

---

# 1

---

## A Monstrous Anatomy

I ask you to imagine two different copies of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a book that was published in five editions from 1621 to 1651. The *Anatomy* discusses melancholy in three compendious partitions, treating the causes and cures of this malady, a significant medical and social issue in early modern England. I first encountered the book in the compact three-volume Everyman edition (1961–64), modestly bound in black cloth.<sup>1</sup> Like the one-volume paperback version of the same edition recently published by the New York Review of Books Press, these books were intended to be read rather than studied.<sup>2</sup> The editors were faithful to the motto of the Everyman Library, "Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide, in thy most need to go by thy side." They italicized and parenthetically translated Burton's frequent Latin quotations; textual issues are firmly sidelined; the volumes themselves are compact and light. These are the books I read for my comprehensive exams in the mid-1970s, taking refuge from the Texas heat in the energetically air-conditioned university library. I was fascinated by the text, especially its long digressions interrupting the orderly divisions, and its expansive preface, "Democritus Junior to the Reader," which found melancholy, folly, and madness in every rank and condition of life. The author's pseudonym, "Democritus Junior," referenced the laughing philosopher, an intriguing identity for an Oxford professor. But I had nothing at all to say about the book. This sprawling, polyglot text did not fit any of the categories of my graduate program, and in my traditional department it was never taught and seldom referred to (although there were rumblings about Stanley Fish's chapter on it in *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, published in 1972).<sup>3</sup> I left those three meaty volumes behind—they seem to be in the Library Depository now—and thought of them as an unvisited location in the canon, suggesting a way of reading specific to its time and place, utterly at ease with its learning. Burton's amused voice rustled in my memory: thin, rhythmic, quizzical, the voice of an eccentric and intimate friend. Many years later, I encountered a face

that matched that voice in Hans Schäufelin's painting *Melancholiker*, the cover image for this book.<sup>4</sup>

And then there is a second version of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, the six monumental volumes of the Clarendon edition published by Oxford University Press from 1989 to 2000.<sup>5</sup> Here, three volumes of meticulously edited text are supported by three volumes of commentary, indexes, and references. When, in recent years, I ventured back to the *Anatomy*, this edition had changed the scholarly landscape. Hundreds of Burton's ubiquitous quotes were verified and sourced; his odd words were defined; the marginal glosses were restored and translated; textual variants were catalogued. It was possible to work on the *Anatomy* in a responsible way without replicating Burton's lifetime of reading. Oxford University Press did not part with these books lightly. When I started, the pound was strong against the dollar; even today, it would cost nearly two thousand dollars to buy all six volumes from the publisher. So I hunted used book sites every June and July, when university libraries are known to deaccession surplus books, and slowly I acquired the three volumes of text. (The commentary came to market more quickly, priced to sell.) These volumes made my vague sense of Burton's erudition more specific and more daunting: who knew that Plutarch had written so much? Who was Crato of Krafftheim? I still heard the voice I'd imagined for Burton, quizzical and confidential. Now I had tools for discerning the multiple voices that spoke around and under it, the voices that Schäufelin's melancholic youth listens to so intently.

My book takes these voices as expressions of diverse early modern practices for constructing knowledge. It wrestles with such questions as what, for Burton and his contemporaries, counted as knowledge. How did they make their knowledge count? How did expert writing come to be organized in disciplinary frameworks, with specific genre norms and rhetorical constraints? How did knowledge move through the uneven fields of early modern learning, among traditional professional discourses such as theology or medicine, across respected disciplines such as philology, and around emerging knowledge practices, such as those of travel and the new sciences? How can we observe language moving through the porous membranes that separated these ways of knowing? My framework for approaching these questions is rhetorical, since questions of how knowledge is organized and made persuasive are central to rhetorical theory. With Burton, I hope to recreate for myself and my readers the fluid movement of ideas and tropes among medicine, divinity, and cosmology, and to reconstruct the rhetorics that sponsored such movement.

Burton's book marks a specific moment in the development of disciplines, a moment when fields of knowledge were distinct but not restrictive. The boundaries Burton encountered have alternately consolidated and softened in the three hundred years between the initial publication of the *Anatomy* and the Everyman edition I used. For Everyman, the *Anatomy* inhabited a loose discursive field; it was part of their series in Philosophy and Theology, and they needed no finer distinction for a publishing project directed toward popular self-education. In that context, Latin was an obstacle, as were expensive books, and the public-spirited press avoided them both.

The Clarendon edition speaks of a different disciplinary formation: a community of expert readers, scholars of literature or of early modern thought and culture, located in institutions that could sponsor their access to a bulky, expensive text. These readers would be undaunted by a little Latin, and curious to trace the odd Burton quotation, but not so deeply immersed in Latin and neo-Latin literature that they could identify it themselves. The change in the disciplinary locations of these two editions produces, in effect, two Burtons. I argue that disciplinary differentiation has become so central to our experiences of knowing and not knowing that we necessarily read the *Anatomy* through contemporary disciplinary frames, even as we acknowledge that those divisions were unknown to Burton. In the current literature, we can find arguments that the *Anatomy* is best read as a book of religious counsel, as a strictly literary text, or as a work of humanistic scholarship. Perhaps if we try to glance athwart our disciplinary lenses, we can discern the freedom and porosity of Burton's knowledge practices, even if our view is oblique and partial.

My book will not settle on any of the views of melancholy that Burton airs. Nor will it show that Burton was or was not a stoic, or a misogynist, or that he meant his utopia seriously or satirically—these, and other questions that better scholars than I have assayed, are not my interest here. Instead, I undertake the thought experiment of bracketing all these local issues, and especially those concerned with melancholy, its adjuncts and its treatment, and focusing instead on how Burton's text negotiates the competing and contradictory demands of disparate knowledge practices. It is in that rhetorical negotiation, shaped by his recognition of the exigency of care, that Burton invests textual energy, rather than in the resolution of any particular issue. Indeed, many of the most significant propositions in the text of the *Anatomy* are contradicted elsewhere in the book. (The only thing I myself am pretty sure about is that Burton disapproved of standing water, popery, and Paracelsians.) I take as my guide an inscription in

one of Burton's books, the text of James Shirley's play *The Wedding*. There, Burton recorded an anecdote about the ubiquity of contradictions: "A certaine pastor of Conningberg in Prussia in a funeral sermon over one that lay solemnly to be buried, after he had spoken much of his vertues and largely commended him to the Auditors told them, this is a testimony and relation I had from his kindred and friends, now I [cross out] ye shall here another cleane contrary [cross out] of mine who knew him as well, or better than they."<sup>6</sup> This doubled, contradictory sermon is a compressed model of the *Anatomy*, which offers clean contraries without resolution.

