the merits of the *Anatomy* aren't invalidated because the author of the "self-help" text on melancholy ended his life by suicide. Gowland says that there is much Christian humanism in the text and he sees compassion extended to Burton after his death, when his close friends arrange for his burial on sacred ground (a place usually not available for the burial of suicides).

Mary Lund

Mary Lund, in *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading The Anatomy of Melancholy* (2010), responds to the long history in Burton criticism of viewing the *Anatomy* as a loose cento with contradictory parts. She sees the *Anatomy* as having a logical structure if judged by its own internal purpose, which she believes is to facilitate empathy, trust and communication with his melancholic readers to enable them to affect a cure. Since melancholy is an affliction that impinges on the will to live, the *Anatomy* takes on a living quality in its organization and tone and thus mirrors the human qualities of emotions tempered with rational logic. Lund is quite critical of Stanley Fish's *Self-Consuming Artifacts* and disagrees that the *Anatomy* falls apart as a whole. Although Lund acknowledges inconsistencies in the *Anatomy*, she believes that when Burton seemingly contradicts himself he is "not undercutting but qualifying" his previous statements (5). According to Lund, a main reason that critics in the past have misunderstood the *Anatomy* is because they fail to realize that the text cannot be understood unless it is seen as an intermediary between Burton and his relationship with his readership. Lund prioritizes the investigation of "Burton's treatment of the reader and the reading process" (6) and laments the pointlessness of research trying to categorize the *Anatomy* into a genre. Lund adds fresh findings to Burton's scholarship by examining how the dynamics of reading in the early modern era inform Burton's writing in the *Anatomy*. She is particularly critical of Fish's ahistorical methodology of reader response research (6, 13), and she adds fresh evidence to Burton studies by exploring the historical context of the reader response phenomena. In particular, she shines new light on the relationship between authors and their readers by exploring the history of curative texts that inform the *Anatomy*. Burton views his book as a "gilded pill," an image loaded with meaning and history, and symbolizing the sweetness of doing

the work to affect a cure for melancholy. Lund uses this image to anchor her investigation into the various ways early moderns communicated about the connections between practical and theoretical medicine.

Lund's study thus builds upon Gowland's research by placing the *Anatomy* in the historical context of its early modern time but goes beyond Gowland's study by focusing intently on Burton's assumptions of his readership. She states that large scale discussions of societies, the forte of Gowland, are beyond the scope of her study and she focuses instead on the "personal level" of melancholy as explored in the pages of the *Anatomy* (8). Burton's "major literary achievement," according to Lund, is his unique and effective way of drawing his readers into the *Anatomy* as active participants in the healing process (17). Lund uses the term "literary therapeutics" to refer to the Burtonian theory that melancholy can be cured through the process of reading, a cure more effective than any other method. Lund believes that Burton establishes his credentials for his readers as "the whole physician" by demonstrating his empathy and skill at administering to their physical and spiritual needs. Burton establishes a comforting connection with his readers through his effective use of rhetoric and the hopeful message he imparts. Lund believes that Burton rejects the theological doctrine of predestination, a doctrine which, if he had embraced in the *Anatomy*, would have implied that some of his readers might be predestined to suffer from a life of melancholy and be powerless to break free. Lund asserts that Burton is a believer in the notion of free will because of the message of hope he gives his readers that they have the power to change their lives and become free from melancholy.

Although Lund provides physical evidence left behind by some of Burton's actual readers in the seventeenth century regarding their reactions to the *Anatomy*, the primary thrust of her research is on Burton's constructed readership. She asserts that Burton intended his readers to

"focus not on their lives beyond the text but rather on their experience of reading the *Anatomy*" (2). Thus the heart of Lund's study is not on specific testimonials from individual responses to the *Anatomy* but, rather, on Burton's "own construction of the reading process" (17). As she delves deep into the ways that Burton communicates with the readership he imagines, Lund takes particular care in pointing out that readers from the seventeenth century did not generally respond to the *Anatomy* like those in the twentieth century. For example, she believes that Burton framed his reading cure to his seventeenth-century readers as something mystical (almost but not quite like an incantation), which is certainly not the rational procedure of reading-to-gain-reason of a twentieth-century reader. Lund likens Burton's writing ethic to Neil Rhodes' description of the "ancient Greek understanding of therapeutic language... writing acting as epode (a charm or conjuration) rather than *logos pithanos* (persuasive speech or argument) (qtd. in Lund 2, Rhodes 40-44). However, as is typical of Burton, he qualifies the mystical nature of reading by rejecting "the occult power of 'Spells, Words, Characters, and Charmes'" (qtd. in Lund 2, Shilleto i.254). Additionally, Lund notes that Burton seems to suggest that the act of reading may have (in modern parlance) a placebo effect on curing the reader of melancholic ills due to the powers of the imagination (97). According to Lund, Burton believes that there is something uniquely powerful about experiencing the world through the written word. For example, she states, "When Burton extols the health benefits of various activities, it transpires that he is presenting them as they are experienced through the written word" (78). Lund says that "Burton deliberately presents cures which are literally unachievable, but which reveal instead the therapeutic pleasures of reading" (105). The reader can gain pleasure (and healing) from the *experience of reading* about these exotic cures. In addition, according to Lund, Burton expects that the reading process will educate his readers so they can "self-treat" themselves of melancholic ills (96). To

this effect, "Burton urges his readers to acquire knowledge of their bodies and souls" (100). Burton believes that his readers have free will which can enable them to make changes in their lives to be cured of melancholy, a belief which is a break from Martin Luther's stance that "the will is entirely without free choice and therefore one cannot change oneself for good" (12). In essence, Lund's landmark study explores how Burton casts himself in the role of a "whole physician" (building upon Gowland's similar assessment) and comforts and empowers his readers to use their free will to rise above their melancholy and to heal themselves through the power of therapeutic reading (a notion that is consonant with Babb's assessment of the comforting power of reading the *Anatomy*). Lund's study bolsters the historically grounded methodology in Burton scholarship. However, Lund doesn't limit her historical methodology to just the *Anatomy*; she seeks to establish a generalized research method that can be used to examine a variety of texts in their historical context. She believes that her version of this method, focusing on the author's relationship with his or her constructed readership "is also applicable to other authors of the period" (23).

The complexity and depth of the *Anatomy* has led to a long history of scholars trying to understand the text with a variety of research approaches. The *Anatomy* was initially greeted with a wave of popularity in the seventeenth century, followed by a period of critical neglect in the eighteenth century when no new editions of the book were published. A renewed interest in the *Anatomy* in the nineteenth century led an accelerated pace of published studies in the twentieth century. In the early to mid-twentieth century a common aim of research involved examining the *Anatomy* through the lens of modern science. This gave way to research that aimed at greater authenticity by carefully examining the text in the context of the early modern environment from which it sprang, as championed by Lawrence Babb, as well as research aimed

at reader response, as popularized by Stanley Fish. The general consensus of Burton studies in the twenty-first century has clustered around research on the historical context of Burton and the *Anatomy* as championed by Angus Gowland. The current thrust of research, exemplified by Mary Lund, is looking at the historical context of the reader response to the *Anatomy* as well as Burton's relationship with his constructed readership.

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Figure 1. Frontispiece to the original edition. Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed.

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