

**The Subtextual Body: Melancholy, Humoural Physiology and Bodies of Knowledge  
in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Literature**

Submitted by: Dean K. J. Thompson, to the University of Exeter as a dissertation for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in English, September 2009.

This dissertation is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(signature) .....

*Abstract*

**The Subtextual Body: Melancholy, Humoural Physiology and Bodies of Knowledge  
in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Literature**

This dissertation examines the themes of epistemology related to the physiology of the humours and melancholy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English prose, with chief emphasis on Robert Burton's (1577-1640) *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). It charts the transformations of the humoural condition in philosophy, anatomy and the medical treatise throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from the renewed interest in the Renaissance of the 'inspired' form of melancholy by Florentine Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) to the middle of the seventeenth century in the writings of Thomas Browne (1605-1682). The first chapter serves as an introduction to the approach of the dissertation, which integrates a cultural historical approach to literary analysis of the *Anatomy* as some form of an anatomical treatise in the sense that it treats both a body of knowledge and knowledge of the body. Chapter two interrogates the distinction made by scholars between the 'Ficinian' and 'Galenic' forms of melancholy, and argues that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoural physiology recognises no such distinction, but rather that they serve as mutually sustainable responses to the problem presented to humoural physiology of visualising the interior of the living human body. Chapter three argues that, rather than using 'anatomy' and 'melancholy' as metaphorical constructs for rhetorical aims, the *Anatomy* pursues the intellectual possibilities implicit in anatomy as a highly procedural mode of analysis toward comprehending knowledge of a humoural body described in Galenic medicine, but that the text, as a result of the complications with completing such a body of knowledge, instead voices disembodiment. The fourth

chapter proposes an analysis of Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia*, known also as *Urn Burial* (1658), as having thematic continuity with both Burton's *Anatomy* but also seventeenth-century humoral physiology as well, in that, while studying the past from the perspective of antiquarian speculation and cultural history, it concludes similarly that knowledge of the complete is impossible by the analysis of ruined and fragmentary objects and surfaces.

## List of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction: The Dark Humour and the Hidden Body	...6
Chapter 2. Exhumations: The Twin Bodies of Saturn in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century Humoural Physiology	...22
Illustrations	...47
Chapter 3. The Painted Voice: The Corpus of Melancholy in Robert Burton's <i>Anatomy of Melancholy</i>	...53
Chapter 4. Invisible Bodies: Thomas Browne's <i>Urn Burial</i> as Diagnostic Crisis	...114
Chapter 5. Epilogue	...172

## List of Illustrations

- 1 Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I* (1514).
- 2 Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632).
- 3 Frontispiece portrait from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543).
- 4 Title-page from Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543)
- 5 Frontispiece from Thomas Browne, *Urn Burial* (1658).
- 6 Frontispiece from Browne, *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658).

## 1

***Introduction: The Dark Humour and the Hidden Body***

From at least as far back as Hippocratic times (fifth century BCE), the interior of the human body was thought to be composed of four primary fluids or ‘humours’, which were held to correspond to the four elements of which the cosmos was composed. Respectively, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile share, as the hidden elements making up the small universe of the human body, a fundamental link and sympathy with air, water, fire and earth. The human body, or microcosm, an analogue of the world body according to this philosophy, is a model or reflection of the body of the universe, the macrocosm. Greco-Roman physician and anatomist Claudius Galen of Pergamum (c.130-c.200 CE), using the elementary Hippocratic model as a basis, developed a more sophisticated theory of the four temperaments and what resembles an antique preamble to clinical psychology; the range of Galen’s theory of humoral pathology encompasses personalities, moods, diseases of the mind and body but also the *connection* of the diseases of mind and body.<sup>1</sup> In Galenic anatomy and humoral pathology, each of the humours also belongs (or is primarily connected) to a certain organ, which in the case of black bile is the spleen. Hence the use of the term ‘splenic’ in sixteenth- and seventeenth- century writings, which characterises someone or something as melancholic or as having too much black bile.

Why should melancholy, merely *one* of the four humours or temperaments, interest us as a topic of research? I suppose a more fruitful question would be: why did melancholy seem to interest and engage Renaissance writers and intellectuals so much?

---

<sup>1</sup> Concerning Galen’s ideas on the temperaments, see Rudolph E. Siegel, *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology, and Function and Diseases of the Nervous System: An Analysis of his Doctrines, Observations and Experiments* (Basel: Karger, 1973).

In the first place melancholy is the ‘problematic’ temperament; from ancient times until the seventeenth century, difficulties of mind and emotions like fear, despondency, dejection and general sadness arising from no specified causes, hysteria, epilepsy, as well as more corporeal disturbances like gastric irritation, indigestion, cloudiness and blemishes in eyesight – all of these were understood to have something to do with the influence of melancholy or the ‘atrabilious blood’. Thus, diseases with a problematic history of diagnosis are often categorised in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical writings as problems arising from (usually too much) black bile.

The Galenic picture of human anatomy, which subsumed this more abstract physiology of the humours under various psychopathologies, remained largely unchallenged and unchanged for nearly fourteen centuries from the second century to about the 1530s, at which point the empirical study of the human body, by way of dissection, gradually assumed priority over the writings of the ancients. Such a development was made possible in the study of anatomy in Renaissance Europe because of a culture of human dissection, located primarily in Italy, which existed at least as far back as thirteenth-century Bologna. As a consequence it was only a matter of time before anatomists began to turn up inconsistencies in Galen’s writings.<sup>2</sup> During the many centuries of Galenic authority in anatomy, the doctrine of melancholy absorbed several additional features along the way. Arabic astrologers during the ninth and tenth centuries, for instance, placed melancholy in the astral domain of the planetary god Saturn, and in the late Middle Ages melancholy became associated with the *acedia* of the fourth-century

---

<sup>2</sup> See Andrea Carlino’s excellent study, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 170-176. Carlino notes that the first “unquestioned evidence of a direct observation of the body” in the Christian West dates to 1315, although other evidence, he says, strongly suggests that it happened as early as 1270.

Egyptian desert monks, which was assigned a place among the deadly sins as sloth or idleness, but which also connotes restlessness.<sup>3</sup>

In sixteenth-century European art and literature, melancholy became a popular theme, offering a deep and rich iconography from which to draw in human representations of mood, personality and atmosphere on the theoretical basis of what are called the ‘complexions’ and ‘temperaments’ (*i.e.* defined personality categories based on the composition of the humours deriving from the humoral physiology of Galen).

Explanations and details concerning what exactly constitutes a melancholic character according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical definitions necessarily involve consultation of the humoral treatises popular during the late-sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

However, if we seek the most comprehensive seventeenth-century source of the definition(s) of the melancholic complexion, its causes, symptoms and cures, we are ultimately and inevitably led to the compendious *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).

In the second half of the twentieth century, when there was a revival of scholarly interest in Renaissance melancholy resulting in the studies, most notably, of Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, Lawrence Babb and Frances Yates, there followed a corresponding revival of interest in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Scholars, that is, approached it not simply to obtain information about seventeenth-century popular conceptions of melancholy but rather as a complicated text in its own right and deserving

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the astrological linkage of melancholy to Saturn by medieval astrologers of the ninth and tenth centuries, see Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London: Nelson, 1964) 127-133. For a proper outline of acedia from the late empire to the Renaissance, the reader is advised to consult Stanley W. Jackson, “Acedia the Sin and Its Relationship to Sorrow and Melancholia,” *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*, ed. Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 43-62.

<sup>4</sup> These humoral treatises or essays on the complexions will be analysed in more detail in chapter two, but some prominent examples of the genre include Thomas Walkington, *The Optick Glasse of Humors* (London, 1639), Levinus Lemnius, *De habitu et constitutione corporis*, trans. Thomas Newton (London, 1633), André Du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight*, trans. Richard Surphlet (London, 1599), and Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586).

of critical analysis.<sup>5</sup> Most of these studies of the *Anatomy* from the 1960s and 70s, in large part influenced by structuralist theory, are organised on questions about the aesthetics of the text, and the ways in which Burton's self-fashioned persona (shown specifically in the pseudonymic and ironic use of the name 'Democritus Junior' in the Preface) functions within a highly constructed conceit or leitmotif of anatomy in order to describe and diagnose the world as a melancholic, and therefore diseased, entity.<sup>6</sup> Structuralist and modernist readings of the *Anatomy* have since yielded to post-structuralist and post-modernist ones, and not surprisingly the text, an early modern document describing melancholia and diseases of the mind, has been critically analysed using concepts based in psychoanalytic theory. Claims have been made, for instance, that the *Anatomy* is, as a text, too neurotic to be coherent, inasmuch as it frustrates or "dispels imaginary projections" onto a text of a complete corporeal entity (ultimately representing the self), and "disables the dialectic of anatomization and incorporation, thwarting readers from projecting a coherent body onto knowledge."<sup>7</sup>

Less attention has been given to the cultural history of Renaissance anatomy in determining to what extent the *Anatomy* is, according to seventeenth-century generic standards, an anatomy. That the *Anatomy* presupposes a 'body' of knowledge, or treatment of such a body using concepts associated with the study of anatomy, has been

---

<sup>5</sup> For these earlier studies of melancholy as a theme in art and literature, the reader is advised to see Klibansky *et al*, Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, rpt. London: Routledge, 1999); Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951); Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1971). For analyses of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in particular, see again Lyons (113-148); Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> For an extensive study of Burton as a stylist, see especially Joan Webber, *The Eloquent 'I'* (Madison, 1968) 80-111.

<sup>7</sup> Grant Williams, "Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*," *ELH* 68.3 (Fall 2001) 593-613 (599).

frequently discussed by scholars, but that such an anatomy should be concerned with melancholy is especially significant and its reasons have not been adequately acknowledged or theorised.<sup>8</sup>

The very idea that a body of knowledge could be comprehended in a text was of fundamental interest in more literal sixteenth-century anatomies, which concern a body of knowledge but also, of course, a body of knowledge *about* the body. The premise of a literary anatomy is based upon this key analogical connection between body and text, which characterises not only Renaissance anatomy literature after Vesalius but also less clearly-defined medical enterprises like *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. It is not a poetical motif that came about randomly but an outgrowth of a new and quite distinct genus of anatomy theatre of the sixteenth century than had preceded it in Europe. As Jonathan Sawday explains, the Renaissance anatomy theatre of Vesalius and his followers differed from its European predecessor chiefly in the sense that the anatomy demonstration, the dissection, no longer assumes a subservient place. Rather than a mechanical demonstration and reiteration of the Galenic anatomy found in ancient texts, the ‘new’ anatomy theatre showed that dead human body could be *witnessed* in the empirical sense, which is to say not only viewed firsthand but also, potentially, discovered. In the post-Vesalian anatomy lecture the cadaver is the object of empirical study capable of *disputing* Galen, and that this amounts to a “confrontation” between living and dead authorities. This confrontation between the “living and dead,” writes Sawday, “expressed a view of knowledge itself which was at a point of metamorphosis: for the anatomist who searched in the body for its structure rather than in the texts of ancient authority, was the

---

<sup>8</sup> Again, see Fox (1-44) in this regard, whose analysis of the *Anatomy* emphasizes the concept of the artificial ‘cut’ that dictates Burton’s literary procedures, and more recently Williams (“Disfiguring”), who posits that the basis of Burton’s methodology is the “rhetorical cut” (596).

concrete representative of a new conception of knowledge, one that professed to rely on the experience of phenomena rather than the experience of textual authority” (64).

Thus, what we witness in the Renaissance anatomy theatre which Sawday describes (but also more broadly in the discourse of anatomy itself) is a specific set of historico-cultural circumstances in which the human body and ancient classical text have become *competing* texts, each asserting its authority over the other. From this competition (or “confrontation”) between new and old authority (*i.e.* body and book) was generated an altogether new text, a deeply visual anatomy textbook, specifically Vesalius’s *De humani corporis fabrica* (and its accompanying *Epitome*, both published in 1543), which encapsulates this competition and emphasises the ways in which body and book reflect or imitate one another.<sup>9</sup>

This analogical mimesis existing between bodies and texts, and the procedures that empirical anatomical investigation implied (dissective in both the practical and literary sense), suggested possibilities for creative and intellectual explorations in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature which were *not* necessarily restricted to the domain of traditional human anatomical enquiry. Burton’s *Anatomy* exemplifies the anatomical treatise as a mode of expression better than any other seventeenth-century work, which is to say that it uses anatomy as a model for organising information although this information is not, as a matter of priority, concerned with the human body. The priority in the *Anatomy* is largely the anatomical model itself, and to a unique degree it calls attention to its manipulated framework. It uses division and contradistinction in order to

---

<sup>9</sup> Sawday points out that Vesalius and his editor accomplished the textual mimesis of the human body by constructing the *Fabrica* in such a way as to resemble the construction of the ‘master text’, the body itself, by sequencing the book in a way that reflected an “architectural mode of analysis,” beginning with the skeleton and “building up the various detailed segments into an organized whole,” and also by implementing a “keying” system standard in modern anatomies, in which the dissected body is displayed “through the use of indicator lines and alphabetical or numerical systems of identification” (*Body* 132).

establish meanings, and implements its own vocabulary of subdivision in the naming of ‘parts’, ‘partitions’, ‘sections’, ‘subsections’ and ‘members’ in order clearly to mark out its exaggerated array of chapter separations. The *Anatomy* is not, of course, an anatomy textbook *per se* in the sense that it not concerned (or if so only marginally and in short unsustained spurts) with describing the layout of the human body for the purposes of instruction.

For these reasons it has proven extremely difficult for Burton scholars to decide the kind of genre to which the *Anatomy* belongs without impatiently describing it as a mock-anatomy/encyclopaedia/encomium or, as Northrop Frye famously termed it in order to underscore Burton’s playful use of generic configurations for purposes of socio-political critique, a “Menippean satire” of the highest order before Swift.<sup>10</sup> An alternative perspective is that the *Anatomy* represents the culmination of a repeating sequence of mutual substitutions between bodies and texts consistent with the culture of sixteenth-century anatomy and its literature, though by no means restricted to this sphere of enquiry. As Sawday writes, the “cycle of texts which become bodies, and bodies which become texts, allows us to understand the equally complex language of textual division as anatomy which informed so much early-modern discussion of method,” and “[i]t was within this tradition [of harmony between the texts of the body and book] that [...] Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* appeared: an anatomy of textuality, as well as a textual investigation of the world and all that it contained” (135).

---

<sup>10</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 311. See also Roger Pooley, *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century, 1590-1700* (London: Longman, 1992), who I think is more accurate in characterizing the *Anatomy* as belonging to a class of ‘cornucopian’ texts, “part of whose life seems to derive from their spreading over the limits of the genre they appear to belong to” (191).

The *Anatomy* is very much “an anatomy of textuality” insofar as it both incorporates myriad genres and forms – the humoural treatise and the anatomical textbook, oral and written, *etc.* – into a single literary enterprise, and appears to be more preoccupied with textual procedures themselves than with their application. But the *Anatomy* is also an anatomy of what a text is incapable of embodying. As works of literature, the *Fabrica* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* are distinct as early modern anatomies in one important way: the former purports to be a representation of reality, while the latter does not. But the physiology of the humours was obviously enough of a reality in medical contexts in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to support the genre of the humoural treatise, similar to the *Anatomy*, though on a smaller scale, in that they collate definitions of ancient, Galenic humoural concepts. Moreover, although they would accept the conception implicit in Vesalian anatomy that the textbook represents a transcription (emphasised by its collection of illustrations) of the “‘text’ of the body,” what is lost in or excluded from their transcription is the specific kind of body described by traditional humoural theory according to Galenic models (Sawday, *Body* 131).

Close analysis of the *Anatomy*, and the extent to which the text itself, ironically, seems to be scrupulously dissected as part of an academic exercise into a register of styles, techniques and rhetorical features, has the effect of overstating the sense of the metaphorical with which ‘anatomy’ should be interpreted in reading Burton, and to be dismissive toward the cultural history of Renaissance anatomy.<sup>11</sup> This approach was commonly adopted by the generation of Burton scholars which includes Babb, Lyons and

---

<sup>11</sup> See especially Angus Gowland, “Rhetorical Structure and Function in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*,” *Rhetorica* 19.1 (Winter 2001) 1-48, for a studied tracing of the *Anatomy*’s rhetorical troping and construction, whose bases, argues Gowland, are in classical models, specifically the epideictic (an oratorical mode of classical rhetoric). See also Williams, “Disfiguring,” who outlines the ways in which rhetorical figures like the *synathroesmus*, *frequentatio* or *congeries* (Burton’s lists or catalogues of exempla in the *Anatomy*) render incoherent the *Anatomy*’s textual body (597-601).

Fox, who favours structuralist readings of the *Anatomy*, in which case Burton uses the conceptual framework of anatomical writing and/or enquiry in order to “bin[d] chaos into form” (Fox 4). What we stand to gain from the inclusion of the cultural history of Renaissance anatomy in contextualising *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, rather than limiting the term to a specific set of largely scientific interests, is a richer sense of the layered meanings of ‘anatomy’ that can guide us to the epistemological rather than rhetorical and aesthetic possibilities of textual anatomies. Apart from unjustly dismissing the discourse of Renaissance anatomy and missing an opportunity to contextualise Burton’s work (and specifically the epistemological conundrums which the Preface seems to pose), insistence on the exclusively metaphorical sense of anatomy in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* does little to explain why melancholy in specific is an appropriate subject for the work.

A textual anatomy represents one possible method of embodying the concept of melancholy, which, as Williams remarks, “possesses no spatialized body” of its own to serve as the model of an anatomy textbook (“Disfiguring” 602). In post-Vesalian anatomy, in which visibility is treated not only as the crucial condition dividing what is known and what is unknown about the corporeal, “spatialized” body, but also, by extension, what is and what is *not* the body, humoral physiology is silently marginalised. Vesalius is scarcely mentioned by Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, because he is not quotable as a source for the very good reason that the *Fabrica* does not discuss humoral theory in any meaningful way. For example, in his description of the spleen, the organ which Galen hypothesised was responsible for eliminating black bile and thus regulating melancholic symptoms, Vesalius states simply in the *Fabrica* that “what the spleen squirts back into the stomach is black bile,” that “[f]rom the stomach it

passes into the intestines, and from there it is eliminated from the body along with the feces.”<sup>12</sup> It is clear, in other words, that black bile is present in the body; it is *not* clear – neither to Vesalius nor to us as readers of the *Fabrica* – what precise function black bile performs within the body. The collection of hypotheses about the functions of black bile, and the nature of melancholic pathologies, is rather the domain of Burton and the premise of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

The Vesalian and Burtonian anatomies (the texts, that is) are thus more than definitive examples, respectively, of literal and literary Renaissance anatomies; they also represent two alternate realisations of the body-as-text analogue – the one signifying a real body, the other *being* a body, in the basic sense that the text of the *Anatomy* and the body that it conveys are essentially one and the same, even though the *Anatomy*, by its author’s admission, is deprived of the coherence and totality that the Vesalian anatomy claims implicitly. As Burton writes, his aim is none other than “to anatomize this humour aright, through all the members of this our *Microcosmus*,” an objective whose implausibility he calls attention to in concluding that it “is as great a taske, as to reconcile those Chronologicall errors in the Assyrian monarchie, finde out the *Quadrature* of a Circle,” or to “perfect the Motion of *Mars* and *Mercury*, which so crucifies our Astronomers, or to rectifie the *Gregorian Kalender*.”<sup>13</sup> It will be useful at this point to introduce the notion of the ‘subtextual body’. If we take as our point of reference the *Fabrica* of Vesalius, a book which positions itself as the product or epitome of the new empirical methodology of anatomical investigation in which body and book are comparable texts, that which

---

<sup>12</sup> Andreas Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body: A Translation of De corporis humani fabrica*, trans. William Frank Richardson and John Burd Carman, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Norman Publishing, 1998-2007) 5:126.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989-1994) 1:23 (“Democritus Junior to the Reader”).

concerned the functions and behaviours of the body not discernible in a *dissected* human body evolved into an existence that could be appropriately described as suppressed or subtextual. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* may be said to be concerned with the subtextual body, in that it realises a body of knowledge about the body that cannot be subjected to the kind of anatomical analysis proposed by post-Vesalian anatomy.

Thus while the *Anatomy's* aims appear to be no different than the aims of other late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century treatises in the genre of humoral pathology, which is the presentation in an organised fashion of the means of diagnosing and treating diseases arising from humoral causes, the *Anatomy* attempts this projection not only on a grander, more ambitious scale, but with a self-consciousness of the problems inherent in a textual anatomy. One of the important features that distinguishes the *Anatomy* from these other treatises, *e.g.* those of Du Laurens, Lemnius, Bright and Walkington, apart from the sheer size of the *Anatomy* and the fact that it contains a long and whimsical preface, is that it draws frequent attention to its inability to deliver on its promise, which is to reduce its subject matter (melancholy) to an organised corpus by way of its methodology (anatomy).

On the basis of the playful Preface, "Democritus Junior to the Reader," scholars have explained these methodological but also deeply epistemological problems which emerge in Burton's anatomical treatment of melancholy by claiming that the *Anatomy* has playful aims beneath its declared focus on melancholy and anatomy. Such scholars may have been hoodwinked – the jovial mask actually conceals the more severe and darker fact that the *Anatomy's* objectives, taken collectively, do not cohere, to the extent that the title is

oxymoronic.<sup>14</sup> There *is* no body of melancholy, no ‘master text’ to serve as the basis for an anatomy text in the way that the dissected human body serves for the *Fabrica*, and thus no anatomy capable of describing it as the topographical body is described by the *Fabrica*’s text and illustrations. If the body itself represents a book in Vesalian anatomy, then the dramas of the humours described in Galenic medicine represents an unreadable (and thus subtextual) part of it. This fact becomes clear, as shown above, when we consult the *Fabrica* for an anatomist’s perspective on the pathologies of the humours of the kind that appear everywhere in the *Anatomy*.

It is the complicated epistemological questions, surrounding the ways in which melancholy can be unequivocally known in the *Anatomy*, which suggest the inclusion of Thomas Browne’s *Urn Burial* in this dissertation. Burton’s *Anatomy* and Browne’s *Urn Burial* are two texts that seem to *want* to be read alongside one another, though they rarely are, which is perhaps unsurprising in the sense that they have different concerns altogether; the *Anatomy*’s title states its concern explicitly (melancholy), while *Urn Burial* concerns artefacts.