There are four possible scholarly and critical responses to Burton's exploration of contradiction, positions analogous to the four corners of the square of oppositions, a medieval graphic representation of the relationships among categorical or hypothetical statements. An assertion could be read as true and its denial false; the denial could be read as true and the assertion false; both assertion and denial could be true; both could be false. Or, in terms of the *Anatomy*:

Burton's utopia is an ideal state, not a satire on utopias.

Burton's utopia is not an ideal state, but a satire on utopias.

Burton's utopia is both an ideal state and a satire on utopias.

Burton's utopia is neither an ideal state nor a satire on utopias.

The square of oppositions was a staple of early modern arts teaching, and Burton would have danced students around it many times. It is not surprising that he generated this range of choices, variations on its traditional category statements. He was not alone in adapting this figure; since the four corners of the square suggested the four elements and the four humors, early modern physicians also used it as a generative device for proposing diagnoses.<sup>7</sup> Burton's text repurposed this shortcut to confirmation or refutation, torquing it into a way of multiplying possibilities.

But multiplied possibilities become problematic in the face of exigency. Since Burton was offering advice on the serious, painful condition of melancholy, he would not have expected readers to simply marvel at the skill of his negotiation. The melancholic must do something: take or refuse counsel, accommodate or resist feelings of fear and sorrow. What Burton's book offers is not a set of directions but a model for choosing among or combining alternatives. The *Anatomy* is not therapeutic because of the propositions it advances, but rather because it shows how a reader can contain the uncertainty of contradictory information.

Just as we can take the assertions of the text as grounds for experimenting with disparate forms of knowledge, we can read in its contradictory advice an experiment in deciding on a course of action in imperfectly known circumstances.

In summary, while we cannot know Burton's intentions about specific issues, we can be sure that he wanted to write a book that advanced contrary propositions to readers in need of reliable advice. Two things follow from this statement. First, whatever succor the *Anatomy* offers the melancholic reader is not to be found in the propositions about melancholy that Burton advances. Second, the *Anatomy* does not support a reading that "it is impossible to tell whether A is true or not true," since such a stance would abandon Burton's therapeutic exigency. His book, perhaps, is not only about melancholy but also about knowledge and action.

So, what could this monster be, this anatomy without melancholy? If we turn the text over and look at its seamy side, we can trace out a web of exchanges and borrowings among nascent differentiated discourses circulating in early modern academic and cultural sites, the places where melancholics were most likely to be found. The texts of Greek and Roman antiquity are relevant, and so are the humanist commentaries on them; so are the Scriptures, and the vast circulating farrago of reformation religious controversies. But the *Anatomy* also puts medical *consilia* and case histories in conversation with joke books, with stage plays in English and Latin, with cosmological speculation and travel narratives. If we bracket the theme of melancholy and instead consider the *Anatomy* as a vast meditation on early modern practices of knowledge, we encounter a text concerned with the tropes, genres, and languages that supported learned discourse. In the midst of this movement, where could stability be found? What sort of stability might the learned reader hope for? What might be the pleasures of renouncing stability? How can we cope with practices of knowledge that resolutely deny certainty but exigently require action? These are essentially rhetorical questions, and they will occupy us for almost all of this book. Only at the end, and very briefly, will I turn the text over, look at its surface again, and have a little to say about melancholy.

If, as twenty-first-century readers, we bracket the issues of melancholy, its causes, and its cures, we can use the *Anatomy* to think about the emergence of powerful disciplines whose discourses now shape our lives: discourses of political theory, science, and cultural history. They all emerge in Burton's text; their boundaries are so porous that arguments, tropes, and assumptions are traded freely among them. Propositions emerge to be aired and forgotten; a few pages

later, their contraries are presented with equal authority. As readers who daily encounter the limits of sealed, immobile discourses, as scholars who work across disciplines, or as rhetoricians adopting transdisciplinary methods, what can we learn from this fluidity, this ease of exchange among discourses?<sup>8</sup>

Sorting through contradictory frames is only half the problem. Burton's readers faced the exigency of a disease that was treated through Galenic modifications of daily regimen. Every hour of the day presented questions that must be answered: Should I eat lettuce? How much should I sleep? Such questions suggest that we bracket the specific issue of melancholy and consider it instead as a powerful anchor for the demands of exigency. The *Anatomy* is then available as a model for acting on partial, imperfect, and contradictory information, under the pressure of time, on matters of urgency. In this framework, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* confronts the central issues of rhetorical theory: the presentation of provisional knowledge, the weighing of contradictory and plausible truth claims, the demands of uncertain situations. While the *Anatomy* is not a book of rhetorical theory, it is certainly a deeply rhetorical text.

To show why we need such a reading of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, I will select and analyze four influential readings of the text, beginning in the 1960s, to discern the shared premises that support divergent critical opinions. I will then sketch out an account of the learned and popular discourses available to Robert Burton as a seventeenth-century academic and discuss how the *Anatomy* negotiated that field for its readers. Since I hope that my book will be of general interest to students of rhetorical theory and history, these sections will also orient readers who are not specialists in early modern academic cultures.

There are no useless readings of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Any scholar who works through the three partitions, situates the book in some kind of frame, and sidles out to say something sensible about it has done a service. This is especially true of the recent books by Angus Gowland, Mary Ann Lund, and Stephanie Shirilan, which are supported by substantial research into the context of Burton's writing.<sup>9</sup> But any scholar who comes to the *Anatomy* in search of positive statements about melancholy is likely to run afoul of the contradictory structure of the book and be forced to settle on some corner of our square of oppositions. We could designate those positions, crudely, as "A is true and not-A is false," "A is not true," "A is true and A is not true," and "It is not true that either A is true or that A is not true." Any of these positions would yield a less interesting book than the one Burton wrote.

## Four Readers

Nobody could be bored with Rosalie Colie's discussion of the *Anatomy* in her *Paradoxia Epidemica*.<sup>10</sup> The impulse for writing this book, according to Colie's preface, was itself a contradiction worthy of Burton: she sought to reconcile the New Critical understanding of paradox, irony, and tension as expressions of personal vision with the early modern uses of these tropes to order discourse. *Paradoxia Epidemica* is an attempt to recover an early modern tradition; the book is also a romp through the touchstones of mid-twentieth-century criticism—Donne, Herbert, Spenser, and Shakespeare—with surprising detours through reformation theology and early modern science. No one has been more alive to the undecidability of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* than Colie:

The climate of Burton's book is of opposites and oppositions, contradictions and paradoxes: we become so acclimated to these anomalies that we tend to overlook their meanings in the large. Burton never presents his readers with a choice between one explanation for melancholy and another different or contradictory explanation. He does not present us with either the Galenical or the homeopathic remedy for any symptom. He does not present us with the choice between being and not being melancholy. His is a pluralist world, accommodating all the alternatives, even some which in conventional logic close one another out.<sup>11</sup>

For Colie, Burton's world is one where the Galenic view of melancholy as a disease and the Aristotelian view of it as an incitement to genius can be presented *seriatim*: they are not posed as alternatives; one does not dispute with the other; two categorically opposed statements are simply laid into a text as if it were a zone where the principle of noncontradiction held no power. In the many decades since *Paradoxia Epidemica*, nobody has understood better how fully the *Anatomy* inhabits that zone: in its multiplication of genres, its self-reference, its mad layering of learned discourses. If a scholar has to pick a position on the square of oppositions that Burton constructed, there is none better than "A is both true and not true," and nobody has occupied that position better than Rosalie Colie.