*Urn Burial* is not ‘about’ melancholy but about the discovery of between “fourty and fifty Urnes” which were “digged up” “[i]n a field of old *Walsingham*” in Norfolk, England.<sup>15</sup> What make these *comparable* works – Burton’s massive treatise concerning melancholy and Browne’s rather brief treatise concerning archaeological discovery and funeral customs – are their epistemological interests, or, perhaps more accurately, their seeming interest in presenting and working through complex epistemological

<sup>14</sup> See especially Lyons, for instance, who argues that “[a]s a satirist, Burton assumes the guises both of the Jonsonian type of detached critic mocking the follies and vices that he professes himself eager to reform, and of the Marstonian type of the melancholy and disgusted man inveighing against evils,” and that the “mask of the Democritic satirist enabl[es] the wearer to vent his feelings verbally” (116).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, urne-buriall, or, a discourse of the sepulchrall urnes lately found in Norfolk*. London, 1658 (2:14). Hereafter referred to as *UB*.

conundrums while offering no clear resolutions. Like the *Anatomy* with its insistence on anatomising melancholy, *Urn Burial* is interested in knowledge that is unobtainable. The result, as Claire Preston writes, is rather “the amplification of loss”<sup>16</sup> or perhaps the kind of presence/loss paradox which, as Michael Ann Holly writes, confronts the cultural historian in virtually every object which has been partially eaten away by time: “The very materiality of objects,” as Holly explains, “that have survived the ravages of time in order to exist in the present frequently confounds the cultural historian, who retroactively sets out to turn them back into past ideas, social constructs, documents of personality, whatever. Works of art metonymically, like links on a chain, express the lost presence.”<sup>17</sup>

In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, this “lost presence” is itself melancholy, or rather the causes of it, the subject matter into which everything in the treatise is absorbed. Questions surrounding the ways in which melancholy originates in the body required from ancient times a deeply speculative theoretical model of the humours and a complex system of elemental analogies in order to visualise and comprehend the inside of this diseased (and dark) subliminal body, ‘present’ in its effects, symptoms, consequences and complexions, but ‘lost’ in the sense of its unreadability by actual visible markers.

In Browne’s treatise on funeral customs, prompted by the Walsingham discovery, visible markers assume the form of grave monuments which complicate the reading of subsurface realities and ultimately, as Browne writes, “the deep discovery of the Subterranean world” (*UB* 1:95). Literally he means the items and treasures hidden in the ground but also, metaphorically, I think, anything whose nature or identity is concealed beyond the limits of the kinds of research which govern Browne’s interests in *Urn*

---

<sup>16</sup> Claire Preston, *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 132.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Ann Holly, “Mourning and Method,” *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002) 660-669 (660).

*Burial* – archaeological, cultural historical, *etc.* Indeed, Browne writes, “a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us,” by which he means that it is undiscovered and thus yet unknown (*UB* 1:95). Browne’s statement that the earth is “still” an “Urne” implies the existence of a “Subterranean world,” itself a subtext to the terrestrial world which contains visible signifiers of it in the form of grave markers and monuments, except that this sub-terrain is not readable.

Thus *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Browne’s *Urn Burial*, though different in both the subject matter and the methods of investigation that they respectively specify, are organised around strikingly similar semiological and epistemological questions: according to what economy or authority of symbols or signs can a body of knowledge be assembled? What can be known by processes of analysis, and what remains necessarily unknown? In the *Anatomy*, the set of pathologies of the body linked in traditional humoural theory to melancholy are shown to escape textual diagnosis by way of the anatomical investigation Burton attempts to carry out. It is, in this regard, significant that Browne’s *Urn Burial*, a text in which bodies and their histories are proven unreadable, is a treatise whose predominant imagery is cognate with the iconography of melancholy as it is depicted in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art and described in genres of medical and pseudo-medical literature in which Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* is included.

Before moving on to Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* in chapter three, I think that it would be useful to explore humoural pathology in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century medical exegesis in what is usually formally referred to as the ‘humoural treatise’. As its name suggests, the genre of medical treatise is reserved for medical definitions of humoural concepts largely consistent with Galenic models. The chapter

will serve the double duty of familiarising ourselves with the iconography of melancholy in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical exegesis, while also giving us a larger sense of the ‘humoural body’ that the accumulation of these concepts forms in this kind of treatise, a kind treatise which loosely suggested to Burton a generic literary model for his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. It is this sense of a body understood in humoural terms which interests me in this dissertation, specifically its existence as something implicit in the body but shown to be difficult to analyse or be otherwise reduced to coherent knowledge.

Following this, chapter three will proceed to analysis of the *Anatomy*, which integrates a cultural historical approach to the literary analysis of the text as an intellectual anatomy which can be seen as, instead of purely a send-up of the anatomy genre for artistic purposes, a text which is equally serious in its deployment of the mode in order to comprehend knowledge of this particular subject matter. But of course, as Burton asks, how is it possible to incorporate this vast range of symptoms of melancholy, “or prescribe rules to comprehend them?” Burton writes of melancholy in the *Anatomy*, implying that knowledge of melancholy is, essentially, impossible because no intellectual means seems to be available to him to execute its ‘comprehension’ (1:407 [1.3.1.4]).

The fourth chapter, on Browne’s *Urn Burial*, will serve as the final major chapter of the thesis, and seeks to establish a continuity with the epistemological themes and concerns which the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, but also with seventeenth-century medical exegesis of humoural pathologies, which define the problematic temperament of melancholy according to Galenic material conceptions. These medical definitions, often specifying the ‘earthy’ objects linked to melancholy and understood in sixteenth- and

seventeenth-century art and literature to signify a psychological depth, are cognate with Browne's subject matter in the dominant themes and material imagery of the essay.

*Exhumations: The Twin Bodies of Saturn in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century*

*Humoural Physiology*

In May of 1609, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), then professor of mathematics at Padua University, heard of a new spectacle instrument or “spy-glass” invented by Dutchman Hans Lippershey, while staying in Venice for studies. Within a day, the story goes, he had in his possession the necessary parts – two lenses, one with a concave side and the other convex, and a metal tube to house them – with which to assemble his first telescope. For a year he marvelled at the things, previously unseen, which his new instrument brought to his optical attention, making note, for instance, of the four moons of Jupiter, and publishing his observations in the meantime in *Sidereus Nuncius* (*Starry Messenger*) in March 1610. But in August of that year began a peculiar sequence of sights in the night sky: Saturn appeared to be made up of three bodies rather than one, situated in line with one another, or else the main planet was flanked by two very significant satellites. Over the next two years, Saturn’s two accompanying bodies gradually dissolved in brightness, clarity and size, and eventually withered to nothing. “Has Saturn perhaps devoured his own children?” Galileo writes to Mark Welsus (1558-1614), a prominent Augsburg magistrate and enthusiast of empirical science, in 1612.<sup>18</sup> Galileo did not live to see Dutch astronomer and mathematician Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) correctly theorise more than four decades later in 1655 that the two bodies were actually the outer edges of Saturn’s encircling ring. When viewed at a sidelong

---

<sup>18</sup> This letter and two others were published together in 1613 as *Letters on Sunspots*. For an account of these events, and the feuding correspondence between Galileo and rival contemporary Jesuit astronomer Christoph Scheiner (?1573/5-1650), which is the context for the *Letters on Sunspots*, see Henry C. King, *The History of the Telescope* (Cambridge, Mass.: Sky Publishing Co., 1955) 34-38.

angle, only the edges of the planet's ring were visible as two bright spots waiting at Saturn's side.

Galileo is, essentially, speaking poetically and allusively in his exclamation that Saturn has “devoured his own children.” In the myth, Saturn fathers six children and then, without hesitation and with strictest determination, eats them one by one as they fall from the womb in order to prevent them from overthrowing him. It may well be habit in the early seventeenth century to speak of a dynamic celestial drama in terms of an ancient but very recognisable myth. But it is also possible that Galileo is registering the personality of Saturn, the “menacing star,” as Walter Benjamin calls it, which, from its long-wandering orbiting outpost, is up to no good.<sup>19</sup> Low in the heavens and also residing in the human body, Saturn “menac[es]” a select group of individuals – sufferers of melancholy – who prefer solitary places to public ones, and who are prone to depression and disease, by way of the element and humour which Arabic astronomers in the tenth century accorded him: earth and black bile.

The role of the Saturn mythology in seventeenth-century astronomy is probably better understood than its role in the history of the study of the human body. The presence of astrological and mythological elements in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discourses of medical physiology and anatomy is less surprising than perhaps it seems, since the basis of humoral physiology in Hippocratic medicine required the acceptance of broad (and essentially occult) systems of analogy – the analogy between humours in the human body (a microcosm) and the elements in the world or universal body (the macrocosm). But the name ‘Saturn’ also functions as a kind of code in sixteenth-century humoral physiology for categorising information and alluding to what had become, from

---

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1997) 149.

ancient times to the Renaissance, a doctrine of melancholy that had grown unruly by having absorbed other doctrines not initially linked to melancholy by Galen and Hippocrates, among them these elements of astrology and mythology linked to the sign of Saturn along with the standard physiological and anatomical definitions of melancholy.

Thus it is common for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physicians to refer to ‘Saturnine things’, without necessarily implying any astrological details or a reference to the Saturn mythology (which I shall discuss more extensively later in this chapter). To call someone ‘saturnine’ in sixteenth-century medicine is equivalent to saying ‘melancholic’; both refer to the diseases of black bile which were made known in the medicine of Galen, and which, long before becoming associated in the astral realm with Saturn, were linked in the physiology of the humours with the element of earth. ‘Saturnine’ also embraces contrary versions of the melancholic human body without seeming in any way incoherent, since Saturn himself was a bipolar character, a “god of opposites” or “demon of opposites” (Klibansky *et al.* 125, 58). Thus, even though Saturn is a much later addition to the physiology of the humours theorised by Hippocrates and Galen (dating from the Middle Ages rather than antiquity), there is a certain degree of logic in enrolling Saturn alongside melancholy in the scheme of the temperaments.

Saturn, like the earthy element present in the body by way of black bile, helped account for the good *and* bad qualities of melancholy. In medical exegesis, the often self-contradictory web of qualities with which melancholy was linked is explained by black bile, but also further explained by the analogy of black bile and the element of earth. For instance, humoral physiologists from Galen onward were certainly drawing on Plato’s metaphysical exegesis, his anatomy of the universe, in the *Timaeus*, in which he states

that earth signifies a good memory, because it is “the most immobile of the four bodies and the most retentive of shape.”<sup>20</sup> Yet earthiness is also a breeding ground for disease: “Earth, the most sluggish of the four, needs four times as long to be purged and causes quartan fevers, which are hard to shake off” (86). The writer of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral treatise does not typically focus on the astrological or occult significance of Saturn, which is generally treated as an interesting narrative to accompany the dryer details of diagnostic medicine.

More often than not the astrological sign Saturn serves as a pretext for discussing the self-conflicted qualities of melancholics, those born under the sign. In *The Optick Glasse of Humors* (1607), a treatise which anticipates Burton’s *Anatomy* as a collection of traditional humoral ‘portraits’ written by a non-physician, Anglican clergyman Thomas Walkington, declares that there are some writers

who averre that those that are borne vnder *Saturne* [are] melancholike men as *Saturne* is the highest planet of all, so they haue the most aspiring wits of all.

Divine *Plato* affirmes that those haue most dexterically wits who are wont to bee stirde vp with a heavenly fury: he saies *frustra poeticas fores* &c. hee that knockes not at the portall of poets Inne, as furious and beside himselfe is neuer like to be admitted in. (128)

“Euen so the soule being pressed downe with the ponderous waight of melancholy,” Walkington continues, “and as it were a thrall vnto this dumpish [sic] humor, is rouzed up with wine and meriment especially, and infraunchist againe into a more ample and heavenly freedome” (127-128). Saturn’s name in these treatises otherwise typically appears at the end of a section on melancholic symptoms, diseases and temperamental

---

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977) 55.

inclinations, as a means of tying the information together: “To conclude, the grim and surly Planet of *Saturne*,” writes Levinus Lemnius in *De habitu et constitutione corporis* (*The Touchstone of Complexions*, 1561), “together with Melancholy” is responsible for the problems outlined in the treatise and also “a great many other like, [that] are incident unto that Complexion and habit, which is cold and dry” (233).

The “*frustra poeticas fores &c.*” mentioned by Walkington as something which “[d]ivine Plato affirms” is the concept of ‘*furore*’ usually ascribed to Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Ion* (*Phaedrus* 244A-245A, *Ion* 533E-534A.). As Frances Yates writes, “[t]here was a line of thought through which Saturn and the melancholy temperament might be ‘revalued’, raised from being the lowest of the four to become the highest”; this “line of thought” did not originate in the field of anatomy but philosophy, though the two fields of enquiry frequently overlapped in ancient times (60).

The most significant and influential pre-sixteenth-century text on melancholy of the ‘good’, philosophical kind, to which Walkington is alluding above in his suggestion that “the soule” is capable of being “rouzed up” by this humour toward “a more ample and heavenly freedome” (127-128), is *De Vita Triplici* (1489) by the Florentine Neoplatonist, Marsilio Ficino. Affected by melancholy are all intellectuals to some extent, “[b]ut of all learned people,” he writes,

those especially are oppressed by black bile, who, being sedulously devoted to the study of philosophy, recall their mind from the body and corporeal things and apply it to incorporeal things. The cause is, first, that the more difficult the work, the greater concentration of mind it requires; and second, that the more they apply their mind to incorporeal truth, the more they are compelled to disjoin it from the body.

Hence their body is often rendered as if it were half-alive and melancholic.<sup>21</sup>

Ficino's explanation of melancholy in positive terms, involving the division of causes according to celestial, natural and human levels of influence, surrounds his conception that the soul and intellectual concentration together share a kind of inclination toward bodilessness, which he further relates by analogy to the center of the Earth (113). Within this series of "compliance[s]," he further theorises, "our mind explores eagerly and perseveres in the investigation longer," in which case whatever truths the mind pursues, it "perceives it clearly, soundly judges it, and retains the judgment longer," and "always seeks the center of all subjects and penetrates to their innermost core" (121).

Writers from Ficino throughout the sixteenth century who were concerned with the humours and with melancholy in particular were faced with a doctrine of melancholy which contained a great many, frequently inconsistent and outlandish claims and had to account for them. Ficino clearly has in mind in these passages cited above the ancient *Problemata* 30.1, the document of Greek origin, discussed briefly in the first chapter, from the fourth or third century spuriously attributed during the Renaissance to Aristotle. I want to return to the question raised by *Problemata* 30.1, "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly melancholics, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?" (18). The writer of the *Problem* proceeds to theorise a causal relation between melancholy and special poetic, political and philosophical giftedness using the analogy of the effects of wine:

One can see that wine makes the most varied characters, by observing how it

---

<sup>21</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books of Life (De Vita Triplici), A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998) 115.

gradually changes those who drink it; for those who, to begin with, when sober, are cool and taciturn become more talkative when they have drunk just a little too much; if they drink a little more it makes them grandiloquent and boisterous and, when they proceed to action, reckless; if they drink still more it makes them insolent, and then frenzied; while very great excess enfeebles them completely and makes them as stupid as those who have been epileptic from childhood or as those who are a prey to excessive melancholy. (*Problemata* 20)

*Problemata* 30.1 belongs to what the Renaissance knew as the *Problemata Aristotelis* (*The Problems of Aristotle*). Klibansky *et al.* have argued that the work more likely belongs to Theophrastus (c.371-287 BCE), although the Renaissance accepted it as genuine in origin (41). As an ‘Aristotelian’ text, its words carried significant weight for Renaissance readers interested in the doctrine of melancholy. This authority was enhanced, as I have noted, by its apparent inclusion of the Platonic concept of divine inspiration, *furore* or mania or frenzy, which accompanies the most sublime poetic creativity and contemplative clarity.

In both *Phaedrus* and *Ion* Plato speaks of some form of *furore* in which the soul is separated from the body. In *Ion* Socrates proclaims that “all the good epic poets” when creating poetry “utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed, and the good lyric poets likewise,” who “when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession – as the bacchantes are possessed, and not in their senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers” (*Phaedrus* 245; *Ion* 533E-534A). The author of *Problemata* is likely evoking Plato in the suggestion that “Maracus, the Syracusan, was a better poet when he was out of his mind”

(24), referring to the exalted state which is simultaneously madness and genius and in which the body is temporarily discarded. German occultist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), in *De occulta philosophia* (1533), includes the concept of frenzy in his theorisation of divine inspiration which leads to insight and foresight, and essentially the ability to comprehend ideas which Ficino had located in the temperament of melancholy, but which was further situated in a large system of astral analogies which Agrippa elaborated.<sup>22</sup> Agrippa and Ficino are essentially reading from the same pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* text in making these formulations. These two writers, led in chronology by Ficino, inaugurated a revival of the *potentially* good, creative and productive form of melancholy which had lain relatively dormant for roughly fifteen centuries of medical physiology and anatomy. Throughout the Middle Ages, the slothful conception of melancholy, connected to ‘acedia’, predominated. Ficino, however, offered a reinterpretation of the doctrine which emphasised the productive aspects of the humour and temperament suggested by *Problemata* 30.1. Ficino’s interest in Platonic doctrine (as a translator of Plato) further influenced his idea to augment melancholy, to “rais[e]” it, as Yates suggests, “from being the lowest of the four to become the highest” (60).

For Ficino, the state of being ‘bodiless’ is undoubtedly a good thing, and led him toward the conceptualisation of ‘inspired’ melancholy based on passages from certain of Plato’s dialogues and *Problemata* 30.1. In humoral physiology melancholy is bodiless in that it is a disease with no basis in corporality. Ficino’s *De vita* is not an anatomical or medical tract, and when historians of early modern medicine refer to one kind of

---

<sup>22</sup> Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia* (London, 1650) 3:500. “[p]hrensie” writes Agrippa, “is an illustration of the soul coming from the Gods, or Demons,” and which “Plato defines by alienation, and binding; for he abstracts from those by which the corporeal senses are stirred up, and being estranged from an animal man, adheres to a deity from whom it receives those things which it cannot search into by its own power.”

melancholy as ‘Ficinian’, it is generally in order to distinguish it from the Galenic variety. Both kinds of melancholy may be seen as bodiless diseases, though for different reasons. Agrippa’s *De occulta*, in many ways a successor to Ficino’s *De vita*, is far less interested in discussing the human body from a medical or diagnostic perspective than either the treatise of humoral physiology or anatomy, and so is not included in the category of the sixteenth-century treatise of humoral physiology.

In the medicine of Galen, melancholy is, fundamentally speaking, a disease, but as I hinted in the first chapter, it may be better described as a collection of diseases, or, more precisely, a nominal subcategory in medicine dealing with diseases that are difficult to see, diagnose, and treat. These include despondency, fear, and even indigestion or other gastric disturbances. Galen writes in *De locis affectis* (*On the Affected Parts*, c.165 CE), which contains his most extensive treatment of the diseases arising from an unhealthy predominance of black bile and melancholy:

Sometimes the same [humoral] mixture appears in all visible parts of the body, for instance in jaundice and the so-called *elephantiasis* and dropsy, and further in cachexia and during di[s]coloration [of the skin] in diseases of the liver and spleen; sometimes when a single part [of the body] receives the humor of bitter bile, phlegm or black bile, it changes its local composition. In the same manner it is occasionally possible, when the entire blood in the vessels has become melancholic [turned into black bile], that the brain itself has undergone such damage according to the general rule of this illness. (89)

“The so-called hypochondriac and flatulent affections,” says Galen, “are connected with a melancholic depression (*dysthymia*) and comparable to the delirium (*paraphrosyne*) due

to a high fever,” and in addition, by way of the “cavity of the stomach,” a “suffusion [of the eyes]” takes place, which is to say a covering or obscuring of the eyes (88).

“Likewise,” Galen adds, “delirium supervenes more readily in inflammation of the neural parts than of any other organs of the body, because at one time only the heat, at another time a vaporous or smoky or sooty gas (pneuma) ascends through contiguous parts to the head” (88). The result of the inflammation in the stomach is that the blood becomes “thicker and more atrabilious,” from which “some kind of sooty and smoke-like evaporation or some sort of heavy vapors are carried up from the stomach to the eyes, equally and for the same reason the symptoms of suffusion occur, when atrabilious evaporation produces melancholic symptoms of the mind by ascending to the brain like a sooty substance or a smoky vapor” (92). In short, there are many variations of the melancholic character type or temperament, says Galen, but as a rule, “all of them exhibit fear or despondency. They find fault with life and hate people; but not all want to die. For some the fear of death is of principal concern during melancholy. Others again will appear to you quite bizarre because they dread death and desire to die at the same time” (93).

There is obviously a potentially confusing set of voices or discourses (anatomy, medical physiology, metaphysics, *etc.*) which speak on the topic of the humours and melancholy, since there appeared to be evidence or at least logical foundation to assert one claim or another. But what *seem* to be opposing schools of melancholy deriving from the anatomy and humoral physiology of Galen and the very non-anatomical philosophy of Ficino can actually be seen as mutually-consistent responses to the problem of what exactly to make of the inside of the human body. It is not surprising to see these two

‘bodies’ co-existing peacefully in the humoural treatise of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, particularly because, by this time, the *subtextual* body described by humoural physiology no longer has a very clear place in anatomy. Unquestioned and unarticulated, it becomes increasingly concentrated in the specialised genre of the humoural treatise from about the 1570s to Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621.

Schleiner complains that scholars of early modern humoural physiology and melancholy “have been interested almost exclusively in what agrees with the – admittedly highly interesting – Ficinian tradition” (99). He almost certainly has the influential work of Frances Yates in mind. But in truth, the humoural treatise in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century is not preoccupied with the distinction between Galen and Ficino on melancholy. Melancholy as a disease arising from a black fluid inside the body *and* as a state of mind connected to non-visible, metaphysical realities have, to varying degrees, a simultaneous existence in works like Lemnius’s *Touchstone of Complexions*, Timothy Bright’s *A Treatise of Melancholy* (1586), Andre Du Laurens’s *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight* (trans. 1599), Thomas Walkington’s *Optick Glasse of Humors*, and, and of course Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Lemnius, Du Laurens, Bright and Walkington are by no means a comprehensive list of humoural physiologists writing in the decades from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, but their works are nevertheless a good representation of the ways in which the period’s humoural treatises mingle elements of Galenic and Ficinian melancholy. These works, which serve as the model for Burton’s *Anatomy*, are markedly different from sixteenth-century anatomical treatises such as Charles Étienne’s *De dissectione partium corporis* (*On the Dissection of the Parts of the Human Body*) (1545), *Les oeuvres*

*d'Ambroise Paré* (1575) by Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) and, of course, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) by Andreas Vesalius.

For the most part, these anatomical treatises engage with and confront Galen on the topography of human anatomy but have little to say about humoral pathologies stemming from liquids in the body, and virtually nothing to say about the kind of melancholy – mystic, occult, saturnine – in which Ficino is interested in *De vita*. In the sometimes heated and bitter remarks exchanged between defenders of Galen and supporters of Vesalius *et al.* in the discourse of anatomy, which continued well into the seventeenth century, the contentions are, as we would expect, with Galen's anatomical works – *De usu partium* and *De anatomicis administrationibus*, which are concerned with the structures, compositions and functions of the body's parts, and not with *De locis affectis*, in which is contained Galen's extensive treatment of the diseases arising from black bile or the atrabilious blood. Vesalius and such "Nouices," says Helkiah Crooke in *Microcosmographia*, "do blame Galen," "yea teare and rend him," and he seems to suggest that the new anatomists have left in pieces the "perfect and exact knowledge of Anatomy," for which Galen's work was the best representation (22). Crooke's *Microcosmographia* proposes to restore Galen's complete picture of anatomy which was rendered incomplete by sixteenth-century transformations in the study, theory and practice of anatomy.

The human "body is, as it were, a Magazine or Store-house of all the vertues and efficacies of all bodies," writes Crooke, an "Image of all this whole Vniverse" (3). However, even in Crooke's anatomical treatise, traditional and Galenic in its orientation, there is no viable place for the discussion of the pathologies of the humours and of

melancholy. Like Vesalius and the other anatomists at which Croke takes aim, his discussion of the spleen is limited to a handful of details about the spleen's appearance asserted by Galen *and* supported by Vesalius; that the "loose and flaggy flesh of the Spleene" is the "receptacle of melancholike humours," though he does mention, like the humoral physiologists, that the spleen and its melancholic humour "dooth liuely resemble" the "cold and harmfull Starre *Saturne*" (7).

Like the other anatomists, Croke limits himself to a description of rather than a commentary on Galen's pathology of the humours. "It is a thing most freely agreed vpon in Physicke, that there are foure humours in our bodies, Bloode, Phlegme, Choler and Melancholie," writes Du Laurens, establishing the Hippocratic and Galenic physiology of the humours, "to be found at all times, at euery age [...] mingled within the veines" (84). "*Galen* appointeth," writes Du Laurens, "the letting of blood [...] in that melancholy which is in the veines, and throughout the whole habite of the bodie," but adds, leaning on "*Aristotle* in his Problemes," that "the melancholie are most wittie and ingenious" (85). For Timothy Bright in his *Treatise*, much of which is concerned with examining "[h]ow diverslie the term Melancholie is taken," the wide variety of different kinds of melancholy require only the simple distinction to be made between "naturall or vnnaturall," the natural being "the grosser part of the blood," which "either by abundance or immoderate hotenesse, passing measure, surchargeth the bodie, and yeeldeth up to the braine certain vapors, whereby the vnderstanding is obscured," while the unnatural is the heated kind described by the *Problemata* (1-2). There is no mandate to settle or reconcile the contradictions between the two kinds of melancholy (*i.e.* the inspired or the diseased).

In the end, Du Laurens admonishes, “we must looke that we understand this place aright, for there are many sorts of melancholie” (85).

In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a work devoted to what Du Laurens calls these “many sorts of melancholie,” not only does Burton pay homage to the authors I have just mentioned, he is especially frequent in his citation of the work of ‘Galenus’ and ‘Ficinus’. Thus the medical treatise of the humours from about 1565 to the 1621, preoccupied with melancholy and the diseases of black bile, is a curious document; it is a medical text concerned with the body but it contains no anatomical illustrations, a bodiless book about the body. This strange fact is especially striking in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, an anatomical book, or so its title claims, but which has no visual demonstration (quite standard from Vesalius onward in literal anatomies) and appears not to be cognisant of anatomy textbooks produced during the century leading up to its publication.

*The Anatomy of Melancholy* is essentially a massive, comprehensive humoural treatise, necessary perhaps by the time Burton wrote it precisely because anatomy mostly ceased to include discussion of humoural pathologies after Vesalius. In a way the humoural treatise always existed in the sense that Galen’s *De locis affectis* is, at least in part, such a treatise. But the very fact that both anatomy and humoural physiology were closely connected in ancient times and that each could be characterised as complementing the other, and also the fact that Galen was essentially the unquestioned authority on both accounts until Vesalius, implied that they were highly compatible fields of study which together centred on the human body. I should point out that, as Carlino writes, the usefulness of anatomy to diagnostic and prognostic medicine in general had been

questioned from ancient times, specifically where the idea of human dissection was concerned, because using knowledge obtained from anatomy to infer what is transpiring inside the diseased and suffering human body was risky since it required the acceptance that living and dead bodies are identical.<sup>23</sup> But if an autopsy could say little about diseases of the body except where there are clear signs of topographical abnormalities in the organs linked to diseases already theorised, humoural physiology stood to gain even less from Vesalian anatomy in the sixteenth century because, as the *Fabrica* suggests, anatomy appeared to have no interest in sorting through the complex pathologies of the humours. Says Vesalius in his description of the spleen in the *Fabrica*, a work which marshals the discipline of anatomy, literally, into the theatre of observational science: “in man this viscus is a dark and rather shady color,” and the “substance of the spleen seems to me to consist of a thick, black blood” (5:122). There is no mention of melancholy here; the presence of black bile is noted, but there is no mention of its melancholic effect.

## **Saturn**

For an expanded history of the Saturn mythology in ancient Greek and Roman culture, as well as Saturn’s astrological link to melancholy in Arabic astrology in the Middle Ages, Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl’s *Saturn and Melancholy* remains authoritative. Nonetheless, it will be useful to revisit some details of the Saturn narrative before moving on to analysis of Dürer’s *Melencolia I* (Figure 1) in the next chapter, especially as ‘Saturn’ and ‘melancholy’ are often used interchangeably in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoural physiology.

---

<sup>23</sup> Carlino writes that the Empiricists of the fourth and third century BCE opposed the Dogmatist (or Rationalist) school on the idea of human dissection, on the grounds that no valuable knowledge about how to treat living bodies could be learned by the observation of dead ones (121-127).

The link between Saturn and melancholy or black bile does not, as we noted earlier, originate in antiquity. Both the humoural physiology of melancholy and the Saturn myth arise independently in antiquity, but their linkage occurred by way of Medieval Arabic astrology, specifically, say Klibansky *et al.*, in the writings of Abû Ma'sâr (787-c.886 CE) and Alcabitius (d. 967). According to the latter's doctrine, "stars, elements and humours could and must be linked with their corresponding colours. The colour of black bile is dark and black; its nature, like that of the earth, is cold and dry. But the colour of Saturn is also dark and black, so that Saturn too must be cold and dry by nature" (128).

The Arabic astrologers simply extended the series of analogies between the body and the world that already existed in ancient cosmologies into the astral realm. The doctrine of melancholy, thereby becoming linked to the planet Saturn, also inherited the mythology of Saturn which goes back at least as far as the eighth-century BCE Greek poet Hesiod.

The Saturn character in Hesiod's *Theogony* is Kronos, not to be confused (at least not yet) with Chronos, the Greek god of time. The mythological Saturn of medieval astrology, recognisable to Renaissance writers, is a composite figure, comprised of several distinct myths. Kronos, according to Hesiod, was the ruler of the original generation of Titans and the father of Zeus. He ruled over a Golden Age before being overthrown by Zeus, in revenge (ironically) for Kronos's cannibalistic attempt to prevent one of his children from overthrowing him. Kronos, says Hesiod, "had learned from Gaia and starry Ouranos / that he, despite his power, was fated / to be subdued by his own son, a victim of his own schemes," and that his son Zeus was "destined to crush him by might of hand / drive him out of his rule and become king of the immortals."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Shield*, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis

“[T]o be subdued by his own son, a victim of his *own* schemes” alludes to the fact that Kronos had taken the throne in the first place by usurping (and castrating) his father, Ouranos. Not wanting lightning to strike twice, so to speak, and in order to prevent the prophesied conspiracy from unfolding in the way described by “Gaia and starry Ouranos,” Kronos “kept no blind watch, but ever wary / he gulped down his own children to Rhea’s endless grief,” “swallow[ing] each child as it moved from the holy womb toward the knees” (Hesiod 466-467, 459-460).

Zeus, however, is saved by his mother Rhea, and transported to a secret location in Crete where he is hidden “inside the god-haunted earth in a cave / lodged deep within a sheer cliff of densely wooded Mount Aigaion,” which is followed shortly thereafter by Kronos’s resulting downfall. Instead of handing Kronos the newborn Zeus in a blanket, Rhea,

handed a huge stone wrapped in swaddling clothes.

He took it in his hands and stuffed it into his belly –  
the great fool! It never crossed his mind that the stone  
was given in place of his son thus saved to become  
carefree and invincible, destined to crush him by might of hand,

drive him out of his rule, and become king of the immortals. (Hesiod 483-491)

Lightning, in the end, absolutely does strike the family twice, literally, as “Zeus the cloud-gatherer,” who had acquired “the thunder and the smoky thunderbolt / and lightning” from the Cyclopes he frees from Tartaros, eventually thumps Kronos and the other Titans with a few bolts of lightning (Hesiod 729, 504-505, 690-692).

---

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) 463-465, 490-491.

Hesiod's Kronos is unquestionably malevolent in character. But when Kronos re-emerges in Roman mythology he is less clearly a villain, having acquired some of the attributes of the similarly-named Chronos, and celebrated as a harvest deity during the Roman festival of Saturnalia. Ovid's Saturn in *Metamorphoses* most closely resembles Hesiod's Kronos, which begins by describing the details of Saturn's 'fall' and the dramatic decline of the Golden Age:

The *Golden Age* was first; which vncompeld,  
 And without rule, in faith and Truth exceld.  
 As then, there was nor punishment, nor feare;  
 Nor threatening Lawes in brasse prescribed were;  
 Nor suppliant crouching pris'ners shooke to see  
 Their angrie Judge: but all was safe and free.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, "[t]was alwaies Spring," even though fruits and flowers have blossomed to maturity, when, says Ovid, "The yet-free Earth did of her owne accord / (Untorne with ploughs) all sorts of fruit afford," and inhabitants were "Content with Natures un-enforced food / [to] gather Wildings, Strawb'ries of the Wood / Sowre Cornels, what upon the Bramble growes / And Acornes, which *Jove's* spreading Oke bestowes" (1:104-109). It is spring, but as in Milton's Eden in *Paradise Lost*, it is, unmistakably, autumn as well. In Milton's Eden "a circling row / Of goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit / Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue / Appear[s], with gay enamelled colors mixed."<sup>26</sup> In short, during the fabled Golden Age, says Ovid, "With Milke and Nectar

<sup>25</sup> Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphosis, Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures by George Sandys*, ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970) 1:89-94.

<sup>26</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost, The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1., ed. M.H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 2000) 4:147-149.

were the Rivers fill'd / And Hony from greene Holly-okes distill'd" (1:114-115). It is only after this, in Ovid's chronology of events, "after *Saturne* was throwne downe to Hell" that "*Jove* rul'd; and then the *Silver Age* befell / More base then Gold" (1:116-118).

The Saturn of Macrobius (fl.400 CE) is different from Ovid's in one very significant way, which is that the Edenic reign of Saturn is presented as a *second* Golden Age that corresponds to the founding of Rome. Macrobius is essentially following Virgil's (70-19 BCE) representation of Saturn in the *Aeneid*. "In those early days," according to the *Aeneid*:

in flight from the weapons of Jupiter, came Saturn from heavenly Olympus, an exile who had lost his kingdom. He brought together this wild and scattered mountain people, gave them laws and resolved that the name of the land should be changed to Latium, since he had lain hidden within its borders. His reign was what men call the Golden Age, such was the peace and serenity of the people under his rule.<sup>27</sup>

Macrobius's Saturn, in which the child-eating Kronos of Hesiod is recognisable, has been partially rehabilitated. "His reign is said to have been a time of great happiness," says Macrobius in the *Saturnalia*, "both on account of the universal plenty that then prevailed and because as yet there was no division into bond and free – as one may gather from the complete license enjoyed by the slaves at the Saturnalia" (1:7.25). Saturn is also "credited with the invention of the art of grafting, with the cultivation of fruit trees, and

<sup>27</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. David West (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 8:320-328.

From the original Latin:

arma Iouis fugiens et regnis exsul adeptis.  
is genus indocile ac dispersum montibus altis  
composuit legesque dedit, Latiumque uocari  
maluit, his quoniam latuisset tutus in oris.  
aurea quae perhibent illo sub rege fuere  
saecula: sic placida populos in pace regebat,  
deterior donec paulatim ac decolor aetas  
et belli rabies et amor successit habendi.  
tum manus Ausonia et gentes uenere Sicanæ

with instructing men in everything that belongs to the fertilizing of the fields,” a craft which he perfects once he lands in Sicily after a long sea voyage following his initial defeat by his son Jupiter (Zeus) Thereafter, he and King Janus, famous for his two faces, “reigned together in harmony and built two neighboring towns by their joint endeavours” (Macrobius 1:7.25, 1:7.21). However, at some point “during their reign [...] Saturn suddenly disappeared,” and for this reason, in order to remember his friend,

Janus then devised a means to add to his honors. First he gave the name Saturnia to all the land which acknowledged his rule; and then he built an altar, instituting rites as to a god and calling these rites Saturnalia – a fact which goes to show how very much older the festival is than the city of Rome. And it was because Saturn had improved the conditions of life that, by order of Janus, religious honors were paid to him, as his effigy indicates, which received the additional attribute of a sickle, the symbol of harvest. (Macrobius 1:7.23-24)

Macrobius’s elaborately characterised version of Saturn is the one linked to melancholy by Abû Ma’sar and Alcabitus during the ninth and tenth centuries. It is also the version capable of conveying in humoral physiology, in the swift stroke of a single mythological allusion, both the inspired melancholy of Ficino’s *De vita* and the *Problemata* 30.1, and the physical and mental disturbance known to affect the melancholic from the physiology of Galen’s *De locis affectis*.

By the time of Macrobius, in the declining years of the Roman Empire, “[t]he ruler of the months, ‘the Greek god of time and the Roman spirit of the crops,’” as Benjamin puts it, “have become Death the reaper, with its scythe, which is not destined for the corn but for the human race, just as longer the annual cycle with its recurrence of seedtime,

harvest and fallow winter, which rules the passage of time, but the implacable progression of every life towards death” (151). It is perhaps not fully accurate to say that this figure has *already* become “Death the reaper,” but it is fair to say that the model which becomes the recognisable figure of Death much later is derived from Saturn. The Greek god of time mentioned by Benjamin is, as I have stated above, Chronos, not to be confused with Cronus or Kronos, the Greek precursor of the Roman god Saturn. Predictably, however, these names became thoroughly confused. Chronos, the god of time, becomes merged with Kronos, one of the twelve Titans who castrated his father and presided over a Golden Age.<sup>28</sup> “Saturn, as Cronus,” says Macrobius, “is identified with Time” (1:8.6). In this context, Saturn’s worst behaviour could now be read as part of the unfolding drama of time’s cycles. “It is said that Saturn used to swallow his children and vomit them forth again,” writes Macrobius, “a myth likewise pointing to an identification of the god with time, by which all things in turn are created, destroyed, and brought to birth again,” and “[a]s for the god’s attribute of a sickle, it is held by some to indicate that time reaps, cuts off, and cuts short all things” (1:8.10, 1:8.9).

It is not clear exactly when or in whose writing Chronos and Kronos first became mingled with one another, but the transformation is already complete by the time of Macrobius, and the version which the medieval Arabic astrologers incorporated into the doctrine of the four humours obviously depended on elements of both Kronos and Chronos.<sup>29</sup> Saturn, as I said a moment ago, the reaper and forerunner of Western image of “Death the reaper” (as Benjamin calls him) thus results from this complex metamorphosis

---

<sup>28</sup> The similar names in Greek are Κρόνος (Kronos) and Χρόνος (Chronos).

<sup>29</sup> I am relying here on Klibansky *et al*’s translations of both Abû Ma’šar and Alcabitius (130-132), both of whom include among features of the saturnine temperament, determined by astrological influence, proficiency in farming and husbandry, interest in sea travel and long journeys, but also tendency toward secrecy, deception, and lust for power.

involving Chronos, Kronos, and the Roman Saturn. Agrippa, in his compendious *De occulta*, describes Saturn as “an old man leaning on a staff having in his hand a crooked sickle, and cloathed in black,” who holds “in his right hand a sith, in his left hand a dart,” or else “whose image was an old man setting upon an high chayre, and in [his hands] holding a sith or Sickle, and under his feet a bunch of Grapes, his head covered with a black or dusky coloured cloth, and all his garments black or dark coloured” (1:131-132, 2:298). Saturn the reaper as a prototype of death is further implicated in the representation of melancholy as black bile is the humour that most closely corresponds to the qualities of death. Black bile is cold and dry, and therefore diametrically opposed to the heat and moisture characteristic of life. According to Lemnius, “all Creatures endued with life, Man and all that live by breath, when they be once deprived, or lacke heat and moisture, quickly to decay, and grow unto destruction. For none other thing is Death, neither can any fitter definition be devised for it” (215).

The Saturn of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoural physiology is valuable less for his claim to outright deadliness, however, than for his ability to convey paradoxes, specifically paradoxes arising from conflicting senses of the body which have a simultaneous existence in the doctrine of melancholy. Flesh-eating Saturn-Kronos, for instance, can symbolise that time eats fleshy bodies; but conversely, the sense of the bodiless for Ficino conveys the idea of truth, which is eternal and thus possesses no body. Philosophers become melancholic, as Ficino writes, because “recall their mind from the body and corporeal things and apply it to incorporeal things” (115). The value of Saturn in humoural physiology is that he calls to mind a series of narrative details and characteristics which are relevant in the study of the physiology of the humours because

they further signify a series of analogies which, in the larger picture, encompass the humoural body.

Thus, for physicians and humoural physiologists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, concerned with the diagnosis of disease, illness and, of course, melancholy, the description of things as ‘saturnine’ is a useful shorthand way of saying ‘melancholic’ although there are still clearly traces of occult and astrological paradigms by which one’s planetary birth could cause melancholy. Thomas Walkington writes in his *Optick Glasse of the Humors*, “the melancholicke man therefore is said to bee borne vnder leaden Saturne the most disastrous and malignant planet of all, who in his copulation and conjunction with the best doth dull and obscure the best influence and happiest constellation” (126). Thus “those that are borne vnder Saturne,” Walkington writes, are “melancholicke men as Saturne is the highest planet of all, so they have the most aspiring wits of all,” at the very same time that “Saturne is the slowest Planet of all, so their wits are slowest of all” (131-132).

The humoural treatise, it becomes clear, in the half-century or so before the publication of Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, a book which is a continuation or evolution of the genre on a grandiose scale, is not strictly a place in which melancholy is defined but a treatise which supports the continued existence of the doctrine of melancholy. Together with poetry and especially stage drama, it forms part of a cultural body of work outside of which melancholy does not exist in any certain and substantial way. It should be clearer in chapter four when we turn our attention fully to Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Vesalius’s *Fabrica* why the humoural treatise appears when and in what form it does, but as I suggested in the introduction, the study of human anatomy from

Vesalius onward, while raising doubts about Galen's anatomy but supplying an immediate replacement for it, must also have eroded the authority of Galen's theory of the humours. For this theory, which as an explanatory narrative had attracted a vast number of diseases and other kinds of crises loosely related to the human body (some of them theological in origin, like *acedia*), no 'modern' replacement appeared.