I like to think of Colie, poring over the puzzles of the *Anatomy* with her students at Iowa, filtering sensibilities formed by the New Criticism through



the problems posed by Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Neither of these issues is alive for us in the same vivid way; our mandate is not that of the cold war literary scholarship. (Colie took up those broad cultural and political questions more explicitly in other contexts, particularly her correspondence with Hannah Arendt.<sup>12</sup>) But the action that concerns *Paradoxia Epidemica* is limited to the force of paradox itself, as it reaches from the frame of the text to grasp and immobilize the reader.

This is a cleaner world than that of the *Anatomy*, where the poor melancholic wonders if he could eat a fish that lived in muddy water, or if it would be safe to break a sweat. Burton's text combines a dizzyingly balanced play of contradictory propositions, frames, and genres with an iron exigency: we are all melancholy; everything in the world is a potential cause of melancholy; cures of melancholy are numberless; we must live in this world as the melancholy readers we all are. If the point of the *Anatomy* is the elegant balance of its paradoxes, then how can we do justice to the compassionate exigency of Burton's therapeutic purpose?

The issue of exigency is of even less concern to Stanley Fish in his chapter on *The Anatomy of Melancholy in Self-Consuming Artifacts*, "Thou Thyself Art the Subject of My Discourse." Fish's discussion of Burton was probably the most widely read scholarly discussion of Burton in the late twentieth century. A search of the databases shows roughly 250 citations, reviews, or discussions of this chapter between its publication in 1972 and 2000; it is likely that nearly every publication about Burton cited *Self-Consuming Artifacts*.

Readers who have followed Fish's work might expect this analysis to occupy the "A is neither true nor false" corner of our imaginary square of oppositions. That is not exactly what happens. For Fish the issues raised by Burton in the *Anatomy* were not of interest. Rather, Fish was interested in the structure of Burton's exposition, especially as it plays out for readers. Fish expands on Burton's proverb, "never a barrel better herring": "Every change of subject, every new topic, is another barrel, a container whose contents are, for the moment, unknown; and for that moment each barrel is the substance of a revived hope, the hope that when opened it will yield better herrings and that we will be among them."<sup>13</sup> Nobody would want to deny a writer named Fish the hope of being among the better herrings; that hope, sadly, is not fulfilled: "Every paragraph, every section shuts off another route of escape for the reader who resists the personal application of the general rule [that all are mad]. One by one



the areas of an artificially segmented universe lose their distinctness, until the complete triumph of madness is not assertion, but an experienced fact."<sup>14</sup>

For Fish, every subdivision of the *Anatomy* renews the promise of definite knowledge about a specific aspect of melancholy or the world it dominates. He watches Burton make an assertion and then negate it by extending the topic at hand, perhaps by moving from one type of melancholy to another. Inevitably, the text encompasses all of lived experience and the original assertion is not only negated but meaningless: A is not true; it is really, really not true. Fish clearly finds this pattern frustrating, especially since Burton, unlike Bacon, Donne, Herbert, or Milton, does not point to an ineffable redemptory state outside language.

I wonder, though, about the invincible naiveté of the reader Fish constructs. Surely after the tenth barrel, readers realize that the game is not "find the better herring," but "what should we do with these barrels?" Fish's reading depends on taking each of Burton's local negations at face value: there is no end to madness, no cure for melancholy, no way of distinguishing one of its forms from another. In this reading, Burton's negation of his initial statement is final, to be taken as true. But Burton does not simply make assertions and then deny them: he asserts, denies, and returns to his initial premises as if nothing had gone wrong. It is an animating journey, deftly balanced between the rigors of its pattern and the possibilities of surprise. Stabilizing the text's motion at the point of denial drains it of energy. No wonder Fish is puzzled that so many readers have enjoyed the *Anatomy*: "What we have, then, is a total unity of unreliability, in the author, in his materials, in his readers, and in the structure, a total unreliability and a total subjectivity. In the face of such a depressing unity, why is the *Anatomy* not a more uncomfortable experience than most readers report it to be?"<sup>15</sup> Fish imagines readers who approach each new topic in hope that here, at last, Burton will make a clear assertion: such readers would be perfect partners in a game of three-card monte but have never yet been seen on land or sea.

Fish's chapter forcibly set a problem for subsequent criticism: how to crack the code of Burton's contradictory assertions and stabilize the text. That search drew upon two strong currents: the reaction against deconstructive readings, with their preference for *aporia*, and the turn toward historicism beginning in the mid-eighties. History, particularly the history of melancholy, seemed to offer a foundation for assertions about Burton's world, and thereby to offer clarity about what the text says. This faith is not misplaced. However dizzying Burton's

whirlwind of assertions, no reader has come away from the *Anatomy* convinced that Burton did not support monarchy, or that he was an atheist, or that he hated learning. The pattern of the text, his social location, and the discourses available to Burton, allow us to place these positions outside the domain of the text.

But these assertions are not the point of the *Anatomy*. I argue that this is the case even when the proposition in question is more urgent for us than purging or bloodletting, as in the question of Burton's misogyny. What do we make of the awful things that Burton repeatedly says about women? That question became pressing with the emergence of feminist criticism, and it is the central issue in the third of the texts I will discuss, Mark Breitenberg's chapter on Burton in his *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*.<sup>16</sup> Against my own political commitments, I propose that arguing either side of this question arrests Burton's wavering movement.

Breitenberg argues that masculine subjectivity, especially early modern masculine subjectivity, is necessarily anxious. Early modern anxiety is not a sentiment but a disposition of the cultural unconscious, generating the hierarchical structures intended to contain it. Patriarchy causes anxiety; anxiety supports patriarchy. Early modern humoral theories encoded masculine fragility: if everyone was made of the same four elements and the same four humors, then there was no essential difference between men and women. Breitenberg's book argues that *The Anatomy of Melancholy* understood male anxiety as embodied, operating simultaneously on the levels of the body, the state, and nature. Not surprisingly, his reading of the *Anatomy* focuses on the final partition's discussion of love melancholy. Breitenberg reads Burton as asserting, with Galen, that melancholy is a disturbance of bodily fluids, so that there is no difference between physiology and psychology. Both are related to the state of the body politic. Melancholy was experienced as an invasion of interiority by a feminine, unregulated Other and a symptom of political disorder. The sprawling text of the *Anatomy* is intended to purge this excess with repeated lessons in misogyny: satire on foolish lovers who worship women, warnings that marriage will shackle a man to a troublesome and disgusting wife, horrified accounts of women's allurements and deceptive wiles. The lover has lost his masculine dignity; Burton will cure him by arousing disgust for the beloved woman.