The humoral treatise or what is sometimes called the "expository" work on melancholy, is typically a small volume, but, probably sensing that no alternate picture of the humoral (but most importantly the melancholic) body was emerging, Burton attempted to deliver his own authoritative picture of the humoral body. When Lawrence Babb writes that there was an "epidemic" of melancholy which began in England around 1580 and which "continued for several decades," he means not that there was a plague of illness or illnesses defined by medical professionals as melancholy that infected England (although the 'malcontent', he admits, was indeed a highly visible social type in London during these years [*Sanity* 3]). Rather, he means that there was a cultural epidemic or revival of interest in melancholy which encompassed the arts and the quasi- and sometimes apparently semi-serious genre of the humoral treatise.<sup>30</sup> I would argue that the 'epidemic' of melancholy in art should be viewed in relation to the increasing sense of uncertainty surrounding the 'humoral body' which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral treatises register, an uncertainty which is emphasised emphatically in Burton's *Anatomy*. Indeed, as André Du Laurens writes in his Discourse, "there are many sorts of melancholie," yet none of them were appearing in anatomy textbooks for quite

---

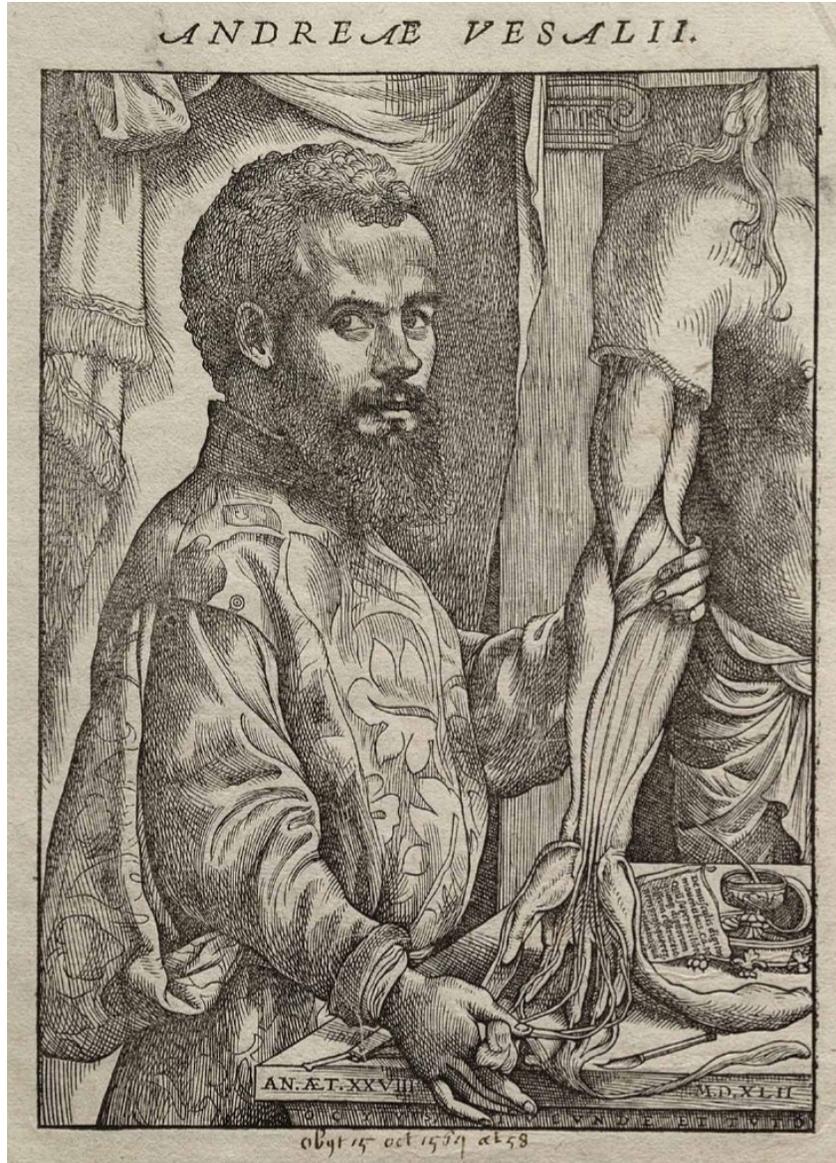
<sup>30</sup> See Vieda Skultans, *English Madness: Ideas on Insanity, 1580-1890* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1979). Skultans claims that there are only three recorded appearances of 'melancholy' in English drama from 1500 to 1580 (19).

some time, and so some more extensive means was now necessary to document these  
“many sorts of melancholie” (84-85).





2 *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn.

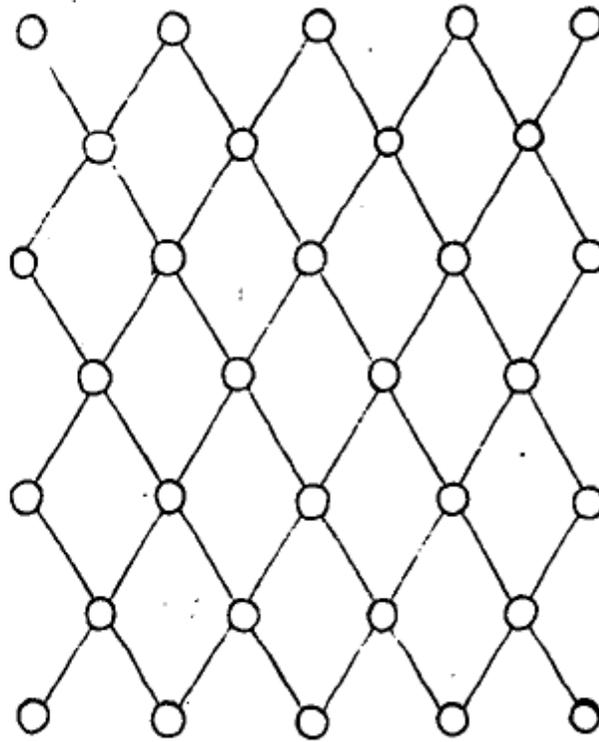


3 Frontispiece portrait from Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543).



4 Title-page from Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543).





*Quid Quincunxe Speciosius, qui, in  
quam cunq; partem Spectaueris,  
rectus est: Quintilian: //*

6 Frontispiece from the 1658 edition of *The Garden of Cyrus*, demonstrating the quincunx pattern woven together in its lattice-like formation.

***The Painted Voice: The Corpus of Melancholy in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy***

At the very beginning of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* we are introduced, not to Robert Burton, vicar of St Thomas and librarian at Christ's Church, Oxford, but to Democritus Junior, a *persona* formed in the mould of the ancient philosopher Democritus from whom Burton claims intellectual descent. Democritus was born in 460 BCE in the Thracian city of Abdera. The picture of Democritus that descends to us from the early modern period, as Christoph Lüthy has demonstrated, is complicated and made up of no less than four distinct versions: "the natural philosopher and atomist; the so-called laughing philosopher, comrade and antitype of the weeping Heraclitus; the moralizing anatomist visited, described, and praised by the physician Hippocrates; and the alchemist and author of the *Physica et mystica*."<sup>31</sup> A blurring of the second and third of these Democriti, the "laughing philosopher" and the anatomist, is detectable in Burton's Preface, "Democritus Junior to the Reader."

Democritus was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, almost as familiar an ancient philosopher as Aristotle. His invocation as a kind of a patron saint at the beginning of (ostensibly) a major work of anatomy would be hardly remarkable in itself, but Burton's version of Democritus, mixing the melancholic sufferer and the anatomy researcher of dead bodies, has specific goals in mind. The mad philosopher and the dissector have been brought together, just as 'anatomy' and 'melancholy' have been brought together by the title of Burton's book. Burton, or 'Democritus Junior', explains:

---

<sup>31</sup> Christoph Lüthy, "The Fourfold Democritus on the Stage of Early Modern Science," *Isis* 91.3 (Sept. 2000): 443-479 (447).

Hippocrates relates at large in his Epistle to *Damagetus*, wherein he doth expresse, how comming to visite him one day, he found *Democritus* in his garden at *Abdera*, in the Suburbs, under a shady Bowre, with a booke on his Knees, busie at his study, sometimes writing, sometime walking. The subject of his booke was Melancholy and madnesse, about him lay the carcasses of many severall beasts, newly by him cut up and anatomized, not that he did contemne Gods creatures, as told *Hippocrates*, but to find out the seat of this *atra bilis* or melancholy, whence it proceeds, and how it was engendred in mens bodies, to the intent he might better cure it in himselfe, by his writings and observations, teach others how to prevent it & avoid it. (Burton 1:5-6 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”])

By the “seat” of the “*atra bilis* or melancholy” Burton means the place in the body in which melancholy is physically situated and from which all symptoms and diseases associated with melancholy ultimately derive. We could infer from Burton’s version of the Hippocratic letter that the book concerning “Melancholy and madnesse,” which Democritus is supposedly following, recommends such an anatomical location of the pathologies attributed in Hippocratic-Galenic medicine with melancholy and a procedure for viewing it by way of a dissection.

To us the notion of a location in the structural study of human anatomy of melancholy may seem quite foreign, but Burton is here alluding to an ancient cultural and historical context in which anatomical and psychological investigation were both understood to be possible within the analysis of structures of the body. On the basis of implied historical context we could also presume further characteristics of the fictive book on “Melancholy and madnesse” in question in addition to supplying clues as to the “seat” of melancholy,

such as that it did not illustrate such a location, since ancient anatomies and medical treatises contained no illustrations as more commonly did anatomies in Burton's time. The illustration was a standard component in especially the anatomy treatise after Vesalius's *Fabrica*; certainly by the seventeenth century, most anatomy texts were illustrated according to the model established in the mid-seventeenth century by Vesalius, and in many cases were plagiarised from his work.<sup>32</sup>

Burton writes that the "booke on [Democritus's] Knees" serves as his own model for the *Anatomy*; Democritus Junior, "bold to imitate," intends "to revive againe, prosecute and finish in this Treatise" the original work of Democritus (1:6 ["Democritus Junior to the Reader"]). This statement, although troubled if not undermined by historical inaccuracy (for the Hippocratic *Letter* contains no such reference to 'melancholy'), perhaps accounts at least in part for why the mode of analysis favoured by *The Anatomy of Melancholy* has more in common with anatomy textbooks written *before* the *Fabrica*.<sup>33</sup> An anatomy textbook *sans* illustration at the time of Vesalius or shortly thereafter is not an event worthy of special attention for these reasons alone, and as at least two recent scholars and editors of Vesalius have noted, "many of the leading physicians of [Vesalius's] day were actively opposed to the illustration of the printed word on the grounds that this had not been done in classical times."<sup>34</sup> By 1621, however, an anatomy

---

<sup>32</sup> Both the *Fabrica* and its *Epitome* (also 1543) were widely plagiarised, perhaps the most outstanding instance of which was Thomas Geminus's (1510-1562) English anatomy *Compendiosa totius anatomie delineatio aere exarata* (1545), which featured about forty images copied directly from Vesalius's *Epitome* (cut in copper rather than wood).

<sup>33</sup> Angus Gowland has pointed out that in the original pseudo-Hippocratic *Letter to Damagetes*, which Burton claims to follow, there is no mention of melancholy (*Worlds*, 13-14). Fabio Calvo's authoritative Latin translation of the *Hippocratic Corpus* (1525), the standard translation in the Renaissance of the letter, contains only a reference to madness ("de furore, & insania, maniave") as the subject of Democritus's research. Burton, however, may have been following Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia*, in which it is similarly written that Democritus was looking for "the seate of anger and melancholy" (12).

<sup>34</sup> J.B. deC.M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, Introduction, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: Dover, 1973) 16.

textbook with no illustrations of the body and its parts, relying solely on textual description, was surely rarer than it was in Vesalius's day.

In spite of what its title may suggest, the *Anatomy* is not a traditional anatomy according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century standards, nor does Burton signal any intention, as many scholars have pointed out, that it is supposed to be, using only loosely the anatomy treatise as a conceptual model to various rather artistic ends.<sup>35</sup> Literary studies of the *Anatomy* from the 1960s onward and still presently tend to view both Burton's book and the personality he displays within it as being highly contrived.<sup>36</sup> Within this view of the *Anatomy*, anatomy as an analytical mode functions to varying extents as a motif for his organised and even compulsive and neurotic tendencies toward taxonomic classification, viewed in some respects as not only reflecting the bewildering academic subject matter of humoral pathology as endlessly evading definition but also enacting mental illness attributable within early modern humoral paradigms to melancholy.<sup>37</sup> By 'anatomy' I should say that I mean its sense as a treatise based on the "model of the body, showing the parts discovered in dissection," when I write that *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is difficult to situate generically within the field of typical sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomies.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> See Lyons for instance, who argues that Burton uses the medical pathology of melancholy as the basis of self-portraiture but that anatomy as a mode of analysis suggested to him a "highly organized plan [which] is the groundwork upon which Burton's doubtful, or sceptical, or at times contradictory notions operate" (125).

<sup>36</sup> Among these scholars of Burton's *Anatomy* who voice variations of this approach to him as contriving are, notably, Lyons (113-148), Ruth Fox (1-44), Joan Webber (80-111), and Stanley Fish (303-313).

<sup>37</sup> Again, see Lyons, who describes the aspect of mental disease as encompassing and informing the structures of Burton's *Anatomy*, including his seemingly anti-structural digressions, together which, she writes, in some way or other, contribute "to portray[ing] the melancholy mind in action, even while it is occupied with melancholy as a formal subject" (114).

<sup>38</sup> *OED*, 'anatomy' 3. Otherwise, see *OED* 10., for the more liberal definition of the term 'anatomy': "The dissection or dividing of anything material or immaterial, for the purpose of examining its parts; detailed examination, analysis."

Sometimes misunderstood or otherwise underplayed in literary approaches to the *Anatomy* is the extent to which both humoral physiology remained in the seventeenth-century the dominant paradigm for explaining, among many other things, states of chronic depression, as well as the more fluid and inexact range of senses implied by a literary anatomy than a “model of the body, showing the parts discovered in dissection” and the epistemic and empirical possibilities that a written anatomy seemed to offer. Awareness of these two interrelated points, of both the currency of humoral theory and the suitability of a literary anatomy as a basis for examining it, should guide our understanding of Burton’s work as using anatomy as a mode of analysis to encompass or embody knowledge using the principle of dissection. This is not an entity of knowledge altogether unrelated to the study of the human body, but specifically knowledge of the humoral pathologies of melancholy, synonymous in certain ways with modern clinical definitions of depression but clearly involved (as the *Anatomy* certainly demonstrates) in medical explanations of an enormous range of emotional, behavioural, psychological and physical pathologies in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Of course, none of this yet explains why, exactly, Burton’s is an ‘anatomy’ of melancholy rather than merely a treatise of melancholy and humoral pathologies such as the kind that was popular in the late decades of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and upon which Burton had more closely and basically modeled his own treatise than proper anatomy treatises. As I mentioned above, anatomy and humoral physiology in classical times were not mutually exclusive domains of medical enquiry, and in fact, anatomy was understood in Hippocratic medicine as subsuming all other branches of medicine, a notion shared by a variety of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century

anatomists, among them Burton's contemporary Helkiah Crooke (1576-1635), who writes in his anatomy treatise *Microcosmographia* (1615) that the body is the "liuely Image of all this whole Vniverse," knowledge of which is comprehended in the "perfect and exact knowledge of Anatomy."<sup>39</sup>

Also subsumed under anatomy in both ancient medicine and in early modern anatomies like Crooke's was thus the physiology of the humours; the link between the two in antiquity was further substantiated by materialist conceptions of temperaments and complexions as being embodied in some way in the form of fluids in the body which reside in organs and course through arterial pathways. Within the larger anatomical picture, humoral physiology proposed a system of understanding processes of the human body for which anatomy alone could not account, namely diseases, illnesses and temperaments. In Galen's writings, knowledge of both the topography of the body and the behaviour of the humours form complementary parts of the overall picture of the body, and they frequently defer to one another. In *De usu partium* (*On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*) Galen writes that the spleen "is the instrument which eliminates the thick, earthy, atrabilious humours," and the effects (or illnesses) of these "atrabilious humours" are discussed in greater detail in *De locis affectis* (*On the Affected Parts*) (232). But the notion of anatomy as encompassing or comprehending knowledge of the body potentially serves only to complicate the meaning of the methodology adopted by *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, especially since, within humoral theory, melancholy is only one aspect or 'part' of such a body envisioned as a humoral entity.

With what objectives in mind should Burton have undertaken the study of this relatively fragmentary aspect of medical theory using the methodology of anatomy which

---

<sup>39</sup> Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrocosmographia* (London, 1616) 4, 22.

implies totality and comprehension? One possible view expressed by scholars of Burton is that the ‘anatomy’ of the title functions to some extent as a metaphor; the work dissects *knowledge*, using a literary procedural tactic known as the ‘*divisio*’, which was used especially in medieval natural philosophy in order “to distinguish between genera and species, wholes and parts, accidents and properties” (Gowland, *Worlds* 56). As Williams writes, Burton’s methodology represents the “rhetorical cut” in the *Anatomy*, in the rather restricted sense of the term as a trope, and one which excludes points of contact between bodies, knowledge as well as bodies of knowledge within texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (“Disfiguring,” 596).

Clearly implicit in the term ‘anatomy’ are very distinct senses of what it means to anatomise something – physically by cutting bodies into parts, but also metaphorically, artificially and aesthetically by presenting information in a dissected manner. But strong distinctions between the two kinds of anatomies – the rhetorical versus the practical, literary versus literal, *etc.* – are quite difficult to sustain in analyses of the *Anatomy* if we use Renaissance anatomy to serve as a contextual basis for reading the work, because in Renaissance anatomy, specifically after Vesalius, the human body and the anatomy textbook are viewed as being two texts that function cooperatively.<sup>40</sup> The body serves as a model for the arrangement of the anatomy textbook, but the textbook, far from being secondary as an imitation of the genuine body or a virtual anatomy dissection, has the advantage of preserving factual data about the body which is vulnerable to decay in the very midst of an anatomy demonstration.

---

<sup>40</sup> Sawday writes that “Vesalius’ text deployed an architectural mode of analysis in that it envisaged the body as ‘constructed’, and sought to replicate this construction [...] by gradually building up the various detailed segments into an organized whole” (132). Thus the organization of the *Fabrica* so as to begin with the skeleton, and then proceed from through the muscles, the vascular and nervous systems, the organs of nutrition and abdominal organs, and concluding with the brain.

If the *Anatomy* appeared, as Jonathan Sawday writes, within a “cycle of texts which become bodies, and bodies which become texts” in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, it was also thus appearing within a tradition which included anatomy itself, and which used the written anatomy for empirical rather than literary aims (*Body*, 135).<sup>41</sup> The extent to which the *Anatomy* can be defined as a ‘metaphorical’ anatomy is further complicated by the fact that it very much concerns the body in at least one important sense, the sense defined traditionally by humoural physiology, *i.e.* that which is composed of humours and susceptible to the effects of atrabilious blood and melancholy. Thus, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, as Sawday writes, is a work which “drew on both the intellectual and the empirical possibilities of anatomy to offer a synthesis of human knowledge,” but it is usually the “intellectual” rather than “empirical possibilities” of anatomy that govern discussions of the *Anatomy*, and not without good reason; it is a treatise written in imitation of a genre, or genres (chiefly the humoural treatise and literal anatomy), for purposes other than the study of the human body from an empirical perspective (108).

As I would like further to suggest in this chapter, the *Anatomy* must also be seen to a certain extent as representing an alternative to the type of body defined by anatomy, within which there seemed less and less place for the occurrence of events described in traditional humoural physiology. The *Fabrica* proposes a dialogue within anatomy as a field of research between the human body and the study of the body in two essential ways: by placing emphasis on the direct observation of the body by way of human dissection, and by using this emphasis as the basis of an anatomical textbook. Within

---

<sup>41</sup> Sawday writes that this “cycle of texts” includes elements of Donne’s *Devotions and Sermons*, and Phineas Fletcher’s (1582-1650) “anatomical poem,” *The Purple Island* (1633) (*Body* 110-140), as well as the genre of court ‘blazon’ (191-212).

Vesalius's new text, the illustrated image is of (at least) equal importance in the book's conception of empirical knowledge of human anatomy as the written text which describes the function of organs, veins, arteries, vessels, bones and fluids. The *Anatomy* appears to want to interrupt this dialogue proposed by the *Fabrica* in several ways, but certainly among them the absence of a visual dimension when compared to seventeenth-century anatomy treatises and the insistence on written textual sources which appears to be both scholastic and humanist in its orientation (*e.g.* by largely viewing original ancient, medieval and contemporary texts as equally authoritative), but certainly not Baconian in its empiricism in the sense that part of Bacon's empiricist methodology necessarily involved devaluing tradition to a certain extent.<sup>42</sup>

Compared not only to post-Vesalian anatomies, but also broader seventeenth-century trends in the natural sciences placing increasing emphasis on what kinds of approaches, methodologies and devices are appropriate or not in empirical writing, the *Anatomy* seems in many regards quaint, dated, folkloric and indeed satirical. This last characterisation, of the work as satire, has dominated views of the *Anatomy* since 1960s and 1970s scholarship on Burton was reawakened by cultural historical interest in melancholy in the arts, and within literary studies, in representations of the humoral pathology centred in large part on reading Hamlet from the perspective of early modern materialist psychology of the humours.<sup>43</sup> It is in many respects a characterisation of the

---

<sup>42</sup> Bacon's *Novum Organum* and *The Advancement of Learning* both express anti-traditionalist attitudes toward older methodologies and systems of logic, specifically over-reliance on syllogistic logic and the axiom.

<sup>43</sup> The enduring view of the *Anatomy* as satire owes itself no doubt in some measure to the influence of Northrop Frye, who termed it a "Menippean satire," by which he meant much less (and even contrary to) the comedic elements of ridicule associated with satire in literature, and rather more of a genre of mixed literary textures whose ragged "appearance of carelessness" belies a determined logic (311, 310). At "its most concentrated," writes Frye, this genre "presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern. The intellectual structure built up from the story makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative" (310).

*Anatomy* that is justified; there is no sense in denying that the *Anatomy* contains elements of satire, both in its inclusion of scathing social commentary, Burton's implementation of an *alter ego* (Democritus Junior) to suggest to the reader motives for the work other than to provide factual, medical information, as well as (and perhaps most importantly) the exaggeration of both the procedures suggested by anatomy as a mode of analysis in the almost-obsessive subdivisions within the text and the equally hyperactive reliance on outside textual sources.

In several ways is the *Anatomy* a mock-treatise; it mocks other medical treatises which rely on redundant taxonomy, and scholastic and humanistic methodologies, but in these senses it also therefore resembles older pre-Vesalian anatomies, derived largely (in both content and form) from Galen's *De anatomicis administrationibus* (*On Anatomical Procedures*) and *De usu partium corporis humani* (*On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*). As Nancy Siraisi writes, "[w]hat distinguished Renaissance anatomy from its medieval antecedents was a great enhancement of both practice and textual foundation, the latter both ancient and modern" ("Vesalius," 2).

It is probably significant that within Vesalian anatomy, with its new emphasis on "both practice and textual foundation," there appeared to be less place for the kinds of speculations about the body which were germane to humoral theory in the tradition of Galen. In the absence of a new empirical programme of investigation comparable to anatomy, had humoral theory become unscientific in intellectual spheres by the end of the sixteenth century? And if so, could this development at least partly account for why melancholy seemed to be of great literary interest in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century? Was the proposition of a literary anatomy to analyse melancholy

merely one logical step in humoral theory which was realised in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*? (There was, after all, no plausible framework such as an anatomy dissection or experiment for the empirical analysis of melancholy or humoral pathologies.) Finally, was an anatomical mode of analysis of humoral pathologies also a natural direction within the domain of humoral investigation, since within the literary anatomy was possible the synthesis of “intellectual” and “empirical possibilities” required to embody melancholy in order that it could be deconstructed (108)?

These first three questions are difficult to answer for certain, but the fourth theorises a possible answer: that the *Anatomy* treats literally the supposition that a text could represent the embodiment of a concept or group of concepts *in its own right*, rather than the portrayal of a real human body. Recent studies with interest in the early modern cultural history of humoral physiology and its literary existence have tended to be oriented by psychoanalytic theory; they devote more attention to the behavioural aspects of humoral physiology.<sup>44</sup> However, the *Anatomy* demonstrates that a literary treatment of humoral physiology in the early seventeenth century could provide evidence of the longevity of the humoral model as medical theory while simultaneously outlining its problematic aspects and raising questions as to its fundamental validity.

It is worthwhile thus to compare not only the very different types of bodies in which the *Fabrica* and the *Anatomy* are respectively interested (the one being tactile, concrete and observable, the other being none of these things), but also the methodologies deployed in order to process these bodies into knowledge. It is probably not historically accurate to state that sixteenth- century anatomists generally believed less and less in the

---

<sup>44</sup> See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993) esp. the introduction (1-22), which focuses on the ways in which early modern writers interpreted and represented shame within bodily paradigms, and specifically the humours.

claims of humoral theory because it belonged to Galen, who had been proven wrong about anatomy or at least certain important aspects of it. But it is fair to say that Vesalian anatomy became interested in a more highly specified body, a topographical and tactile entity made of ‘fabrics’ rather than consisting of behaviours, which largely excluded the speculations of humoral physiology.

To what specific degrees Vesalius and other contemporary anatomists like Charles Étienne and Ambroise Paré endorsed or merely tolerated Galenic humoral physiology, as opposed to Galenic anatomy, appears to vary slightly, but for the most part these anatomists have relatively little to say about the function of black bile in the body. Generally speaking, they describe the spleen as being saturated in a black fluid or ‘juice’, but do not really guess at or provide details about what kinds of effects this humour has in the body. The spleen, says Paré, “resembles the colour of its muddy blood,” and the “naturall melancholy humor” is essentially “the faeces or dregges of blood.”<sup>45</sup> Absent are descriptions comparable to those found in Galen’s *De locis affectis*, that black bile or the atrabilious blood introduces “melancholic depression,” “delirium,” “suffusion [of the eyes],” “despondency,” and “fear of death” (*De locis*, 88, 93).

Thus, while sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomy textbooks have little to say regarding humoral physiology, they can give us an idea of the specific parameters of investigation with which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomical analysis is concerned, one which largely excludes Galenic humoral theory and related speculation discussed, as chapter two demonstrated, in the humoral treatise. Such treatises are more likely what Burton refers to as his “vast *Chaos* and confusion of Bookes,” which he

---

<sup>45</sup> Ambroise Paré, *Œuvres complètes d’Ambroise Paré, revues et collationnées sur toutes les éditions antérieures* (Paris, 1840-1841) 111.

expects anatomy as an intellectual mode of analysis will reduce to clear order (1:10 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). Perhaps this explains the problematic issues together suggested by the blurring of Democritus the anatomist and the melancholic thinker, Democritus Junior’s proposition on the basis of this historically inaccurate, composite philosopher to conjoin anatomy and melancholy; the first is a mode of analysis ordering parts into a comprehensive entity of knowledge, and the second a concept related to the study of the body which could not, as the *Anatomy* demonstrates, be subjected to such analysis.

### **A Vast Chaos and Confusion**

Issues surrounding the *Anatomy*’s internal disruptions of coherence and logic, of methodological complication, and overall frustration of goals, which seem to arise in many cases specifically out of tensions between anatomy as a mode of analysis and the subject matter of humoral pathology, have been well documented by scholars of Burton.<sup>46</sup> These issues confront us immediately in the preface and throughout the *Anatomy* by way of both Burton/Democritus Junior’s self-conscious expressions of the book’s artless form but also more demonstrably in various areas of the text after the preface (in which the treatise assumes a more serious tone) in which medical definitions become irredeemably complicated by either the presence of too many authoritative sources or the absence of focus. In execution, the *Anatomy*’s goal to “finish in this

---

<sup>46</sup> See Lyons, who writes that Burton’s attitude toward his body of sources informs the *Anatomy*’s formal character, and that the book’s overall “aim is to show that life does not conform to precept and theory, and that the whole subject under consideration is far more complicated than at first might appear” (131). More recently Williams has noted that, unlike many of the contemporary sources he cites like Bright and Du Laurens, Burton’s logic is circuitous: “Burton’s putative definition does not commit itself to a single articulation, instead circuitously weaving in and out of multiple, overlapping quotations. At the place where one would expect the text to establish a definition of melancholy, there is only an ambage” (“Resisting” 202).

Treatise” the hypothetical treatise of the original Democritus is fraught with inexact and unfocussed attempts at description and definition which is contrary to what we likely think that anatomical analysis suggests, and in spite of its enormity, is actually dominated by an overall sense of the incomplete rather than the fulfilled or comprehended (1:6 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

As anatomy possessed as an analytical mode, as I have discussed, varied meanings in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century culture, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* must necessarily be understood as drawing on one of these rather than transforming it into a literary model to produce, as some scholars have obviously viewed, a kind of psychological narrative of the melancholic mind. The *Anatomy* is a treatise which ‘incorporates’ fragments of other treatises of ancient anatomy and humoral physiology, but also various other sources and genres existing outside of the sphere of medical enquiry in which Burton encountered definitions or representations of the melancholic character. Indeed, “[w]ho can read them?” Democritus Junior asks his reader, referring to the vast number of books available to researchers (1:10 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). “As already, wee shall have a vast *Chaos* and confusion of Bookes, we are oppressed with them, our eyes ake with reading, our fingers with turning. For my part I am one of the number, *nos numerus sumus*: I doe not denie it, I have only this of Macrobius to say for myselfe, *Omne meum, nihil meum*, ‘tis all mine, and none mine” (1:10-11 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

The *Anatomy*’s proposed objective of comprehending this “vast *Chaos* and confusion of Bookes” and reduce them to order into an anatomy, a treatise in which all of the parts make sense within the whole, is undermined constantly in the text in at least two ways: its hyper-exhaustive economy of citation, and, related to and arising out of this first one,

Burton's inability to control or apply his sources to good use toward humoral definitions in the text, all of which (along with his well-noted digressions) have suggested to reader of the *Anatomy* either a conceptual design or else rather the lack of design altogether.

These textual characteristics do not necessarily suggest that Burton is illustrating that the subject matter makes little sense when exposed to academic scrutiny, but, I think, that anatomy as an intellectual mode of analysis and humoral pathology as its object of investigation inevitably proceed to certain complications when engaged on a textual level. Burton's excessive consultation of sources, demonstrating his literary erudition but also a compulsion to express it, has been discussed by many scholars, and so I will not go into great detail here about his habits in this regard. But Burton's proclivity to complicate standard, and even very basic definitions related to Galenic humoral theory, should be reconsidered with perhaps less emphasis on Burton's literary personality and viewed as showing that anatomical analysis, when viewing something other than the human body in a confined, structural sense, could not impose any sense of limitation and thus lead more toward confusion than comprehension, and that there are certain areas of knowledge into which neither empirical nor intellectual analysis could penetrate.<sup>47</sup>

The *Anatomy*'s struggle to define terms like 'melancholy' itself or 'black bile' which we expect as readers from a humoral treatise, a crisis of epistemology begins to emerge.

Douglas Trevor states that "[i]n celebrating the apparent homology between bodily and cultural, Burton unwillingly draws attention to the opacity of humoral theory itself"

(118). The "endlessly enfolding capacity of Galenically inspired analysis," he writes,

"unintentionally exposes the perpetual deference and circularity of humoral explanations"

<sup>47</sup> See Babb, *Sanity*, who gives a close and studied look at Burton's sources, including Burton's favourite ones. Babb, observing that a "strangely small proportion of the *Anatomy* is devoted specifically to medicine and psychiatry," and describes Burton as largely traditionalist and his medical theory as "solidly Galenic" (6, 69).

(119). Williams suggests that Burton disrupts the coherence of knowledge in the *Anatomy* by way of its imagined dissection. “Because melancholy,” writes Williams, “embracing everything, ranges from being part to being a whole, the reader may define it in any way he wishes; and yet because melancholy may also be taken as a trope, it possesses no definition of its own” (“Disfiguring,” 603).

This manner in which melancholy, within the treatise, appears to “posses[s] no definition of its own” points to a potential faultline in a treatise proposing to define melancholy for purposes of curing and diagnosing of it. Burton’s futile attempt to render a descriptive definition of the nature of black bile – the substance responsible, according to Galenic medicine, for melancholic symptoms if too much of it existed in the body – illustrates that even rudimentary humoral concepts are elusive in medical discourse, since medical authorities can themselves conflict with one another with respect to certain medical definitions. As Stanley Fish notes, compacting the problem is Burton’s reluctance to marshal these disputing authorities toward any sense of resolution, the result of which is that “the reader is deprived of a point of reference from which whatever is said can be judged” (306). Burton’s unusual role as an author in the *Anatomy*, first in the preface as a character, Democritus Junior, and then thereafter as overwhelmingly passive in managing his sources, has clearly contributed to impressions in scholarship of the *Anatomy* as being structureless, something which scholars, as I indicated above, have attempted to resolve by suggesting an underlying artifice contrary to this appearance.<sup>48</sup>

As the above critical characterisations by Williams and Trevor of the *Anatomy* suggest, the kind of logical “opacity” which seems to arise out of the *Anatomy*’s approaches to

<sup>48</sup> This motivation to redeem the *Anatomy* in some measure from being dismissed as having no artistic structure or merit characterises especially Fox’s critical approach to Burton, who suggests that the artificial structure of the book “orders and shapes the book’s contents by art, and it serves as artifice to disguise the contents’ resistance to order” (4).

defining humoral concepts have suggested to scholars a link between this formal dimension of the text and its subject matter of humoral pathology. However, usually this link is interpreted by scholars as being related to Burton larger aims of describing the world as melancholic and sick, whereas I think that these issues must also necessarily be seen as indications that humoral theory in the seventeenth century was seemingly open to question as to the knowledge of the body which it proposed and that it was seen on many levels, certainly by Burton, as deteriorating as a knowledge system. The *Anatomy* is clearly unique as a humoral treatise for using melancholy as a master concept into which the world it describes is absorbed, for its presentation, as Frye writes, of a “vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern,” in which case the pattern is a diseased one located in the experience of melancholy, but this intellectual pattern must also be understood as describing melancholy as a subject of analysis in the seventeenth century, which the *Anatomy* demonstrates to have been linked to feelings of doubt and pessimism (310).

Compared to other contemporary treatises on melancholy and the medical exposition of humoral physiology, the *Anatomy* is distinct most obviously in terms of sheer size, but, as reactions in literary studies to Burton tend to suggest, it is also distinct in a more important sense in Burton’s handling of sources which result in blurring definitions with which he is ostensibly occupied. Timothy Bright, for instance, writes unequivocally in his *Treatise of Melancholy* that black bile is a “grosse, thicke, cold & earthie humour” (6). Burton, however, takes a wider view and writes in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* that, “[o]f the Matter of *Melancholy*,”

there is much question betwixt *Avicen* and *Galen*, as you may read in *Cardans*

Contradictions, *Valesius* controversies, *Montanus*, *Prosper Calenus*, *Capivaccius*, *Bright*, *Ficinus*, that have written either whole Tracts, or copiously of it, in their severall Treatises of this Subject. *What this humour is, or whence it proceeds, how it is ingendred in the body, neither Galen, nor any old Writer hath sufficiently discussed, as Jacchinus thinkes:* the Neotericks cannot agree. *Montanus* in his consultations, holds Melancholy to be *materiall* or *immateriall*: and so doth *Arculanus*: the *materiall* is one of the foure humors before mentioned, and naturall. The *immateriall* or adventitious, acquise, redundant, unnaturall, artificiall: which *Hercules de Saxony* will have reside in the spirits alone, and to proceed from an *hot, cold, dry, moist distemperature, which without matter, alter the braine and functions of it.* *Paracelsus* wholly rejects and derides this division of foure humours and complexions, but our *Galenists* generally approve of it, subscribing to this opinion of *Montanus*. (1:166 [1.1.3.3])

One paragraph later Burton writes that there is “[s]ome difference I finde, whether this Melancholy matter may be ingendred of all foure humours, about the colour and temper of it. Galen holds it may bee ingendred of three alone, excluding *Fleagme* or *Pituita*, whose true assertion, *Valesius* and *Menardus* stifly maintaine, and so doth *Fuchsius*, *Montaltus*, *Montanus*. How (they say) should white become blacke?” (1:167 [1.1.3.3]).

It will perhaps appear unremarkable to us to see variation and conflict among medical sources consulted by Burton which concern descriptions of black bile in material terms, since, at least in Renaissance human anatomy, it existed in only the very limited sense that a dark liquid was observed in the spleen, but Burton is here calling into question basic ontological aspects of the humoral concept in the context of further discussing its

pathologies which other writers usually take for granted in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral treatises. In questioning black bile on an ontological level – asking whether it is “materiall” or “immateriall” – Burton has also called attention by extension to epistemological questions surrounding the study of humoral theory itself which he has obviously tied in several ways to academic approaches to it. The effect in frequent cases in which the provision of sources serves only to complicate definitions, of which the frustrated definition of melancholy from the perspective of materialist conceptions is merely one example, establish doubt rather than certainty as the *Anatomy*'s overriding teleology.

As both a historical cultural document related to seventeenth-century medicine and a work of literature, the *Anatomy* has a tendency to pose problems in situating it in paradigmatic, critical terms. Is it a medical treatise or a novelistic text drawing on a widely disparate range of literary modes in the service of some particular intellectual vision? Is it fact or fiction? It is not exactly an anatomy in the sense reserved for studies of the body's structures, and its relevance is questionable in medical history since humoral physiology has been out of currency since the eighteenth century. Yet approaches to the text from all angles, whether as a primary literary text or one serving as contextual background in studies otherwise interested in seventeenth-century discourse of the humours and passions, inevitably have to come to terms with its confusing presentation of definitions, which tends to annoy even Burton's careful readers.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> See Vicari, for instance, who I think follows Fish's view of Burton as simply lacking in critical powers of concentration which leave the reader, as Fish writes, “confused and disoriented” (309). Vicari suggests that Burton's hesitation with ruling his many sources toward some argumentative synthesis “was in part a reaction to his own experience of mulling his way through endless books in the solitude of Minerva's tower. His intellect was good, but it did not have the power of penetrating analysis that reduces welters of contradictory evidence to clarity. When authorities conflict he sometimes tries modestly to exercise his own judgment on the basis of what seems reasonable, but usually his personal judgment, like a feeble swimmer, is carried off in the tide” (88-89).

Uncertainty comes to dominate the treatise, rather than definition, frustrating the *Anatomy*'s proposed aim to render a clear picture of “[w]hat *this humour is, or whence it proceeds, how it is ingendred in the body*” (1:166 [1.1.3.3]). Burton’s attempt to define black bile by citing authorities is frustrated and ends in some measure in failure; black bile, he says, “*neither Galen, nor any old Writer hath sufficiently discussed*” (1:166 [1.1.3.3]). That no ancient writer “*hath sufficiently discussed*” the nature and generation of melancholy as a function of the body is a matter of perception, but the statement indicates the *Anatomy*'s purpose to identify certain epistemic problems related to the study of humoral physiology. Read on his own, Galen is actually much more logically clear and concise than Burton. The “flatulent affections,” says Galen in *De locis affectis* (c.165 CE), “are connected with a melancholic depression (*dysthymia*) and comparable to the delirium (*paraphrosyne*)” (88). Galen also places “certain conditions of the cavity of the stomach” in his picture of melancholy and the activities of black bile and atrabilious blood, which are, in his anatomy of the human viscera, chiefly located (though not exactly originating) in the organ of the spleen, which supposedly helps filter the darker waste matter, the faeces, or blood, cooked up by fever in the stomach; “[f]or it seems,” he says, “that there is an inflammation in the stomach and that the blood contained in the inflamed part is thicker and more atrabilious” (*De locis*, 88, 92).

Galen’s segment of *De locis affectis* which concerns the atrabilious blood, black bile and melancholy, relatively miniscule when considered within his total corpus of medical writing, is succinct and less ambiguous than Burton would have us believe. The *Anatomy* is less clear than many of its sources, but less clear *because* it relies on so many rather than because it misinterprets or misunderstands them. It is not the “vast *Chaos* and

confusion of Bookes” necessarily, but specifically the *number* of “Bookes” – of ancient anatomy, physiology and philosophy, among others – that Burton is determined to include which disturbs the sense of coherence that the *Anatomy* wants to propose (1:10 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

Readers of the *Anatomy*, however, approaching the book armed with a literal sense of the term ‘anatomy’, may be struck by the absence of more recent – post-Vesalian or non-Galenic – anatomists among the *Anatomy*’s enormous range of textual sources. The *Anatomy* pays close attention to the aggregate of symptoms of melancholy recorded in ancient physicians’ books; these include those of Galen and the notable Arabic Galenist, Avicenna, and also Timothy Bright, *Ficinus* (Marsilio Ficino) and *Montanus* (Johannes Baptista Montanus, 1498-1551), to note just a few of the prominent figures of anatomy, medicine and essay-writing from antiquity to the sixteenth century mentioned by Burton.

Notice the absence, in the long passage quoted above concerning the “Matter of *Melancholy*” but also more generally in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, of Renaissance anatomical researchers and investigators, such as Alessandro Benedetti (c.1445-1525), Jacopo Berengario da Carpi (c.1460-c.1530), Gabriele Falloppio (1523-1562) and of course Andreas Vesalius (1:166 [1.1.3.3]). The *Anatomy* itself begins with the description of an anatomical dissection, that of Democritus’s as recounted in the Hippocratic letter, but the story of Democritus’s failure in his experiment and the struggles of Burton’s text to reduce by literary anatomical procedure the subject matter of melancholy to concise and coherent meaning are clearly intended to refer to one another on some level of irony. Democritus, surrounded by “the carcasses of many severall beasts” which he is in the process of dissecting, is looking, specifically, for “the seat of this *atra bilis* or

melancholy, whence it proceeds, and how it was engendred in mens bodies, to the intent he might better cure it in himselfe (Burton 1:5-6 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

The dissections carried out by Democritus, hinting at the possibility of a *scientia experimentalis* concerned with the (animal) body, are inconclusive. The only details we have according to Burton’s story in the preface is Democritus’s failure to discover melancholy’s elusive but emissive black humour, recorded in an unfinished book now irretrievably lost, all of which is based on an anecdote told second-hand in a letter by Hippocrates, which is then reported to us by Burton. The original letter, as Gowland points out, does not contain a specific reference to “melancholy” (*Worlds*, 13-14). Within this cycle of deference is an encoded admonition to the reader of the *Anatomy* about degrees of loss: no text, no author, no discovery and no method even for making a discovery. Burton’s method of assembling quotations increases doubt about their origins, which he only deepens by mentioning that even he does not have access in all cases to their original sources. “Quotations are often inserted in the Text,” he says, “which make the stile more harsh, or in the Margent as it hapned. *Greeke Authors, Plato, Plutarch, Athenaus, &c.* I haue cited out of their interpreters, because the Originall was not so ready” (Burton 1:14 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

The quotations, a topic of concern among Burton scholars, attract attention at the outset of a reading of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* because they seem to nudge the author out of the way. “Occasionally Burton adjudicates between conflicting authorities,” says Lyons of the book which follows the Preface, “but more often he is content to watch as they fight it out” (131). I cannot agree with Patricia Vicari that the fragments of quotation in the *Anatomy*, often very brief and jaunty and always numerous, project to the reader an

overall sense of authority not linked necessarily to any one source in particular but to the authority of sources in general. “Quotations of a proverbial sort,” she writes, “are not treated as having any special authority because they come from the Bible. The guarantee of their truth is their compelling style – pithiness convinces immediately – and the fact that all men everywhere and at all times would agree with them. They appeal to universal reason.”<sup>50</sup>

I would argue instead that the *Anatomy*'s quotations, so many of which have a proverbial quality, tend to accomplish the exact opposite of “convinc[ing] immediately.” The truthfulness which, as Vicari says, the quotations' characteristic brevity appears to secure, is instead undermined by their incompleteness as Burton places a large number of them together. As soon as one quoted statement, especially, is shown to disagree with another, we would wish to see more of the source in order to settle the dispute. Although Burton constantly draws attention away from his own work toward others, to “*Montanus, Prosper Calenus, Capivaccius, Bright, Ficinus,*” he limits our access to these authors (1:166 [1.1.3.3]).

Burton's sloppy citation style, perhaps not unusual for seventeenth-century writers, only adds to the distance between us and his sources, amplifying the sense that what the *Anatomy* has presented is not the study of the human body but the study of words' inability fairly to measure a part (or level) of the human body traditionally made available for analysis by the highly speculative philosophy of the humours. Of course, most of the opinions in the *Anatomy*, like the name Democritus, belong to dead men. This is no crime; it is part of scholarship, says Burton. “If that severe doome of *Senesius* be true, *It*

---

<sup>50</sup> Patricia Vicari, *The View from Minerva's Tower: Learning and Imagination in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 113.

*is a greater offense, to steale dead mens Labours, then their Clothes,*” and asks, “what shall become of most Writers?” (1:6 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). The elements of time, transience and mortality – great liberators of private property – give Burton his creative materials but they also deepen the remoteness of the *Anatomy*’s references. Even in cases in which Burton’s sources are not literally lost, they are very much lost in the pages of the *Anatomy* in that they are pieces of other works filtered (frequently) through translation and (we suspect) his memory. “The *Anatomy* was,” as Sawday writes, “a feat of memory, an incorporation of remembered fragments into a larger whole.”<sup>51</sup> His sources belong to a world now available to him but especially to us as readers only in incomplete fragments. “Hence the display of craftsmanship,” as Walter Benjamin writes of this class of baroque composition, “shows through like the masonry in a building whose rendering has broken away” (179). Burton is not very difficult to fit into the profile of the baroque creator described by Benjamin, who is, in spirit, a collector. “That which lies here in ruins, the highly significant fragment, the remnant, is, in fact, the finest material in baroque creation. For it is common practice in the literature of the baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal” (Benjamin 178). “Pil[ing] up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal” seems to be what is taking place in the *Anatomy*; it is a mountain of fragments collected from dead authors, and by the end of the lengthy Preface we are still only in its foothills.