It is not hard to find support for all these assertions in Burton, whose castigation of women has all the ignorance and exuberance of middle school boys' talk. But nearly all the assertions in this chain, all the statements that "A is true,"

are balanced by contradictory statements that “A is not true” later in the text. The Galenic understanding of melancholy as a disease, for example, is undercut by assertions that reference the celebration of melancholy in *Problemata* 30.1, attributed to Aristotle, and in Marsilio Ficino’s *Three Books on Life*.<sup>17</sup> Burton observes: “Why melancholy men are witty, which Aristotle hath long since maintained in his Problems: and that all learned men, famous Philosophers, and Law-givers, *ad unum ferè omnes Melancholici*, have still beene Melancholy; is a Probleme much controverted” (1:421). And Breitenberg himself writes of the “pleasure and satisfaction” that Burton seems to have taken in his own melancholy and his account of the condition.<sup>18</sup> While the *Anatomy* connects psychology and physiology, that connection is not seamless. In the long “Digression of Anatomy” that interrupts his preliminary exposition for thirty-eight pages (1:139–61), Burton works out how the body and mind affect each other, with many cunning mediations and a fair number of external interventions. The horror of melancholy as an invasion of the Other is offset by its universality—if all are melancholy, how can there be an Other? And the misogyny that is so prominent in the section on love melancholy is less interesting to Burton in other sections of the text. Stephanie Shirilan has painstakingly shown that diatribes against women in the *Anatomy* are regularly balanced with admissions that men are as bad as women, or that they give women good reason to act as they do.<sup>19</sup> In the endless whirligig of propositions that propels the *Anatomy* forward, every “A is true” is followed by an “A is not true.” Fish, focusing on the gradual retraction or “self-consuming” of the assertion, holds that Burton really meant “A is not true.” Breitenberg, relying on the energy and weight of Burton’s many misogynistic statements, dismisses the retraction and holds that the text intends to say “A is true.” I argue that these positions are equivalent, that there is no principle for deciding between them, and that they are both marginal to the work of the text and to the pleasure readers have taken in the *Anatomy*.

At this juncture, aligning with the position that Burton intends neither the propositions he advances in the *Anatomy* nor his contradictions of them is a tempting alternative. This position has been elaborated by R. Grant Williams in his essay “Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.”<sup>20</sup> Williams contrasts Burton’s *Anatomy* with texts such as Helkiah Crooke’s *Microcosmographia*, which for him exemplify a practice of dissection that relates parts to wholes, producing reliable knowledge. Williams sees anatomical texts developing lucid arguments through

the logic of synecdoche; he contrasts these presentations with Burton's image of Democritus in his garden: "about him lay the carcasses of many severall beasts, newly by him cut up and anatomized . . . to finde out the seat of this *atra bilis* or Melancholy" (1:6). Burton observes that Democritus's research was "left unperfect, & it is now lost"; his own *Anatomy* will take its place (1:6). Nothing could be further from the anatomist's composed and layered disclosure of structures, their relations and their attachments, than this carnage of random animals, rifled over in a fruitless search for a point of origin of the ubiquitous humor of melancholy.

For Williams, the very structure of the *Anatomy* expresses Burton's refusal of any stable form of knowledge, or as he puts it, his practice of "disfiguration." Instead of the expressive figure of synecdoche, Burton employs the loose, open-ended list, or synathroesmus. A list offers no guidance about the importance of its members, particularly when, as is customary for Burton, it ends with a trailing "&c," or et cetera. On the level of arrangement, Burton's organization of the partitions of the *Anatomy* is inconsistent: the first discusses causes and the second, cures; they are organized as thesis and antithesis. But the third partition, on love melancholy, corresponds to an organization by species. The initial address, "Democritus to the Reader," does not introduce the text that follows, to say nothing of the wandering conclusion offered in the first edition. Within each partition, the orderly development of the *Anatomy* is disorganized by frequent, extensive digressions.

Williams connects the synecdochic logic of conventional anatomies with the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage, the moment when the young child integrates a diffuse experience of his or her body with their reflected image and thereby enters the world of knowledge, the domain of the imaginary. A refusal of this integration is therefore a profound renunciation, fragmenting both the knowing subject and the objects of knowledge. Williams's analysis of the depth of this refusal is especially telling because it places Burton's contradictions at multiple textual locations: however cleverly we reconcile the conceptual and structural contradictions in the assertions of the text, we are outwitted by contradictions on the level of the sentence, the arrangement of the book, and the development of its sections. There could be no more uncompromising statement that, in the *Anatomy*, both "A is true" and "A is false" are untrue.

Like Colie's celebration of the multiple assertions of the *Anatomy*, Williams's reading of it as a nihilistic text is entirely plausible unless we consider the

question of exigency. And exigency is at the heart of Burton's statement of his purpose: "to anatomize this humour of Melancholy, through all his parts and species, as it is an habite or an ordinary disease, and that philosophically, medicinally, to shew the causes, symptomes, and severall cures of it, that it may be the better avoided" (1:110).

We could read the *Anatomy* as a disfiguration of its subject, a derangement of its "parts and species," in which the contradictions between medicine and philosophy are richly displayed and never resolved, but we cannot neglect the drive to avoid melancholy, to put this information to use, whether as good counsel or as an experience of radical indeterminacy. For Williams, this orientation of the *Anatomy*, central to its rhetorical purpose, is elided by Burton's foreclosure of the subject of knowledge. If there is no knower, how can there be an exigency of choice?

The four readers I have discussed represent four representative decades in Burton criticism: the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1990s, and the 2000s. Some of their readings are historicist; some are relatively presentist. All are historically informed, and all integrate their readings of Burton with more general discussions of seventeenth-century literature and culture. Although none of these scholars is blind to the movement and energy of the *Anatomy*, their interest is focused on the propositions advanced in Burton's book. How can a writer advance two contradictory ideas? If a writer advances an idea definitively, can we discount his offhand dismissal of it? What do we do with a writer who contradicts both his original assertion and his refutation of it? My work in this book will be to contextualize these questions as responses to early modern practices of knowledge, to emerging paradigms of study, explication, and observation. I will do my best to fight shy of Burton's tangled assertions and denials, to keep my eye firmly on the seamy side of his web.