But the “goal” of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is, of course, an anatomy of melancholy – a body, or at least, the model or description of one. The very title hints at destruction and construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, cutting and joining, dissection and

---

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Sawday, “Shapeless Elegance: Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Knowledge*,” *English Renaissance Prose: History, Language, and Politics*, ed. Neil Rhodes (Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997) 173-202 (184).

dismemberment, but also collection and embodiment. Implicit in the *Anatomy* is the recognition that academic scholarship *is*, invariably, an act of corruption; quotations and citations include parts of authors but exclude the body to which they belong; bodies of authors are cut up and sewn together like, as Burton writes, a “Cento” woven by “a good hous-wife out of divers fleeces weaves one peece of Cloath,” or in his case “laboriously collected” and woven into a new text “out of divers Writers” (1:11 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). But in such a process of incorporation, he admits, are these bodies of work, the bases of his intellectual anatomy, dismembered and misremembered, because either Burton has, like many erudite students of his day, trusted his memory perhaps more so than he should have, or else has occasionally, as he freely admits, accepted the translations of (notably medieval) scholars at face value. He has “cited out of their interpreters, because the Originall was not so ready,” reflecting a relationship of trust in the authoritative *interpreters* of ancient medical and anatomical texts more characteristic of medieval scholastic medicine. The scholastic school of medicine is exemplified by the medieval Arabic Galenist, Avicenna, preoccupied with reiterating Galen and Aristotle, a general academic approach which fell out of favour with the early humanists from Petrarch (1304-1374) onwards, and certainly by the sixteenth century among anatomists, at which point direct access to the original Hippocratic and Galenic texts was deemed essential (1:14 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

By the time of Vesalius’s *Fabrica* (1543), the original texts themselves had loosened their grip on the mind of the anatomist, no longer capable of trusting Galen, to say nothing of his secondary interpreters in whose texts could be found corruptions of the original texts when actually compared to a dissected human body. The *Fabrica*, very

much unlike *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, is relatively free of the “endless chains of citations of multiple previous authors” which, as Siraisi argues, are typical of the sixteenth-century physicians and anatomists from which Vesalius’s *Fabrica* distinguishes itself (“Vesalius and Human,” 63). The *Anatomy*, in contrast, is full of “endless chains of citations,” so numerous, uninterrupted, and incomplete, that in the end the subject matter, as Trevor writes, is “obscured by the sheer number and range of examples produced,” resulting in “a kind of thick narration that does not describe so much as enumerate interpretive possibilities” (129).

A “thick narration” does describe *The Anatomy of Melancholy*’s use of citations, but also, I think, its subject matter, the humoral pathologies described in Galenic medicine but which could not be reduced to logical sense by anatomical analysis in a text. The philosophical system of the humours, with the assistance of a complex system of analogies, had been required in the time of Hippocrates and Galen to explain for diagnostic and prognostic reasons the pathological, out-of-the-ordinary disturbances inside the human body which could not, for obvious reasons, be witnessed first-hand. Indeed, “[t]he inner body, hidden from view by the epidermal mass, constituted the limits of knowledge for ancient empirical research” (Carlino 128). The analogies which supported the theoretical basis of the humours and were of use to the ancient physician and anatomist are of two general kinds: one which took the animal body and the human body as comparable in parts and functions, thus legitimising animal dissection as an alternative to human dissection, and one which links the processes of the body to the environment. Both make inferences about the frequently tumultuous interior of the body; both kinds of analogy are central to Galen’s picture of human anatomy, which was based

on his dissection and vivisection of animals which “more or less resembled humans,” and to his anatomical exegesis of the symptoms of fear and despondency connected to melancholy/black bile (Carlino 129). Galen writes in his *De locis affectis*, “[a]s external darkness renders almost all persons fearful [...] thus the color of the black humour induces fear when its darkness throws a shadow of fear through the area of thought” (93).

The *Anatomy*, which is not an anatomy of the human body, is an anatomy of a concept which concerns the nature of the *interior* of the body. A taxonomic treatise on the substance of melancholy whose place in the body is neither explained nor recognised in the post-Vesalian anatomy, aiming to be both comprehensive *and* coherent, is, as the *Anatomy* demonstrates, potentially limitless. Do not expect, says Burton in the opening page of the *Anatomy*, “some ridiculous Treatise (as I my selfe should haue done) some prodigious Tenent, or Paradox of the Earths motion, of infinite Worlds [...] in an infinit wast”; astronomical riddles clearly disquiet him.

Black bile signifies something potentially limitless in meaning, spatially limitless, because it occupies no certain space at all. Despite Burton’s admonition to the reader that the *Anatomy* will not participate in any debate surrounding astronomical paradoxes, he implies from the very beginning of the Preface that the microcosm – the body – is equal to the macrocosm of the heavens in its infinite expansiveness, stating that pursuing an anatomy of melancholy “through all the members of this our *Microcosmus*” is as difficult as to “perfect the Motion of *Mars* and *Mercury*, which so crucifies our Astronomers” (1:23 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). “Who can sufficiently speake of these symptomes,” Burton asks,

or prescribe rules to comprehend them? as *Eccho* to the painter in *Ausonius*, *vane*

*quid affectas &c.* foolish fellow what wilt? if you must needs paint me paint a voice, & *similem si vis pingere, pingere sonum*; if you will describe melancholy, describe a phantasticall conceipt, a corrupt imagination, vaine thoughts and different, which who can doe? The foure and twenty letters make no more variety of words in divers languages, then melancholy conceipts produce diversity of symptomes in severall persons. They are irregular, obscure, various, so infinite, *Proteus* himselfe is not so divers, you may as well make the *Moone* a new coat, as a true character of a melancholy man; as soone finde the motion of a bird in the aire, as the heart of man, a melancholy man. (1:407 [1.3.1.4])

“Echo” refers to the bodiless voice in Ovid’s third book of *Metamorphoses*, a voice which was once housed in a body. Echo’s body disintegrates when her desire for Narcissus, another figure whose body eventually deserts him, is frustrated. George Sandys’s 1632 translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* describes Echo’s decay as a sequence of events in which unreciprocated desire, and consequent shame, literally consumes Echo’s body; what remains is only a voice with no bodily frame:

Despis’d; the wood her sad retreat receaues:  
 Who couers her ashamed face with leaues;  
 And sculks in desert caues. Loue still possest  
 Her soule; through grieffe of her repulse, increast.  
 Her wretched body pines with sleeplesse care:  
 Her skinne contracts: her blood converts to ayre.  
 Nothing was left her now but voyce and bones:  
 The voyce remaynes; the other turne to stones.

Conceal'd in Woods, in Mountaines neuer found,

Yet heard in all: and all is but a Sound. (Ovid 3:353-362)

Echo's body, as her "skinne contracts: [and] her blood converts to ayre," withers in a hyper-progressive state of decomposition. Narcissus endures a similar fate when his desire (for himself, recognised in a bodiless reflection) reaches a dead end:

Ah, He is I! now, now I plainly see:

Nor is't my shaddow that bewitcheth me.

Loue of my selfe me burnes; (ô too too sure!)

And suffer in those flames which I procure.

Shall I be woo'd, or woee? What shall I craue?

Since what I couet, I already haue.

Too much hath made me poore! O, you diuine

And fauoring Powres, me from my selfe dis-joyne!

Of what I loue, I would be dispossest:

This, in a Louer, is a strange request!

Now, strength through grieffe decayes: short is the time

I haue to liue; extinguisht in my prime.

Nor grieues it me to part with well-mist breath;

For grieffe will find a perfect cure in death. (3:421-434)

"*Selfe-lou'd* Narcissus," as Sandys's Argument to Book 3 explains, is turned "*to a Daffadill*," before the Naiads and Dryads, his sibling water and wood nymphs, get a chance to collect the corpse for a proper interment by funeral pyre. There is no body when they come upon the ground upon which Narcissus died:

The funerall Pyle prepar'd, a Herse thy brought  
 To fetch his body, which they vainely sought.  
 In stead whereof a yellow flowre was found,  
 With tufts of white about the button crown'd. (Ovid 3:507-510)

“*Echo* to the painter in *Ausonius*” alludes to Epigram XXXII by the Roman poet Ausonius (c.310–395 CE), in which the disembodied voice of Echo taunts the painter whose desire is to paint her. Sandys’s *Metamorphosis* includes the epigram:

*Fond Painter, why wouldst thou my picture draw?  
 An vnknowne Goddess, whom none euer saw.  
 Daughter of aire and tongue: of iudgement blind  
 The mother I; a voice without a mind.  
 I only with an others language sport  
 And but the last of dying speech retort.  
 Lowd Ecchos mansion in the eare is found:  
 If therefore thou wilt paint me, paint a sound.* (Sandys 157)

Echo’s “mansion,” which signifies both her dwelling place and her body, is non-existent in the material sense.

Why Burton’s deliberation about how to “prescribe rules to comprehend” the “melancholy conceipts” which “produce diversity of symptomes in severall persons” should call to his mind the Narcissus and Echo saga in Ovid makes perfect sense once we consider the objectives that the book has outlined in the Preface: to detect a bodily presence of melancholy, to uncover its “seat,” as Democritus junior writes (Burton 1:407 [1.3.1.4], 1:5-6 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). To discover the place in the body

in which melancholy resides is to embody melancholy; ironically the *Anatomy* is a book of disembodied voices. Melancholy as a concept is ontologically complex, in the sense that, anatomically, it does not exist in the same way that the body's 'fabrics' do, and if the kind of body-and-book envisioned by Vesalian anatomy could be described as a textual body, then the *Anatomy* supplements this textual body with a subtextual one – a body of melancholy composed of voices signifying no master text. It is thus difficult to follow the logic proposed by Grant Williams that the *Anatomy* represents a process in which a 'body of knowledge' is disfigured; he writes that "Burton's disfiguring cut dispels imaginary projections" of the body (or self) onto the text that ordinary sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomies accept as given, and that the *Anatomy*'s "cutting does not yield a body of knowledge, the merger of parts into a whole, but conducts a delirious disfiguring."<sup>52</sup> The argument that a body of knowledge has undergone some form of distortion presupposes that we can first recognise what the body looks like, that all of the elements of the text identified as cutting and disfiguring are fully distinguishable from the body of the text.

I wish to argue that the *Anatomy* is instead preoccupied with exploring the possibilities of a so-called textual existence to its full extent, mending the signified and the signifier, the body and the book, so that the textual anatomy signifies only itself. The answer which Burton supplies to his own question, "Who can sufficiently speak of these symptoms [of melancholy]?" is that there is no "sufficien[t] means "to speak of these symptoms" –

---

<sup>52</sup> Williams, "Disfiguring" (599, 597). Williams argues that Burton accomplishes textual disfigurement rather than embodiment primarily by frustrating "synecdochic logic" – the principle that parts are capable of signifying the whole, and by extension that comprehension of parts means comprehension of a total entity. According to Williams, this frustration manifests itself, for instance, in the *Anatomy*'s extensive digressions, the absence of grammatical closure to the *congeries* or 'list' that frequently appears in the treatise, the absence of an epilogue after the 1621 edition (depriving the book of a sense of the complete), and Burton's conflation of melancholy with other plagues.

because Burton is attempting to anatomise something that has no objective, material, bodily existence (1:407 [1.3.1.4]). The kinds of logical difficulties implicit in the genre of taxonomic writing to which the *Anatomy* belongs call to mind Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) claim in *Novum Organum* (first published in 1620, the year before Burton's first edition of the *Anatomy*) that since "the high and formal discussions of learned men end oftentimes in disputes about words and names," the investigator ordinarily must "by means of definitions reduce them to order. Yet even definitions cannot cure this evil in dealing with natural and material things; since the definitions themselves consist of words, and those words beget others: so that it is necessary to recur to individual instances, and those in due series and order."<sup>53</sup> In a way the *Anatomy* sounds like exactly the type of treatise, full of the "the high and formal discussions of learned men," at which Bacon aims his criticism.

But in another way the *Anatomy* openly endorses these very criticisms, for it may be seen as parodical and self-aware in its exaggerations as a comprehensive treatise of definitions in which little is defined for certain. Implicit in both the *Anatomy*'s inability to marshal its source-material and "by means of definitions reduce them to order," and the sense that words in the text seem only to beget other words, is an ontological paradox: an imagined object not only exists solely in its descriptions but also gives rise to more such descriptions. To describe this paradoxical quality in the *Anatomy*, Grant Williams has borrowed from rhetoric the term "periphrasis," the principle of which "presupposes the one behind the many,"

and thereby proclaims the one to have been responsible for the redundant prolixity.

---

<sup>53</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, *The Broadview Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Verse & Prose*, ed. Alan Rudrum, Joseph Black & Holly Faith Nelson (Orchard Park, New York: Broadview Press, 2000) 53-54.

Protected in the imaginary realm of the signified, melancholy generates diverse causes and symptoms, all of which gesture toward its malevolent ubiquity, while at the same time concealing itself from the subject, who cannot seize that which is everywhere and elsewhere.<sup>54</sup>

Melancholy “generates diverse causes and symptoms,” resulting in a “malevolent ubiquity,” and a sense of something “which is everywhere and elsewhere.” Indeed, melancholy is, as Williams suggests, “protected” in an “imaginary realm” ordinarily inhabited by the signified in the post-Saussurean semiotic order, which is to say things which are known only indirectly through signifying components – both symptoms of the disease and words describing it.

It is thus no surprise, as we witness all that melancholy can signify, that hypochondria and melancholy have a shared history in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical literature. Both are believed to be connected to the spleen. ‘Hypochondria’, recognisable to us as a term meaning a state of melancholy or mental illness the causes of which are unclear in a physiological sense,<sup>55</sup> was believed at least until the early seventeenth century to have its origins in the activities of the spleen, which is the organ which Galen had assigned to melancholy in his anatomy and his physiology of the humours.<sup>56</sup> After the decline of humoral physiology in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, melancholia subsided for a time into increasingly mechanical explanations, and many of

---

<sup>54</sup> R. Grant Williams, “Resisting the Psychotic Library: Periphrasis and Paranoia in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*,” *Exemplaria* 15.1 (Spring 2003): 199-221 (209).

<sup>55</sup> *OED*, s.v. hypochondria def. 2 (sing.), “A morbid state of mind, characterized by general depression, melancholy, or low spirits, for which there is no real cause. Now identical in meaning with *Hypochondriasis* (q.v.); it remains the commoner term among laymen.”

<sup>56</sup> *OED*, s.v. hypochondria, def. 1 (pl.), “Those parts of the human abdomen which lie immediately under the ribs and on each side of the epigastric region. b. The viscera situated in the hypochondria; the liver, gall-bladder, spleen, *etc.*, formerly supposed to be the seat of melancholy and ‘vapours’.”

the illnesses formerly attributed to black bile and the atrabilious blood in the medicine of Galen (mainly the psychotic disorders) became categorised as ‘hypochondriasis’.<sup>57</sup>

In Galenic medicine the spleen has a clear anatomical function in a set of processes which result in melancholy. Burton largely adheres to the material physiology of Galenic explanations of melancholic hypochondria, though he also anticipates modern psychopathologies in suggesting the extraordinary range of symptoms reported by patients categorised as having the “hypochondriacal” form of melancholy.<sup>58</sup> Basically, in the Galenic picture, the spleen is responsible for filtering black bile out of the blood and keeping the amount of atrabilious (*i.e.* melancholic) blood in check in the body. Benjamin links the condition of the spleen to the dog in Dürer’s *Melencolia I* (Figure 1), sleeping but also whittled down by neglect and starvation to skin and bones. “If the spleen, an organ believed to be particularly delicate, should deteriorate,” writes Benjamin, “then the dog is said to lose its vitality and become rabid. In this respect it symbolizes the darker aspect of the melancholy complexion,” which is further “enriched by the fact that the animal is depicted asleep: bad dreams come from the spleen” (152).

A deterioration of the spleen results in its inability to cleanse the blood and filter out black bile properly. Babb notes that “[t]he office of the spleen (that is, of the organ of that name) was to absorb and evacuate as much of [black bile] as was superfluous to the physiological operations.”<sup>59</sup> A weak spleen thus results in too much black bile according to Galenic humoral physiology. André Du Laurens in his *Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight* (1594, trans. 1599) includes the liver and pancreas in the anatomical exegesis

---

<sup>57</sup> See Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 117-146.

<sup>58</sup> See Burton’s subsections on the causes and cures of ‘hypochondriacal’ melancholy (*Anatomy* 1.2.5.4 and 1.3.2.2, respectively).

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence Babb, “The Cave of Spleen,” *The Review of English Studies* 12.46 (Apr. 1936): 165-176 (166).

of hypochondria, “but that part which procureth the *Hypochondriake* melancholie most of all,” he emphasises, “is the spleene in as much as nature hath made it for the purging of the blood of feculent and melancholike iuyce” (126-127).

According to Galen black bile does not *come* from the spleen; rather, it is the job of the spleen to expel black bile out of the body – a crucial difference, which places the spleen in the bigger picture of things which are connected to melancholy in some way, but from which melancholy does not actually originate. Du Laurens defines hypochondria as a subcategory of melancholy, and the two are similar in the efflorescence of symptoms which they cause. “The *Hypochondriake* disease being throughly growne and perfected,” he says, “is commonly coupled with an infinite number of grievous accidents, which by times holde the partie with such pangs, as that they thinke to dye at euery moment” (Du Laurens 128-129). The spleen is real, and it does, according to both Galen *and* Vesalius, contain a black or “feculent and melancholike iuyce,” mentioned by Du Laurens (127).

However, the description of the spleen as an organ which resembles the black liquid discussed by Galen and repeated by Du Laurens as the atrabilious blood is not equivalent to a statement concerning what that black “melancholike iuyce” is responsible for in the living body.<sup>60</sup> Vesalius writes in the *Fabrica* that “black bile” is what “the spleen squirts back into the stomach,” but the “function of this” is less clear and he suggests no experiment to determine it (5:126). After Vesalius, such formulations became more strictly the concern of the humoral treatise like Du Laurens’s *Discourse*. Physicians like Du Laurens *are*, however, obeying the older set of Galenic assumptions about what kinds of diseases or distempers generate this black liquid.

---

<sup>60</sup> See together Galen, *De usu partium* 231-235 on the spleen and *De locis affectis* 88-93 on the atrabilious blood.

The increasing difficulty of situating melancholy in the physiology of the (anatomical) human body was not a major obstacle for writers of the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral treatise. They rely simply on descriptions of the spleen and black bile provided by Galen in the first place, facts which were *not* contested by the new anatomists. For details about the pathologies arising from (too much) black bile, there was, as *The Anatomy of Melancholy* demonstrates, a nearly inexhaustible supply of sources to consult. Indeed, the doctrine of melancholy supported, as Du Laurens writes, an “inifinite number of grieuous accidents” characteristic of melancholy in general, and hypochondriacal melancholy in particular, because of this rich and extensive body of material (Du Laurens 128). Black bile, the kind which leads to melancholy, is, in the genre of the humoral treatise, still described as “cloudie and darke,” like “blacke Cheries, and blacke Grapes: the juyce whereof dyeth and coloureth a mans hands with a blacke or bloody colour” (Du Laurens 90; Lemnius 232). Black bile, in other words, might be imaginary, but it is nevertheless imagined as real according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical definitions, which is an important distinction, I think, and one which Douglas Trevor suggests readers have perhaps failed to make when seeing in Hamlet patterns of behaviour that are impossible to rationalise in ways that include consideration of both the body and imagination: “But quite to the contrary there is, in fact, something imagined there in Hamlet’s body: black bile, and too much of it” (73).

The early moderns, like the ancients, favoured materialist explanations for both emotions and also psychopathologies and neurological disorders, and within this schema melancholy occupies what seems to be an ontological middle ground or potentially, to us, a conceptual contradiction – an emotion or morbid disposition with yet a very certain

place in the body's 'fabrics'.<sup>61</sup> Melancholy, however diverse and manifold its symptoms are, and however imagined or theorised by way of analogies, is distinguished in Renaissance medical conceptions as being a corporeal substance, a black fluid, which is yet also "protected in the imaginary realm," as William writes, because it is only experienced and interpretable indirectly through signs ("Resisting," 209).

Melancholy/black bile is "protected" in at least one other important sense which Williams does not touch upon: it could not be disproved within the parameters of post-Vesalian anatomical investigation because, while black bile could be witnessed, empirically, the array of pathologies specified in humoural treatises could not. Scholars interested in the cultural history of Renaissance anatomy (Vesalian and post-Vesalian) usually find little use for *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The emphasis on empirical and 'scientific' study of anatomy which typically surrounds historical studies of Vesalian anatomy, whose followers, "in their urge to overturn Galenic authority," as Sawday writes, "stressed the primacy of 'ocular evidence' in their explorations of the body," naturally excludes the *Anatomy* on the basis that its interests are aesthetic and thus the interpretive domain of literary studies (*Body*, 26).

Burton scholars often (and perhaps inadvertently) sustain the supposition that, as a textual anatomy, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is unrelated historically to literal anatomy. By scrutinising its rhetorical procedures and traditions, and its aesthetic features, they rely perhaps too much on the Preface to support the claim that the *Anatomy*'s aims are purely literary and that it asks no serious epistemological questions about, for instance, the kinds of knowledge about the body obtainable from texts. Close analysis of Burton's

---

<sup>61</sup> See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) who refers to early modern materialist conceptions of emotive processes as a "premodern ecology of the passions" (9).

use of textual procedures and generic forms present in the *Anatomy* inevitably requires justification for what exactly it is that Burton intends to accomplish with the bundle of literary procedures that make up the *Anatomy*.