### Learning's Burton

Let us first consider Burton's relationship to early modern practices of knowledge. What disciplines would the sixteen-year-old Robert Burton have encountered as he began weaving his web in 1593, when he matriculated as an undergraduate, joining his brother William at Brasenose College, Oxford? (William would later publish the comprehensive *Description of Leicester Shire*, a landmark in British local history.<sup>21</sup>)

We know very little about the specifics of Robert Burton's undergraduate life, and he vanished from university records between 1593 and 1599, when he entered Christ Church as a Student, at that time a junior undergraduate rank. Some biographers suggest that he might have left the university because his family ran short of money; others, that he may have suffered from illness.<sup>22</sup> Some identify him with the Robert Burton described in the notebooks of the astrological physician Simon Forman. That patient suffered from melancholy; Forman saw him five times in 1597, prescribed medicines, purges, and phlebotomy, but noted "he carieth death upon him."<sup>23</sup> There is some evidence for this identification: Forman's patient was twenty years old, Burton's age at the time, and a passage from an unpublished manuscript by Forman appears in Burton's astrological notebook.<sup>24</sup>

Burton received his bachelor's degree in 1602 and his master's in 1605. With his second degree, he assumed again the rank of Student, now roughly equivalent to "Fellow."<sup>25</sup> He continued at Christ Church until his death in 1640, serving for a time as Clerk of the Market, and after 1624 as the college librarian. He wrote Latin plays, provided Latin verse for university collections, participated in lectures and disputations, taught students, and obtained a living, a position that provided him income, in 1616. He oversaw the publication of five editions of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, 1624, 1628, 1632, and 1638. He was known as a surveyor; he reported seeing the moons of Jupiter through a telescope (2:62). His astrological notebook included broad speculations as well as directions for finding lost objects and drawing up natal charts. He cast his own horoscope and insisted that it be included on his funeral monument in Christ Church cathedral.

Burton's Oxford was an active intellectual center, committed to both scriptural and humanistic scholarship, and open to the influences of the emerging new sciences.<sup>26</sup> Some of the disciplines of the university, like medicine, philosophy, and divinity, are familiar to us; we could find courses in them in any contemporary university. But we would be hard pressed to recognize modern scientific disciplines in their early modern predecessor, natural philosophy; in fact, as practices of knowledge, all of these subjects were quite distinct from their modern incarnations. The daily life of university students and teachers has also changed. Oxford University was populated by very young students, had no departments, and did not really give courses, let alone grades. The university took responsibility for students' religious formation and good conduct. What practices of knowledge did they sponsor? Which did Burton take up?

## Burton's Learning

We have a number of accounts of the course of study at Christ Church in the sixteenth century; they give us some idea of the education Burton received and provided. The Carnsew brothers, studying in the 1570s, kept diaries of their work. In the course of their studies, the brothers wrote five definitions of *homo*; they read Sallust and *ad Herennium*; they made exercises; they wrote epistles and syllogisms *per impossibile*, proving that a proposition is true by showing that its opposite is impossible. They also studied mathematics, anatomy, Aristotle's ethics, and works in logic and rhetoric. Their reading included puritan tracts and the rhetoric of Rudolph Agricola, which they outlined in tables.<sup>27</sup> This course of reading coheres with what we know of the sixteenth-century arts curriculum, with its prescribed lectures and readings in grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and with the orientation of Oxford to producing able civil servants as well as well-trained divines.

The books that Burton owned and cited in the *Anatomy* are deeply rooted in this tradition, especially as it was interpreted by such northern humanists as Erasmus and Melancthon. Burton quoted extensively from Seneca, Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Pliny, and Cicero, as we might expect from a university scholar with humanistic training. But he also summons a crowd of other writers from Greek and Roman antiquity to his pages: Pausanias, Ausonius, Petronius Arbiter, Philo Judaeus, Pliny, Ptolemy, Gellius, Lucian, and Persius, among others. He cites no fewer than thirty-six works by Plutarch. He followed the humanist preference for the Greek and Latin fathers: Chrysostom, Cyprian, Eusebius, Jerome, Tertullian, and Augustine appear more often than the scholastic theologians Aquinas, Bonaventure, or Scotus. Since the canon of antiquity began with Homer and ended with Boethius, it included over a thousand years of writing, and Burton's explorations in it were wide-ranging. Burton was also versed in early modern humanist scholarship, including philology, philosophy, and political theory: the *Anatomy* quotes the Dutch poet Heinsius, the earlier rhetoricians and humanists Juan Vives and Julius Caesar Scaliger, both the NeoPlatonist Marsilio Ficino and the NeoStoic Justus Lipsius, and the Jesuit theologian Leonardus Lessius.

Burton was by vocation and profession a divine, but we know little about his specific religious beliefs. In the *Anatomy*, Burton wrote on sin as a cause of melancholy, on prayer as a source of healing, and on the treatment of religious



melancholy. He satirized both Roman Catholicism and Puritanism. In the preface, as "Democritus Junior," he mocked both the "three-crowned Sovereigne Lord the Pope, poor *Peters* Successor, *Servus servorum Dei*," and "our Nice and curious Schismaticks" who "abhorre all ceremonies, and rather lose their lives and livings, than doe or admit any thing Papists have formerly used" (1:40, 41). But you will not find a clear elucidation of predestination in the book; nor does Burton wade into the nature of the Eucharist, the number of sacraments, or any of the other issues that vexed early modern theology. Democritus Junior dismissed such writing as useless contention (1:21), but Burton read his share of religious polemics. Nicolas Kiessling's inventory of his library, on which I lean heavily throughout this book, lists 462 titles on theology, the Bible, and liturgy.<sup>28</sup> Annotations in these books show us a man absorbed in the religious issues of his day, carefully annotating works of theological polemic such as Franciscus Collius's *De animabus paganorum libri quinque*, on whether virtuous pagans could have been saved, or Robertus Loeus's *Effigatio veri sabbathismi*, on Sabbath observance, or Zacharias Ursinus and David Pareus's *Explicationum catecheticarum*, a catechism in which Burton wrote notes on salvation, the Holy Spirit, and other religious topics.<sup>29</sup> Since Christ Church cathedral was connected to the college, Burton's duties would have included preaching there. Burton observed that "I might have haply printed a Sermon at *Pauls-Crosse*, a Sermon in *St Maries Oxon.*, a Sermon in *Christ-Church*, or a Sermon before the right Honorable, right Reverend, a Sermon before the right Worshipfull, a Sermon in Latine, in English, a Sermon with a name, a Sermon without, a Sermon, a Sermon, &c." (1:20). Titles comparable to these found a home in Burton's extensive collection of sermons.

While Burton did not engage religious controversies in the *Anatomy*, religious issues shape the text's warp and woof. Discussing poverty as a cause of melancholy, Burton criticizes the rich who "may freely trespasse . . . they may securely doe it, live after their owne lawes, and for their mony get pardons, Indulgences, redeeme their soules from Purgatory and Hell it self" (1:347). In his subsection on the relation between physician and patient, Burton writes "Of those divers gifts which our Apostle *Paul* saith, God hath bestowed on man, this of Physicke is not the least, but the most necessary" (2:11). Such references are common throughout the *Anatomy*. Here again, discourses are mobile and the boundaries between them are porous: religion is a resource for criticizing the rapacity of the rich and praising the usefulness of medicine.

Given Burton's training and profession, it is not surprising that twentieth-century scholarship on *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, while acknowledging the breadth of his interests, presented him as primarily a humanist with deep commitments to Christianity. E. Patricia Vicari observed that "Next to Christianity, the strongest influence on Burton's mind was Renaissance humanism."<sup>30</sup> And her observation is borne out in Nicolas Kiessling's analysis of Burton's library: "As one might expect in the library of a member of an Oxford college in the early 1600s, the majority of books concern theology. . . . His holdings in history and literature . . . are very extensive and follow theology in number."<sup>31</sup>

The category "literature," however, did not exist for early modern scholars or readers; what Burton would have called "good letters" included poetry and other kinds of imaginative writing (but not necessarily prose fiction or vernacular plays), history, and treatises such as Hooker's *Reason of Church Government*.<sup>32</sup> Rhetoric held a special place in this domain: while the basic texts that everyone studied in childhood were often used but seldom cited, it is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of Erasmus, and the trained, skillful practice of persuasion was highly valued, both inside and out of the academy. As a central element of good letters, rhetoric shaped both traditional and emerging discourses of knowledge, supplying the means for making observations present to readers, the templates for organizing physicians' case histories, and the tropes, figures, and affective resources for popular writers. As we will see, it offered critical resources for Burton's project of investigating disciplinary movement and exchange.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated the breadth of Burton's interests, including his curiosity about natural sciences. Oriented to the work of his contemporaries, Burton had a lively interest in the kind of literature—plays, joke books, travel books—that would not have counted as "good letters." Often written by university trained writers, these texts abandoned the world of learning for the public theater, or were posted as broadsides. Burton also extended foundational university studies in letters and philosophy into cognate disciplines such as natural philosophy, disciplines that would themselves give rise to (and confront) emerging practices of observation. To follow these connections, and to understand what Burton did with his wide-ranging interests in the text of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, will take a bit of unfolding, beginning with an account of how early modern scholars understood natural philosophy and its relation to medicine, astronomy, and the emerging sciences.

Natural philosophy occupied a liminal space in the program of study that early modern English universities inherited from their medieval predecessors. It was a science, a systematic deductive study that produced certain and permanent knowledge. But it dealt with material things, with bodies and their relationships—a constantly changing and endlessly variable congeries of objects. Medieval philosophers struggled with this tension, and it did not evaporate in early modern thought.<sup>33</sup> The curriculum in natural philosophy was based on Aristotle, and so this discipline focused on the four Aristotelian causes, especially the final cause, or purpose, of an object. That focus wobbled and blurred in the early modern period, although long after Burton's death Isaac Newton would still write of God, "We know him only by his most wise and excellent contrivances of things, and final causes."<sup>34</sup> Newton's statement coheres with the general belief of early modern natural philosophers that God was the final cause of the universe, but Aristotelians and corpuscular physicists, who studied particles and their movements, understood divine causality differently. They disagreed with each other about the nature of "substance," the material that constitutes all bodies, and about how change occurs.<sup>35</sup> These questions were not anterior to natural philosophy; they were an intrinsic part of the field, liable to emerge in treatises about the migrations of birds or the movement of objects. Such questions had implications for natural philosophers' understanding of the human mind and its vicissitudes. Daniel M. Gross has demonstrated their importance for reformation philosophers, especially Philipp Melanchthon. Writing about the end or purpose of physics, generally considered the primary division of natural philosophy, Melanchthon observed, "It treats the order, quality, and motion of all bodies and forms in nature, the causes of generation, corruption and other motions in elements and in other bodies generated in the mixture of elements, it investigates and reveals however much the darkness of the human mind yields. . . . Wondrously, souls are affected by all of nature."<sup>36</sup>

Resolving problems of causality and change required theories that operated simultaneously on different levels, or that rested on incompatible axioms; therefore, the early modern natural philosopher fell back on the secure foundations of his field, the Aristotelian texts and the rules of logic. But natural philosophers also drew upon a range of strategies to connect those foundations with uncertain natural events. This work was textually mediated; since no scholar assumed that science progressed, the Greek and Latin physicists and botanists enjoyed signal authority. Work in natural philosophy would often begin by citing the

writings of antiquity, and for many writers a quotation from Aristotle was enough to resolve a difficult point.

It would be a mistake to call the writer of natural philosophy a “natural philosopher,” as if this scholar unlocked the door to a Department of Natural Philosophy every morning and idly paged through an issue of *The Journal of Natural Philosophy* at night. It is true that “natural philosophy” designated a well-defined field of study, with a technical vocabulary, canon of theoretical texts, and traditions of communication and proof. But a work in natural philosophy could be produced by a divine, a philosopher, or a historian. Consider such writers (all quoted by Burton) as José de Acosta, a Spanish Jesuit historian who also wrote on the natural history of the Americas, *De natura novi orbis libri duo* (Salamanca, 1589); Jean Bodin, the political theorist who also wrote a comprehensive treatment of natural philosophy, *Universae naturae theatrum* (Hanau, 1605); and Girolamo Cardano, who wrote on game theory, produced works on music and consolation, and also wrote *De Subtilitate* (Basel, 1560), a wide-ranging account of natural phenomena. We could add other canonic early modern figures such as Scaliger and Melanchthon, and many other minor writers. While there were scholars whose main work was in natural philosophy, just as there were those who concentrated on theology or antiquities, it was not at all unusual for an individual to produce works in a variety of fields in the course of an intellectual life. Natural philosophy, with its close ties to the philosophical treatises every academic studied, was an available discourse rather than a specialized profession.

The three professional disciplines—divinity, medicine, and law—were linked to the branches of philosophy offered in the beginning arts course. Natural philosophy sponsored the profession of medicine; it was the source of the “*praecognita*” of medicine—theories of the elements and the humors, as well as such basic concepts as substance and accident or potency and act. But while natural philosophy was in principle an investigation of what was true in all of nature, medicine was necessarily occupied with specific individuals and their illnesses; it focused on what was emergent in a particular illness at the time of treatment. While natural philosophy proudly claimed the certainty of science, medicine claimed certainty only for its description of the common processes and vicissitudes of bodies, for its descriptions of what usually happens. But diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment, as everyone understood, were uncertain, chancy businesses. While natural philosophers investigated unchanging laws, physicians

worked to rectify the constantly changing humors, consulting texts such as Hippocrates's *Airs, waters, places* to balance objects and forces that changed with the seasons, time of day, and weather. It was the work of the physician to search out what was *praeter naturam*, or outside nature, to remove obstructions, to reestablish humoral balance, or to correct excessive heat or cold. Facing so many variables, the physician could not guarantee certainty and his practice was therefore considered to be a conjectural art.<sup>37</sup>

Like natural philosophy, medicine could be either a lifelong profession or an occasional study. The physician could be a zoologist, a botanist, a mathematician, a natural philosopher. (There is an article to be written about the many rhetoricians who were also physicians, including Giorgio Valla, Giovanni Garzoni, Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, Rudolph Agricola, Thomas Linacre, and that hardy perennial in any collection of early modern polymaths, Julius Caesar Scaliger.) Like natural philosophy, medicine valued the works of antiquity, and since important texts of Galen and Hippocrates were being discovered and translated into Latin, the medicine of Greek and Roman antiquity was in effect new learning. The ancient texts were joined by a rich current literature, both theoretical and practical. Physicians collected the letters they wrote to each other and to their patients, published their case notes, and generally joined the cacophony of shared knowledge that was early modern learning.