Burton scholars of the 1960s and 70s tend to want to redeem the *Anatomy* from being regarded as too unwieldy and recklessly compiled a text to be worthy of critical analysis. They propose that Burton has used the divisive and highly manipulative design possibilities suggested by a textual anatomy in order to impose upon his “vast Chaos and confusion of Bookes” a sense of coherence that appears to be absent not only within and among the body of his sources but also (as the *Anatomy* implies) in humoural theory itself (1:10 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]). Burton “cannot finally rule that subject matter by logic,” Ruth Fox writes, “but he can and he does rule it by art, by imposing on it a structure which binds chaos into form,” and in the *Anatomy* it is the “structure itself [that] is the statement of Burton’s chief concern in the book, the reassertion of order in the world through the reassertion of order in art” (4). Like Fox, more recent critics like Liliana Barczyk-Barakonska also see the desire for control as characterising the *Anatomy*, in the way that it imitates the layout, but more importantly the organisation, of a library: “Thus Burton designs a space where the structurally depersonalized acts of seeing and reading segregate books, volumes, treatises into particular catalogues, dividing and dissecting knowledge and, by the same token, the world.”<sup>62</sup>

Claiming to find an overall pattern of design that predominates in the *Anatomy* is risky, however, as Burton’s book derives not only from multiple textual sources but also from many different traditions. It contains traces of oral traditions and is at times, as Patricia

---

<sup>62</sup> Lilian Barczyk-Barakonska, “‘Never to go forth of the limits’ Space and Melancholy in Robert Burton’s Library Project,” *Journal of European Studies* 33.3-4 (2003): 212-226 (219).

Vicari notes, “dominated by [...] a rhetoric of persuasion which, at the deepest level, is homiletic” (186). This is true of the Preface, which seems to attempt to deliver an Erasmian account of the ways in which the all the world is melancholic (or sick) (186). But it is less clear that the rest of the *Anatomy* is “dominated” by a “rhetoric of persuasion,” which is in fact rather factual in its detail about humoural physiology and other topics loosely tied to the humours.

The image of Burton as a textual manipulator with a clear and specific agenda is still pervasive in more recent studies of the *Anatomy*, and demonstrates that Burton criticism continues to function within Frye’s famous categorisation of the *Anatomy* as a “Menippean satire” (311). Douglas Trevor has argued that the *Anatomy*’s very visual textual procedures – not only the divisions but the marginalia especially present in Burton’s existing manuscripts of the *Anatomy* – express both his personal frustration with his academic profession, but are also a means of coping with these frustrations through the textual manipulation that literary anatomy offers. “By manipulating the graphic possibilities of the printed page,” Trevor argues, “Burton finds a way to vent his frustrations over a patronage system that, in his eyes, is stubbornly bent on rewarding only ill-deserving pseudo-scholars, not genuinely learned men,” that “he expresses his bitterness by offering a reading of not just his disposition but England as a whole,” and that extensive knowledge of humoural theory offered intellectuals like Burton the “analytical expertise” necessary to “projec[t] the relevance of their understanding of the passions onto the world at large” (Trevor 120). Gowland also proposes that the loose compositional framework of the textual anatomy allows Burton to deploy several rhetorical devices consistent with Aristotelian definitions of “epideictic rhetoric,” which

furnished Burton with a “theory of persuasive argumentation” that “permeates his entire writing project,” with the ultimate aim of expressing *himself* as melancholic rather than simply defining it.<sup>63</sup> Obviously these approaches to the *Anatomy* are interested in melancholy as a rhetorical concept rather than a medical one.

There is no doubt that ‘melancholy’ is valuable to Burton as a trope in parts of the *Anatomy*, specifically the Preface and also the section entitled on the “Miseries of Scholars” (Burton, 1.2.3.15). The latter provides the basis for Trevor’s impression of Burton’s bitter outlook toward academia for “rewarding only ill-deserving pseudo-scholars” rather than “genuinely learned men.” However, it is not purely as a rhetorical concept that melancholy exists in the text, otherwise the factual information about melancholy derived from humoural theory, to which most of the *Anatomy* is directed (primarily partitions one and two, which comprise about three-quarters of the volume of the text excluding the Preface), would be mostly unrelated to the main expressive purpose of the *Anatomy*. Emphasis on the rhetorical, and thus metaphorical, meanings of melancholy is complicated by a similar set of circumstances that complicate the exclusion of empirical and epistemological possibilities of a textual ‘anatomy’ in favour of its rhetorical and aesthetic functions.

We need to be cautious when dissociating both ‘melancholy’ and ‘anatomy’ from their contexts as concepts located in Renaissance epistemologies of the body in order to assert their roles as rhetorical devices in the *Anatomy*. Humoural theory was still widely believed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only enduring, as Paster writes, a “slow and incomplete disintegration in the seventeenth century,” which involved a series

<sup>63</sup> “Rhetorical,” 8. The main Aristotelian rhetorical devices which Gowland identifies in the *Anatomy* are the *partitio*, *narratio* and *dispositio* (respectively, the outline of the components of a case, the specifics of a case’s story or narrative, and the arrangement) which he suggests are used by Burton in order to establish a certain relationship with the reader.

of transformations in humoural explanations rather than its outright replacement with more modern-seeming, empirical systems.<sup>64</sup> And the kinds of textual procedures which critics identify as anatomical or dissective in the *Anatomy* were critically important features in truer anatomy texts both for encoding the text with substructures or ‘members’ of information and also convincing the reader that a text was capable of representing, or realistically imitating, the deconstructed body in a transparent and accurate way. The *Anatomy* exists within a tradition of anatomical texts that includes the *Fabrica* and, more contemporary with Burton, Helkiah Crooke’s *Microcosmographia* (1615), both of which are concerned with anatomical investigation. This tradition, however, was by no means limited to texts with strictly empirical aims.

*The Anatomy of Melancholy* does not claim to represent the topographical body with which anatomy is concerned, but the *Fabrica* and the *Anatomy* are comparable in the sense that implicit in both texts is the representation of a specific kind of body: one, the anatomical body of ‘fabrics’, the other the less tactile humoural body of fluids (but which also encompasses emotional and mental pathologies). *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is certainly a textual anatomy, but the anatomy as a genre of text must also be properly understood as deriving historically from the literal study of anatomy, and participating, as Sawday observes, in a “cycle of texts which become bodies, and bodies which become texts” that involved not only anatomy literature but also sixteenth- and seventeenth-century court and epic poetry.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> *Humoring* 6. The reader is again advised to see Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression* (117-146) with regard to the transformations in humoural theory through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

<sup>65</sup> *Body* 135. As noted above (*fn.* 33), within the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition in which bodies and texts are substituted for one another, Sawday includes the court ‘blazon’, in which the female body is metaphorically dissected (191-212), *The Purple Island* by Phineas Fletcher, as well as Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, in which takes place an “anatomical journey” in the ‘House of Alma’ section of the poem (Book 2), *i.e.* an allegorical representation of the interior of the (specifically female) body (*Body* 163).

The *Anatomy*, as a text which scarcely acknowledges the *Fabrica* (Vesalius's name is mentioned only three times in all of the *Anatomy*), employs anatomy as a procedural mode of analysis of humoral concepts according to pre-Vesalian parameters of anatomy, founded on ancient models in which "there was no intrinsic contradiction between a belief in the humoral paradigm and anatomical research" (Carlino 123). This "humoral paradigm" coexisted with anatomical research in the early modern period with perhaps less contradiction than we might presume. Indeed, in ways that may seem illogical to us, the decline of Galenic anatomy promulgated by the Vesalians had little effect on Galenic humoral physiology in terms of its currency as a viable field of enquiry or body of knowledge.

On the contrary, humoral physiology, as a conceptual system explaining the functions of the passions, personality types, moods (literally, good or bad 'humours') according to materialist theories derived from the ancients seems to have continued relatively uninterrupted by the emergence of the modern empiricist-oriented anatomy until well into the seventeenth century. The humoral treatise of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, including, of course, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, are evidence that humoral theory endured as a field of investigation. Recent studies of humoral physiology in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature by scholars working from the disciplinary basis of psychoanalytic theory, psychology and historical anthropology have been valuable in demonstrating that humoral concepts belong to no mere metaphorical category simply because they have a strong literary existence in this period. Rather, humoral concepts are perhaps better understood as being, particularly in Elizabethan poetry and drama, simultaneously literal and metaphorical. Using as her point of

emphasis “the intersection of psychology and the early modern constitution of the world” and Shakespearean drama as her chief subject of analysis, Gail Kern Paster argues that, in early modern culture, humoral explanations represent a “psychological materialism” (*Humoring*, 11, 12), in which sense the early moderns tended to imagine processes of emotion and impulse within the material framework provided by the theory of the humours. Emotions literally derived from bodily matter, matter which shared an intrinsic connection with one’s environment. Douglas Trevor argues for the place of the *Anatomy* among early modern English texts whose literary methodologies enable their writers to “speak of their depressive states in ways that powerfully attest to their sense of interiority” (9). Such “depressive states,” as *The Anatomy of Melancholy* indicates, were conceived specifically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as either caused or accompanied by the presence of melancholy/black bile in the body, a material understood to be literally and physically real.

Humoral physiology thus makes somewhat intelligible to us pre-modern and pre-Enlightenment psychological theory unfamiliar and strange from modern perspectives; but humoral physiology also served other functions in connection to knowledge of the body that was not explainable by anatomy, and it is for these reasons I think that the “humoural paradigm” which, as Carlino writes, had existed in ancient times with no “intrinsic contradiction” in relation to “anatomical research,” continued to exist as such in the midst of post-Vesalian, ‘optical’ anatomy (Carlino 123). It should more likely be understood that because optical and empirical anatomy excluded any means of rationalising the claims of humoral theory that anatomy and humoral theory are not mutually exclusive but to a certain extent complementary domains of enquiry in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A multitude of historical circumstances which gradually altered the Renaissance anatomy theatre in scope, function and social significance ultimately led, as Sawday writes, to a very new and different understanding of the human body, anatomically, and “[w]ith the new understanding of the body, attendant on the researches and discoveries of the anatomists and the natural scientists, came a reawakening of interest in the body’s *penetrable* nature” (*Body*, 87). These circumstances, as many critics have shown, include increasingly lax attitudes toward human dissection in fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Italy, established in part by the necessity of dissection for autopsy in very special cases,<sup>66</sup> as well as the idea that the body of an executed criminal was morally acceptable specimen to be dissected on the pretext that it was a corrupt body.<sup>67</sup> A “new understanding” of the body, to which Sawday refers, does not mean a series of corrections to the image or map of the body described by Galen, but, more importantly, a transformation in the methodology for determining such an image, thus giving rise to the sense that the body possessed an inherently “penetrable nature.”

The idea that the body was “penetrable” indicates important ideological changes in the sphere of anatomical research throughout the sixteenth century. Within this ‘anatomical renaissance’, ordered around the empirical exercise of the dissection, no clear place exists for empirical investigation into the humoural body, and so as far as the functions of humours and their complicated pathologies, however material they were understood to

---

<sup>66</sup> See Carlino 178-181, who argues that the imperial autopsy, records of which reach as far back as 1180s Venice and 1265 in Bologna, opened the door for early anatomical practice on cadavers to develop by offering a legitimate pretext to cut into the body and examine its contents.

<sup>67</sup> See Lois N. Magner, *A History of Medicine* (New York: Dekker, 1992) 160. As Magner writes, Vesalius’s research benefited by way of a personal relationship with a Paduan judge who allowed Vesalius priority access to the cadavers of executed criminals, that the judge in question even arranged the times of execution to suit Vesalius’s preferred dissection schedule.

be, the body remained largely *impenetrable*. Thus anatomy and humoral physiology can in a sense be viewed, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as complementary domains of enquiry, each functioning within a distinct, though occasionally overlapping, set of interests in the body and definitions of the body, anatomy being concerned with the descriptions of structures, and humoral physiology more variously with diseases, neuro- and psychopathologies, mood disorders and predispositions.

Although anatomy and humoral physiology may be seen as complementary domains of enquiry, they are linked with two distinct types of text: the former relying on images to the reduction of textual description, the latter relying rather on “endless chains of citations of multiple previous authors” largely characteristic, as Siraisi argues, of pre-Vesalian anatomies (“Vesalius and Human,” 63). These two ‘genres’ cannot be absolutely distinguished, as they share a great deal of textual middle-ground (*e.g.* moralising rhetoric, structures of argumentation, *etc.*) no doubt derived in part, historically, from shared Galenic sources, and I would argue that sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century anatomy texts in particular can be seen variously as occupying a wide spectrum that comprises degrees to which an anatomy text can be described as ‘Vesalian’ in orientation.

### **The Textual and Subtextual Body**

At one extreme of such a spectrum stands, of course, the *Fabrica*, a text whose chief point of emphasis is the anatomical body as an ‘open’ concept, in contradistinction to Galenically-derived anatomies which relied on ancient texts rather than knowledge obtained by way of dissection. Somewhere within this spectrum is also situated *The*

*Anatomy of Melancholy*, a distinct type of body-text compared to either kind of literal anatomies – Galenic or Vesalian, traditional or empirical, *etc.* – in that the kind of body which it theorises is a closed one. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomy and humoral physiology could both be characterised as studying or ‘revealing’ in different senses the interior of the body (the former concerned with interior structures and the latter with internal pathologies pertaining to emotional and mental states), but the rhetoric of both the *Fabrica*’s preface and encoded visually in its title page imply the literal, empirical possibility that the human body from an anatomical perspective could be opened or disclosed for purposes of observation, whereas the interior body studied within humoral theory was concealed not only beneath the skin but in other important senses.

One such way in which the body as defined within humoral theory could be described as concealed is that it involved aspects of the body like passions, emotions, temperament, psychological character – in other words concepts related to experiences but not necessarily related to structures found within the body, and so the concept of interiority as something by which to orient analyses of early modern culture can encompass a range of meanings drawing on very different sixteenth- and seventeenth-century epistemologies. The term “body interior,” for instance, which Sawday uses to describe the “strange and secret place” that represented a concept of great interest to anatomists and poets alike in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries refers to something quite different than what Trevor means by “interiority” in his study of the theme of melancholy in early modern poetry and drama, by which he means more of an understanding of private psychological experience explained humorally in this period, which reflects a “‘sincere’ mode of self-understanding” to which many writers’ uses and interpretations of

humoural pathologies (*i.e.* melancholy) attest (3). Sawday's "body interior" in poetry is necessarily an imagined place but in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomies the mysteries of such a "strange and secret place" are supposedly, or ostensibly, divulged in textual form (*Body*, 16-22, 161, here 160).

Such an anatomy represents the transcription of the body's manifold and complex interior structures, resulting in what could appropriately be described as a 'textual' body, and, as the *Fabrica* attests, the basis of this transcription, the 'master' text, so to speak, was the dissected human body. A dissected body is, physically, an opened one; for anatomists in ancient times the body was closed and its contents concealed, in the sense that dissections were – with some historical exceptions – culturally prohibited. Hence the tendency for traditional anatomies to rely on a combination of classical assertions and speculations largely unrelated to dissective experimentation on human subjects in order to verify any such claims. The textual aspect of Vesalian anatomy involves the transcription of the subsurface "body interior" onto the pages of a book, thus mapping the *material* components of the body's complex interior using a combination of written text and image, the result being a text whose production began literally within the anatomy theatre, and thus limiting the possibility that discoveries inconsistent with Galen would go unrecorded.

The *Fabrica*'s predominant theme is not that Galen's texts should be replaced but that it should be rewritten and revised by verifying his claims through firsthand observation. Thus, if an overall attitude toward Galen is discernible in the *Fabrica* it is, as Siraisi writes, one that is characterised by "a complicated mixture of dependence, reworking and critique," and the *Fabrica*, far from being a rejection of Galenic anatomy, is rather "a

book with the central message that all ancient assertions about human anatomy need to be reconfirmed and extended on the basis of dissection in the human subject” (“Vesalius and Galen,” 2, 19). Generally speaking, an anatomy text after Vesalius which does not make extensive use of diagrams tends to identify it as pre-modern (*i.e.* Galenic) in its philosophy and methodology. Closely related to Vesalius’s view that anatomy which was derived from ancient sources must be “reconfirmed and extended on the basis of dissection” is the conveyance of the anatomical exercise within the text, in which sense the *Fabrica* presupposes a transparency between text and body. It presuppose, in other words, that the text could transparently signify the terrain of the anatomical human body made visible by the act of dissection – even though, as scholars have noted, the *Fabrica* distorts this very transparency by misrepresenting reality in, *e.g.* the animation of flayed corpses which “stroll through a pastoral landscape, casually allowing themselves to be gradually deconstructed, oblivious to the literal impossibility of such a reduction” (Sawday, *Body* 112-113).

These kinds of surrealistic distortions notwithstanding, the *Fabrica* is largely preoccupied with realistic representations of the anatomical body, employing a sophisticated conjunction of text and image resulting in the realisation of the body textbook more akin to modern anatomies than to Galenically-based anatomies reliant upon descriptions and scholastic methodology. Historians of medicine, when emphasising the *Fabrica*’s and Vesalius’s historical importance to the modern study of anatomy, usually highlight certain key features which distinguish the *Fabrica* from older anatomy texts and methodologies: Vesalius favoured the methodology of firsthand dissection, and his text, by way of its extensive array of woodcut illustrations, illustrates

both his observations and his idealisation of anatomy. It is an oversimplification to say that the *Fabrica* is the first anatomy text to contain illustrations.

The presence of illustrations is itself of less significance than several other factors, such as the quality of the woodblock cuts, their painstaking attention to detail and sheer volume, the sometimes jarring juxtaposition of or alternation between realism and the fantastic as evidenced by illustrations of bones and muscles but also the depiction, as discussed above, of the flayed pastoral ‘musclemen’ or skeletons shown leaning pensively. But not least among these, if we are interested in the *Fabrica* as a unique artefact in the early modern history of the book, is the engagement of textual description and image. As Saunders and O’Malley have noted, “Vesalius employed the illustration to eliminate ambiguity and to delimit verbal statement,” and, to him, “picture and text were one” (21). Thus, it is not necessarily the function of the images but the function of image with and within text that is particularly noteworthy in the *Fabrica*.

One way in which text and illustration function in unison in the *Fabrica* is through a system of cross-referencing between the two, in which images containing either several parts or substructural features – muscles, bones, arteries, organs, nerves – were marked either numerically or alphabetically so that these parts could be more easily referred to in discussion and analysis. One of the results of this cooperative interplay of text and image in the *Fabrica* when compared to Galen’s anatomical works is, as one scholar has noted, the decreased reliance on textual description itself.<sup>68</sup> In the Vesalian anatomy text was

---

<sup>68</sup> See especially Siraisi, who notes that, in viewing the *Fabrica* in comparison with sections of Galen’s *On Anatomical Procedures* and *On the Usefulness of the Parts*, much of the reduction comes at the expense of Galen’s “flowery” rhetoric which he used to marvel at the perfect architecture of the body as designed by nature: “[Vesalius’s] grand project of a critique of Galen, of a new and more accurate Galenic anatomy that would truly describe mankind instead of ‘Galen’s apes’, led him frequently to compress or eliminate and occasionally to make ironic remarks about Galen’s looser rhetorical claims about the human body” (“Vesalius and Galen,” 30).

also represented the possible synthesis of what Sawday has referred to as the “ideal anatomization, which took place only in the pages of textbooks” and the body in the very midst of being dissected, which was “mysteriously complex and, because of the biological tendency towards decay, continually eluding the practical dissector” (*Body*, 133). Both the body and text, in other words, might be construed as ‘ideal’ in very distinct ways – the body for being perfect in both its construction and as a subject of anatomical study, and the anatomy text for representing a mode of transcribing knowledge of the body obtained from dissection into a form that was invulnerable to decomposition. The *Fabrica* acknowledges the hindering effect of time and decay on empirical anatomy in the title page illustration (Figure 5), the centre of which is occupied by a skeleton, symbol of death, a meaning which was accented by the alteration of the skeleton’s staff in the first edition to a scythe in the title page to the 1555 edition of the *Fabrica*.<sup>69</sup>

In the larger picture which emerges from scholarship, Vesalian anatomy may be seen to reflect two major features: one is the priority of dissection as a methodology for obtaining anatomical knowledge, the other is the close connection of this methodology to the production of a specific kind of text. It is this second feature which interests me primarily here, and I will discuss it in more detail below. But for now it is worthwhile pointing out that both of these features are represented in the title page of the *Fabrica* – the empirical method of dissection by the female cadaver which lies open at the centre of the theatrical scene, and the act of transcription which, as we have seen, is signified by the writing tools.

---

<sup>69</sup> See also Carlino’s analysis of the title page (39-52), who suggests, in addition to the skeleton’s symbolic meaning as portending death, that it may be viewed equally as stressing the importance of osteology in the study of anatomy (47).

The title page of the *Fabrica* is valuable perhaps not so much as an accurate historical representation of a sixteenth-century anatomy lecture but as a rhetorical and idealised vision of one, suited to the general argumentation of the *Fabrica*'s preface and implicit in the book's approach to anatomy as a field of research, necessarily contrary to certain traditions grouped in opposition to 'Vesalian' anatomy. Historians of early modern anatomy have noted that the title page also implies that the basis of the anatomy text is the anatomist's own research; the anatomist (a portrait of Vesalius himself) is here conducting the lecture and performing the dissection, contrary to the practice customary in public anatomy demonstrations from the thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries, in which one lecturer would narrate the proceedings while subservient assistants or barber surgeons made the incisions. "Prior to Vesalius," writes Dolores Mitchell, "the actual cutting of the corpse was generally done by an assistant to the anatomy lecturer for reasons of decorum, and because the church frowned upon the desecration of the body. Vesalius, determined to advance the knowledge of anatomy, dispensed with such an assistant and did his own dissections" (146).