Conceptual ties between rhetoric and medicine were ancient and tangled. Both disciplines dealt with individual cases; both were conditioned and located in time, oriented to activity, and reliant on the uncertain evidence of signs. Neither worked by reasoning deductively from unchanging principles. Nancy Struever has characterized this shared orientation to *kairos* and deep contextualization as a "rhetorical-medical mindset," a term that is quite accurate, although it would have puzzled early modern practitioners of either art.<sup>38</sup> Since my book is a work of rhetorical history and analysis, and since the ostensible subject of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is (by some lights) medical, I will discuss Burton's use of rhetoric and medicine at some length in coming chapters. The affinities between rhetoric and medicine—uncertainty, particularity, imbrication in time—the very qualities that made them suspect to early modern scholars in search of certainty—were supports to Burton's interest in exchange, in mobility, and in the deployment of tropes from one field to another.

But these were not the only texts that Burton loved, collected, and used. He was interested in the full range of disciplines associated with natural philosophy: natural history, cosmography, and the evolving "chymistry," which in his

lifetime included alchemy, astronomy, and optics.<sup>39</sup> In Burton's copy of Conrad Gesner's alchemical text *Euonymus, sive de remediis secretis* he wrote definitions of a list of alchemical terms such as *calcinatio*, *solutio*, and *sublimatio*.<sup>40</sup> He practiced surveying, which was considered a lowly "mechanical art," and he delighted in the new maps. The borders between these practices were fluid, as were those between the emerging sciences and practices of knowledge that modernity would reject, including astrology. Early modern astrology integrated mathematics and astronomical observation well before Isaac Newton's *Principia*, and so it had more in common with the new science of astronomy than did text-bound academic astronomy.<sup>41</sup> Burton's "astrological notebook," written in the blank pages in his copy of Cyprianus Leovitiuus's *Brevis et perspicua ratio judicandi genituras, ex physicis causis extracta*, recorded his own horoscope and Queen Elizabeth's, as well as passages from a range of authors including Tycho Brahe, Gerolamo Cardano, Simon Forman, and Ptolemy.<sup>42</sup> He noted the latitude and longitude of cities, and Thomas Harriot's description of sunspots.

Not all of Burton's interests were so scholarly. Anthony Wood, in his brief biography of Burton, reported that his close friends found him "very merry, facete and juvenile."<sup>43</sup> Burton's youthful cheerfulness—or perhaps his desire to counter melancholy with mirth and merry company, as he advised in the *Anatomy* (2:116–24)—led him to collect a wide range of amusing texts. His library included plays from the London public and private theaters, books of travel, and joke books, as well as romances and poetry. In the blank pages of one of his books, he wrote three Latin epigrams, including this sober account of a joke:

Cum Radamantheum stetit ante Tribunal Erasmus  
 Ante joco scribens serio damnor ait?  
 Cui Judex, libri dant seria damna jocosi,  
 Si tibi culpa jocus, sit tibi poena jocus.

[When Erasmus stood before a Radamanthean court  
 He said, Is one writing in jest to be condemned in earnest?  
 The judge replied, jest books do serious harm.  
 If your guilt is a joke, let your punishment be a joke.]<sup>44</sup>

Whatever the perils of fooling around, Burton still found jokes, merry tales, and other entertainments irresistible; he recommended "*Jucunda confabulatio, sales, joci*, pleasant discourse, jests, conceits, merry tales" (2:117). Since he also

warned against drinking too much, neglecting business, or falling in with bad companions, Burton had nothing to fear from Radamanthus's judgment.

Burton's will offered first choice of his books to the Bodleian Library; the librarian John Rouse inventoried his collection and found sixty-one "Comedies & Tragedies." These books, along with poetry and comic works in English, were remanded to Christ Church library; they were too numerous for the Bodleian, and Bodley had banned such "baggage books" from his library.<sup>45</sup> Kiessling's inventory of Burton's library includes sixty-four plays in English. Burton's taste in drama is surprising; the closest thing to it I can imagine would be finding out that Derrida's Netflix log alternated between *How I Met Your Mother* and *Battlestar Galactica*. Burton had none of Marlowe's or Shakespeare's plays, although he owned some of their poems. He favored Beaumont and Fletcher (nine plays, separately and in collaboration), the scholarly Chapman (five plays), the farcical Heywood (nine plays), the sensational Middleton (five plays), and the copious Shirley (eight plays). His collection leaned toward comedy and included titles published in every decade from 1600 to 1640.

Burton's library included 109 unique books, editions that survive only in the copies he owned. These include the 1602 edition of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, a rather racy poem for a divine. Also among the unique copies are two versions of the highwayman ballad *Adam Bell*, dismissed as "Ridicularia" by the librarian Rouse, the poems in *Pasquils fooles-cap sent to such . . . as are not able to conceive aright of his mad-cap*; Thomas Deloney's *The Garland of Good Will*; and *A Booke of Merrie Riddles*.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Hearne, writing in 1735, correctly observed that the Bodleian bequest included "Pamphlets, now grown wonderful scarce, . . . [and] other little merry books."<sup>47</sup> Such "little merry books" mingled happily on his shelves with collections of sermons, works by Plutarch, travel books, and collections of medical cases. Burton's learning speaks of an elastic temporality, opening out from the texts of antiquity to the most ephemeral of nonsense books—although what could be more ancient than a riddle? Individual volumes include a range of knowledge practices: moral and religious reflections are found in medical books; an anatomy opens a commentary on Aristotle; merry tales dot a medical case book. With their scratchy bachelor markings in the margins, their Latin tags inscribed on the title pages, and their lists of authors and specialized terms written on the blank pages, Burton's books record a mobile mind at work among porous disciplines, rearranging information, texts, and scraps of narrative among them. His library speaks of a world of clear hierarchies, but also a world of fluid movement and exchange among disciplines, a world where



knowledge responded to exigency by curing diseases, stirring up religious devotion, or resolving political problems.

My book is an investigation into the movement and exchange that Burton constructed in the *Anatomy*. To return to the discussion of the two editions of Burton's book with which I opened this chapter, I read the notes of the Clarendon edition into the compact Everyman edition, so that my discussion folds the commentary into the text and unfolds the text into the commentary. That process necessarily leads me to Burton's learning, to the investigation of his own very material books and his practices of reading, excerpting, and adapting, including his use of texts that he loved, used, but, as far as we know, did not own, such as the writings of Cicero, Melanchthon's *Liber de Anima*, and Erasmus's *Adages*. Taking together Burton's personal library and the other resources available to him, we have a map of the republic of letters in one of its early seventeenth-century iterations.

We cannot say that Burton was an active citizen of that imaginary state, a community based on exchange among scholars, transcending national and confessional boundaries, mediated by personal ties, correspondence and exchange of specimens, and eventually organized by learned journals.<sup>48</sup> We have only the thinnest records of any personal ties between Burton and colleagues anywhere outside Oxford, and learned journals did not begin publication until decades after his death. Yet his world of learning was international; his authorities, distributed in time and space; his reading, inclusive of Roman Catholics, reformers, physicians of all persuasions, and a full range of political theorists. Burton's demeanor as Democritus Junior is anything but the cosmopolitan polite tolerance that the republic of letters recommended to its citizens, but his reading was as voracious and varied as that of any collector of humanist manuscripts or rare plants.

I will investigate Burton's practices of knowledge and persuasion, focusing on two textual structures—genre and choice of language—and on two disciplines—medicine and rhetoric. While the recovery of the rich, mobile, and consequential world of Burton's learning is important, it is also my hope that this recovery supports readers in their adventures in the three compact volumes of the *Anatomy*, or the new readerly editions to come, books that will have much to teach us about the rhetorical power of the *Anatomy* for showing how knowledge and expertise could become more mobile and convivial.

In chapter 2, "Burton's *Anatomy*: Genres as Species and Spaces," I argue that while contemporary genres are closely associated with distinctive disciplines (the

monograph with humanities; the scientific essay organized by Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion with sciences), such genre boundaries were anything but secure for early modern writers, who moved easily between historical examples and philosophical speculation and wrote “treatises” on history, philosophy, grammar, and geometry. The genre of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* has long been a subject of debate; this chapter argues that the *Anatomy* is productively read as an example of layered and sedimented early modern genre practices. I argue that our current understanding of genre is shaped by the powerful metaphor of Darwinian speciation and suggest that supplementing this understanding with more spatial metaphors allows us to see genres as facilitating movement among knowledge practices by constructing points of exchange among them.

Chapter 3, “*The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Early Modern Medicine,” investigates Burton’s avid study of medical literature. He owned and annotated many books by physicians, including many by medical humanists. As an academic discipline, medical humanism integrated textual investigations of the newly recovered works of Galen and Hippocrates with observations and medical letters collected and distributed among physicians and other interested scholars throughout Europe. The issue raised by these materials would become central to new observational sciences: how can individual cases generate secure knowledge? Medicine was a central point of exchange among emerging practices of observation and the textual disciplines of humanist scholarship. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* constructs specific nodal points that facilitate such exchanges, including conventions for reporting medical cases that supported the construction of general statements. Burton also used the narrative structures distinctive to the literature of regimen, a very popular form of medical advice, to form new kinds of narrative temporalities. In Burton’s hands, the concept of *spirit*, a central idea in both natural and moral philosophy, connected bodily experiences, the external world, and the experiences of thought, affect, and will.

Just as Burton used medicine as a storehouse of shapes for thought, he found in rhetoric figures for constructing mobile, polyvalent texts about uncertain and changing objects. Chapter 4, “Burton, Rhetoric, and the Shapes of Thought,” investigates how Burton used the resources of early modern rhetorical theory. He leaned heavily on the topics, as developed by Rudolph Agricola, especially definition. He delighted in the expansion and elaboration of *copia* demonstrated by Desiderius Erasmus, especially in the commentaries of the *Adages*. Both the topics and the techniques of amplification had been part of the armamentarium of rhetoric since Greek and Roman antiquity, but early modern rhetoricians

shaped these devices into flexible ways of developing information and exchanging forms of knowledge. Definition developed from a static practice of demarcating the defined object by genus and species into an investigation of all its qualities, adjuncts, and associations. Agricola called this investigation a “perlustration,” and Burton took full advantage of his invitation to wander. And while the polyvalence of Erasmus’s use of *copia* is well known, we have yet to appreciate how productively the figure, engrafted into the comments on proverbs in his *Adages*, generated multilayered narratives. Both perlustrating definitions and polyvalent *copia* sustained the traditional role of rhetoric: to transform propositional knowledge into the grounds for affect and action, to make knowledge count. This chapter investigates Burton’s use of the rhetorical theory advanced by Agricola and Erasmus to show that, while Burton was not at pains to give readers a stable account of the causes of melancholy, he wanted the *Anatomy* to form in them the habits of mind and body that would prevent or cure the illness.

Our understanding of the relations among learned languages and vernaculars in early modern culture, like our understanding of genres, is shaped by an evolutionary metaphor of speciation: learning used to be in Latin, and then it adapted to the modern vernacular languages. This narrative obscures the relations of mutual influence and exchange among learned languages, including Latin and modern vernaculars, especially as they played out in universities. I present an alternate narrative in chapter 5, “Translingualism: The Philologist as Language Broker.” Throughout the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth centuries, Latin was preeminent in scholarly communications among physicians and natural philosophers; it has been called “the national language of the republic of letters” and it was an important literary language throughout Europe. Latin also offered other virtues: a Latin text was more stable than one in the changing vernacular, hence the custom of translating works from modern languages into Latin, even if they had already been rendered in English. Using the framework of translingual theory, which sees languages as suites of communicative practices rather than as self-contained systems, I consider the interactions among the multiple languages in use at Oxford in the seventeenth century.

Burton participated in a language community that was organized around Latin, that sought to use it as a communicative practice, and that valued other languages ancient and modern. I investigate his location in the polyglot culture of Oxford and discuss the language politics expressed in his Latin poetry. I consider the implication of his choice to publish the *Anatomy* in English but to include abundant Latin quotations. This diglossia establishes Burton as a

language broker, an individual who facilitates exchanges among languages: a difficult and rewarding role. The early modern equivalent for “language broker” might be “philologist,” a term sometimes applied to Burton, indicating a wandering, spontaneous movement among texts rather than technical scholarship in language.

Finally, I will consider what these investigations mean for rhetoric, both as a practice of persuasion and as a disciplinary study. In particular, what do they suggest about rhetorical practices that predate the development of contemporary disciplines? Burton’s rhetoric was not, and could not have been, transdisciplinary, but it models possibilities of movement and exchange that might be useful to current transdisciplinary theorists. His model suggests possibilities for a transdisciplinary practice oriented to movement and exchange rather than to the identification of commonalities or differences; such a practice sponsors a productive approach to the exigencies of melancholy. Such a practice also values the transformation of disciplinary resources as they enter new contexts. It would join toleration of uncertainty with a desire to put knowledge to use, however provisionally.