The two figures in the lower part of the title page, just beneath the dissection table, are usually understood to represent the barber surgeons, now marginalised and reduced to secondary or unimportant roles within the Vesalian anatomy theatre.<sup>70</sup> Vesalius suggests in the *Fabrica*'s preface that, not only was this an unnecessary division of tasks requiring often poorly trained assistants, but that accurate knowledge of the body was not possible within this kind of divided ritual structure because those who were most concerned with studying and perfecting knowledge of the body were not directly involved in the

---

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, both Sawday and Carlino (45-48), who interpret the figures as pre-Vesalian dissectors who "squabble over surgical instruments" (Sawday, *Body* 68).

performance. “[W]hen the whole practice of cutting was handed over to the barbers,” he writes, “not only did the physicians lose firsthand knowledge of the viscera but also the whole art of dissecting [fell] forthwith into oblivion, simply because the physicians would not undertake to perform it, while they to whom the art of surgery was entrusted were too unlettered to understand the writings of the professors of anatomy” (1:li). As a result, he says, it has been impossible “to prevent that evil fragmentation of the healing art from importing into our Colleges that detestable ritual whereby one group performs the actual dissection of a human body and another gives an account of the parts: the latter aloft on their chairs croak away with consummate arrogance,” while the former, the dissecting assistants doing the actual cutting, “are so unskilled in languages that they cannot explain to the spectators what they have dissected but hack things up for display following the instructions of a physician who has never set his hand to the dissection of a body” (1:li).

Whatever reformation of anatomy can be attributed to Vesalius and his followers involved, in equal importance, both practical approaches and textual production, and the conjunctive aim of both was the *improvement* of accuracy in anatomical knowledge. It will be clear to viewers of the *Fabrica*'s woodcut illustrations that, for the most part, they are intended to replicate the experience of viewing a dissected human body “The reader [of the *Fabrica*] must remember,” says Richardson, “that all Vesalius's anatomy is naked-eye anatomy: if he could not see it with the naked eye, it was not there” (1:xvii-xviii). This was clearly the principle that informed the production of the *Fabrica* as a text that could potentially do justice to Vesalius's “naked-eye anatomy.” The *Fabrica*'s impressive series of (over two hundred) diagrams and woodcut illustrations shows the

importance attached to images to ‘discuss’ and demonstrate anatomy, as if the empirical exercise of an anatomical dissection and anatomy text occurred together, the latter emerging naturally out of the former. Vesalius asserts that his book is by no means a substitute for dissection, which he encourages students of anatomy to undertake wherever the opportunity should present itself; “it was never my intention that students should rely on these [images] without ever dissecting cadavers; rather I would, as Galen did,” says Vesalius (likely referring here to Galen’s treatise *De anatomicis administrationibus*), “urge students of medicine by every means at my command to undertake dissections with their own hands” (Vesalius 1:lvi).

*The Anatomy of Melancholy* is in a very different category of early modern anatomy texts than the *Fabrica*, the latter aiming chiefly at an accurate representation of the body while the other is notable for pursuing the empirical possibilities inherent in the literary procedures of a textual anatomy in order to define a (humoural) body. Let us return for a moment to Vesalius’s consideration of the spleen, in order to get an idea of not only his observations but more significantly the aspects to which he restricts his analysis. While “everyone agrees,” Vesalius writes, “that what the spleen squirts back into the stomach is black bile,” its function is less clear, and he avoids arbitrating between jostling positions: “I am not bold enough to make a firm statement about the residue [*i.e.* black bile] squirted into the stomach by the spleen and about the function of this” (5:126). Even so, he states that “[t]he dissections that I have carried out do not in my view support the things that the professors of anatomy assert as incontestable facts” (Vesalius 5:126). He reports details of his own findings while “examin[ing] at Bologna the spleen of a Gallic priest who had died in the hospice of water under the skin,” placing specific emphasis on

things he witnessed which did not correspond to Galenic humoral theory; “his spleen was small and white,” writes Vesalius, stressing the contradiction between this finding and the Galenic descriptions of the spleen as being of a “shady black color” (5:123). “I record these facts,” he goes on, “in order to encourage students to make a careful study of the substance and function of this viscus (if, that is, one may be so bold as to doubt Galen’s account of its function)” (Vesalius 5:123).

Raising “doubt [in] Galen’s account” of human anatomy, specifically by contradicting with his dissections whatever “things that the professors of anatomy assert as incontestable facts,” is a centrally important theme in Vesalian anatomy and the key point iterated in historical scholarship which now represents it. But for those of us more interested in the history of early modern texts, the *Fabrica* is highly significant for transforming the standards of expectation of what a text could signify in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Doubting in Galen’s account may be aptly described as doubting one kind of text and favouring another kind; one representing old, the other new, one representing scholarship and scholastic methodologies, the other anatomical empiricism. It is in this sense that Sawday uses the term “textual authority,” meaning that a text could signify authoritatively, whereas, in opposition to this kind of authority, the anatomist of the Vesalian order, “who searched in the body for its structure,” was the “concrete representative of a new conception of knowledge, one that professed to rely [instead] on the experience of phenomena” (*Body*, 64).

But the *Fabrica* can be equally and accurately described as itself a “textual authority,” one in which the topographies of the body are both visually and textually encoded. Vesalian anatomy, in other words, involves both “the experience of phenomena” but also

the production and formulation of a new “textual authority,” the result being a complicated and potentially confusing interchange between body and text in which the text is never exactly displaced but rather augmented. The *Fabrica*, in short, replaced the ancient text with the ‘text’ of the body itself, only to replace it ultimately with another text.

This mixed message – the simultaneous necessity and insufficiency of texts – is inscribed into the *Fabrica*’s frontispiece and title page images, which place the body at the visual and geometric centre but which also contain various symbols denoting the proximity of the exercise of writing to anatomical research and suggest that the production of the anatomy text begins within the anatomy theatre. There are the writing instruments already noted, such as the pen and inkwell, along with the fragment of parchment, in both the title page and frontispiece engravings, and many scholars of Vesalius have also noted that there is among the figures depicted in the *Fabrica*’s title page a reader engrossed in his book, who occupies a rather privileged place above the anatomist’s head, beneath the skeleton’s right elbow. I note the position of the reader and his book because such a position may have been intended to suggest to the viewer of the title page the indispensable intellectual value of the text in Vesalius’s outlook on anatomical enquiry, possibly accented by the contrast to the unimportance ascribed to some of the occupants of the lower part of the image below the table, such as the barber surgeons and both the dog and monkey (thought to signify the animals upon which Galen performed his dissections, and therefore useless in their presence).

Other nuanced messages may suggest at least a partial endorsement of the place of ancient anatomy texts within the theatrical sphere of anatomy, rather than outright

rejection of them. As Nancy Siraisi points out, in the *Fabrica*'s frontispiece portrait, the flayed hand 'reads' like an anatomist's oath, declaring Vesalius's intention to follow in his ancient master's footsteps, at the same time that it also constitutes an exposé of Galen, since both Galen's *De anatomicis administrationibus* and *De usu partium* (*On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Human Body*) are arranged by Galen so as to begin with the hand as the focus: "both [...] treat the hand in all its parts – bones, nerves, tendons, blood vessels, flesh, skin and nails – but [...] give special emphasis to the multiple and intricate arrangement of muscles and tendons providing and controlling the mobility of the fingers" ("Vesalius and Galen," 5). Like Galen's anatomies, "the *Fabrica*, too, starts with the hand, since the famous author portrait showing Vesalius in the threefold capacity of dissector, teacher and author, presents him at work on the forearm, hand, and fingers" (Siraisi, "Vesalius and Galen" 5). But "the pictured hand and arm are unambiguously human, being attached to a human torso," which itself is an indictment of Galen's work since any hand he dissected belonged almost assuredly to an ape (Siraisi, "Vesalius and Galen" 5). Thus, the anatomist in Vesalius's frontispiece, looking directly at the viewer, seems to say 'Look: what I am dissecting is a human hand, not an ape's', and in this sense is the flayed hand, as Siraisi has suggested, both a "silent quotation and a silent criticism of Galen" ("Vesalius and Galen," 5).

From the perspective of early modern medical history, the *Anatomy* and the *Fabrica* are categorically distinct in the sense that they belong to different domains of interrogation: humoural theory and anatomy, respectively. But they are comparable as texts in the sense that both are involved in the mutual interchange between texts and bodies which arose out of sixteenth-century anatomical research but which writers, as the

*Anatomy* demonstrates, adapted to purposes other than anatomical investigation. But these purposes, as the *Anatomy* also demonstrates, could be equally epistemological in orientation; both texts operate on the premise that a conceptual entity could be embodied comprehensively and coherently within a text, although in texts historically identified as ‘anatomical’ works the text is modelled on the human body, and so its parameters are relatively defined. In Burton’s case, in which the textual possibilities of anatomy assume priority over the body which it signifies, such limitations are only loosely implied.

Burton will, he writes, “by the clue or thread of the best Writers, extricate my selfe out of a Labyrinth of doubts and errors” (1:171 [1.2.1.1]). He shows no interest in bodies in the sense understood by empirical anatomy, or in live experiments, and indeed, as Vicari writes, “[m]ost often a piece of new scientific knowledge will remind Burton of an old myth,” rather than whet his appetite for more new information (30). His methods of academic investigation are scholastic and, in a way, out of step with seventeenth-century Baconian writing, favouring not exploration but explanation. Burton’s relentless taxonomic description resembles more the genre which Peter Dear suggests was endorsed by medieval followers of Aristotle. “Thus when Aristotle’s followers considered what Aristotelian natural science should look like,” says Dear,

the model that they examined was one in which empirically acquired truths were taken as given, with only their explanation being the truly important task. In a sense, therefore, an Aristotelian world was not one in which there were countless new things to be discovered; instead, it was one in which there were countless things, mostly already known, left to be explained.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Peter Dear, *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and its Ambitions, 1500-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 132.

The world in which there are “countless new things to be discovered,” as Dear states, does not appear to be the one to which the *Anatomy* belongs or in which it expresses any interest. Why, then, the ‘anatomy’ of melancholy? Why not the ‘archives’ of melancholy? What kind of statement can be to be deduced from *The Anatomy of Melancholy* concerning anatomical research even though it is, as scholars agree, a literary anatomy rather than a true anatomy text whose ideological bases were in the recognition that “human anatomy had to be learned from dead bodies not dead languages”<sup>72</sup> On the one hand it is perhaps possible to read the *Anatomy*, as Angus Gowland does, as a lampooning, mock-imitation of the traditional scholastic treatise which Dear describes above:

What we see in the *Anatomy*, then, is a treatise that absorbed medical learning into a humanist philosophical enterprise. Negatively, it discredited physicians’ use of scholastic techniques and their reliance on over-systematised doctrine and general rules, and ridiculed the curiosity about matters beyond human capacity that had disfigured the discipline and led it astray. (*Worlds*, 34)

The relentless taxonomic methodology that the *Anatomy* implements, seldom if ever precipitating the satisfying resolution of a certainty in the text, invites the impression that the *Anatomy* is either non-serious in nature, or that it is serious insofar as it critiques “over-systematised doctrine” by itself becoming an exaggeration of it.

The *Anatomy* has a tendency to elicit these kinds of responses to it in literary studies of the text, which is to say that it is directed toward “ridicul[ing] curiosity” and examining human folly, that humoral physiology suited Burton’s purposes by offering both a

---

<sup>72</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) 179.

pseudo-medical context within which to characterise and analyse cultural madnnesses, and that anatomy represented a mode of critical analysis that permitted the aggregation of diverse ideas, knowledge systems and indeed generic modes – literally the ‘incorporation’ of genres, voices, patterns, and rhetorical models.

My concern with these approaches stems in part from the hesitation which Burton scholarship tends to show in viewing seventeenth-century humoural physiology as a knowledge system that was still largely believed and (perhaps more importantly in terms of my own themes in this dissertation) was to which was attached many larger epistemic questions that interested seventeenth-century writers. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, the historical distance (or the strangeness, for want of a better word) of the idea of the body as a composite of humours which function upon the emotions and physical and psychological pathologies appears to account for part of the reason that scholars, in their interest in studying the cultural fascination with melancholy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art and literature, favour its figurative senses rather than its epistemological depth. To a certain extent the dominance of the figurative or metaphorical meaning of melancholy is still detectable in literary studies of Burton as well as studies of humoural physiology in literature, although, as I have noted, recent approaches oriented by psychoanalysis and historical anthropology have proven valuable in bringing to our attention, not the authority of literal meanings of humoural concepts, but rather the authority of a kind of symbiosis of meanings that belongs to the fields of both poetic tropology and psychological materialism.<sup>73</sup>

The epistemic questions raised by the *Anatomy* help situate seventeenth-century humoural physiology in broader crises of thought and link Burton to other writers and

---

<sup>73</sup> Again, see Paster, *Body* (1-22) and *Humoring*.

disciplinary contexts altogether in which are posed questions about the very validity of knowledge within their respective modes of analysis. Specifically such questions, conveying attitudes of both scepticism and pessimism, are often further tied to problematic aspects of conceptions of knowledge as a reality which lies somehow underneath or within visible surfaces (*e.g.* as humoral pathologies are understood to reside in the activities of the humours within the body), and which can be known by modes of analysis which involve surfaces of various kinds – the analysis, interpretation and ultimately the understanding of knowledge by the study of objects, signs, symbols, symptoms, *etc.* Thomas Browne, whose work is the focus of the next and final chapter, writes in his 1658 essay on cultural funeral rites occasioned by the accidental discovery of some Anglo-Saxon urns in the proximity of his Norfolk residence, “who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried?,” by which he implies that nobody is capable of knowing whether his or her bones will remain in a final resting place or be disturbed as were the ones whose unearthing prompted his essay.

Indeed, the question ‘Who knows?’, which can be possibly paraphrased as ‘*How* can one know?’, seems to be one by which prose writers like Browne and Burton, whose interests are perhaps too eclectic to be described as scientific in a modern sense, have oriented much of their research. Humoural theory figures prominently into these landscapes of seventeenth-century investigation, hinged, like anatomy, to the view of the body as a complex structure of encrypted meanings to be decoded by study, but different than anatomy in that it seemed to provoke, as *The Anatomy of Melancholy* shows, questions as to its own validity as an area of study; “Who can sufficiently speake of these symptomes, or prescribe rules to comprehend them?” Burton writes of melancholy in the

*Anatomy*, implying that knowledge of melancholy is, essentially, impossible because no intellectual means seems to be available to him to execute its 'comprehension' (1:407 [1.3.1.4]).

***Invisible Bodies: Thomas Browne's Urn Burial as Diagnostic Crisis***

In January of 1632, the month in which Dr Tulp delivered his famous anatomy lecture in an Amsterdam theatre to an elite crowd and surrounded by the Guild of Surgeons, the month in which Rembrandt was commissioned to paint his *Anatomy Lesson* (Figure 4), Thomas Browne, then twenty-six years of age, was well on his way in his academic training as a physician, a training which had taken him on a tour from Oxford through Montpellier, Padua, Vienna and, later, to Leiden, in Holland.<sup>74</sup> Most likely, Browne's residence at this time was Padua, the theatrical 'stage' of the anatomical renaissance and, professionally, of Andreas Vesalius, and the university at which William Harvey earned a medical degree in 1602. W.G. Sebald, however, would like to place Browne in Amsterdam during January 1632 and so imagines he could have been present at Dr Tulp's dissection of Aris Kindt. But "[w]e have no evidence," admits Sebald, "to tell us from which angle Thomas Browne watched the dissection" (17).

The anatomy lecture, as a public dissection, would certainly have attracted medical student and faculty alike in Padua and Leiden. The university at Leiden, from which Browne would eventually be awarded his doctorate medical degree in 1633, housed, along with Padua, one of the most famous anatomy theatres in seventeenth-century Europe. But from empirical anatomy only knowledge of the body's architecture and 'fabrics' can be obtained; it has nothing to say about the pathologies of living bodies in which physicians are concerned and about which they form a diagnosis or 'reading' based on analyses of exterior symptoms.

---

<sup>74</sup> I am following details of Browne's biography and education provided by Jonathan F.S. Post, *Sir Thomas Browne* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987) 4-11.

The disjunctive relationships between signifiers and signifieds, surface appearances and subsurface realities, are critical problems which preoccupy Browne later in his career in both his major and minor writings, including *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) and *Letter to a Friend*, but in particular his treatise on urns and funeral rites, *Hydriotaphia*, or *Urn Burial*, printed together with *The Garden of Cyrus* in 1658, and with which it has traditionally shared ‘companion’ status in Browne scholarship because of the many ways in which their respective themes have been shown to contrast with one another.<sup>75</sup> The epistemological themes of *Urn Burial* have been noted extensively by Browne scholars and specifically its scepticism about the possibility of gaining conclusive knowledge within the modes of empirical and speculative analysis related to antiquarian research.<sup>76</sup> Readers of *Urn Burial* encounter at various turns different manifestations of the antiquarian problem of attempting to read, re-establish and reconstruct knowledge of the past into complete and coherent historical narratives by analysis of ruined and incomplete artefacts. The essay itself was prompted or occasioned by a series of urns uncovered by accident in a field near Walsingham, Norfolk, near Browne’s residence, which emerged from the ground amid no burial markings and containing few incontestable clues as to their cultural and historical origins. The mystery of the urns leads Browne into consideration of other widely ranging cultural examples of funeral interment which represent human attempts to preserve one’s memory while inadvertently and ironically guaranteeing at least the partial loss of information to the antiquarian and historian attempting to reconstruct history.

---

<sup>75</sup> Regarding the thematic mirroring which has been understood to take place between the essays, see, for instance, Frank Livingstone Huntley, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962) 206-211.

<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, George Williamson, “The Purple of *Urn Burial*,” *Modern Philology* 62.2 (Nov. 1964) 110-117.

What I wish to explore in this chapter is the extent to which the imagery and iconographic language of *Urn Burial's* subject matter – to which are tied questions of how and to what extent knowledge is obtainable from analysis of such objects as graves, urns, earth, human remains – are also tied in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medicine to the episteme of humoral theory. This iconographic language, which is a kind of material symbolism, is cognate in specific with melancholy according to medical definitions, in which can be found both descriptions of black bile as ‘earthy’ in nature and also of the melancholic as being somehow inclined to think and dream of graves and graveyards.

André Du Laurens writes in his *Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight* (1598) that the melancholic “dreameth of nothing but dead men, graues” (95). In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral physiology and in medical definitions, a statement such as Du Laurens’s is not an arbitrary example selected by the writer as an object emblematic of a melancholic’s morbid disposition; it is, rather, a reflection of the prevailing tendency in early modern natural philosophy to perceive the universe in sets of analogies or natural sympathies, a tendency whose sphere of influence extended into medical physiology and dominated humoral theory. This semiotic system of similarities, a system in which things can be said to ‘signify’ other things by virtue of innate likenesses, governs much early modern meaning. In fact, as Gail Kern Paster has argued, the very perceived existence of a system in which things mean other things by way of similarity “made discovery of similitude and resemblance the richest and most direct path to knowledge of the world” in the early modern period (27).

Within this system of “similitude and resemblance” which orients ancient and early modern natural philosophy, black bile is understood as being similar to earth on the hypothesised basis in both ancient cosmology and Hippocratic medicine that the four elements and four humours participate in a mirroring relationship with one another and share fundamental similarities. Both earth and black bile, the humour associated in Galenic humoral theory with melancholy, are, for instance, dry and heavy, and thus by extension the melancholic is thought to be ‘heavy’ in terms of his or her temperament, which is to say sombre or severe and prone to depression.

These medical definitions are all consistent within this teleology of the “discovery of similitude and resemblance” which represented the “direct path to knowledge” in early modern natural philosophy, the key to which was thus the ability to recognise relationships based on similarity. It is thus not insignificant in seventeenth-century writing that crises of epistemology, *i.e.* belief in the potential for knowledge and meaning to be permanently lost, should be both moored as they are in Browne’s essay to semiological issues (in this case, of reading and interpreting signs), but also further linked by way of sixteenth-and seventeenth-century medical contexts to the doctrine of melancholy. The latter, as Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* attests, seems as a body of knowledge to have become noteworthy in the seventeenth century for what it was incapable of conveying with absolute certainty. As we saw in my third chapter, the frustration of locating and defining melancholy was frequently verbalised by Burton in the *Anatomy* as arising specifically from the fact that simply too many symptoms could be documented to render a definition that was anything but confusing. So many and diverse are the symptoms of melancholy – the very signs by which the disease is

diagnosed according to Galenic medicine – that one cannot, Burton writes, “sufficiently speake of these symptoms [of melancholy] or prescribe rules to comprehend them,” since the “foure and twenty letters make no more variety of words in divers languages, then melancholy conceipts produce diversity of symptomes in severall persons” (1:407 [1.3.1.4]). Burton, alluding here to both senses of what it means ‘to comprehend’ something, *i.e.* to encompass as a totality in the body of his work but also to understand, hints at the literal impossibility of either of these (deeply interrelated) objectives. The symptoms of melancholy are too diverse to enumerate, so “irregular, obscure, various,” and certainly not useful to a physician for interpreting pathologies residing in the interior of the body by making diagnostic sense of visible signs.

Humoural physiology was thus, from ancient times, a discourse oriented toward *knowing* the body in certain specific respects: as a complex of functions, mood predispositions and both physiological and mental pathologies. In Galenic medicine, knowledge of such processes or ontological states was possible by simply being able to identify or read certain tell-tale physical signs; for instance, a melancholic disposition could be discerned in a subject by his or her darker complexion, skin discolorations or, as Galen writes, a humoural “mixture appear[ing] in all visible parts of the body,” in addition to the states of prolonged despondence (or depressive ‘melancholia’) (*De locis affectis* 89).

The relatively slender doctrine of melancholy in Galenic medicine was one whose coherence, from a diagnostic perspective, presupposed a cause-and-effect symmetry between the surface (the symptomatic terrain of skin) and whatever resides beneath or within it (the activities of always-changing humours and fluids). Most sixteenth- and

seventeenth-century medical writers follow Galenic humoral physiology without raising doubts about its doctrinal coherence to the extent that Burton does. In fact, when we consider Browne's essay in relation to Burton's *Anatomy*, we can see that the kinds of problems to which they each give voice could be expressed as frustrations arising from the recognition of (what we might call) a kind of semiotic disorder; specifically, that signs which can be seen and read fail to carry or embody meaning in the ways in which they are expected to do, according to both the methodologies and knowledge systems to which they respectively and predominantly adhere.

The result of this recognition, brought to the reader's attention in both *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Browne's *Urn Burial*, is to call into question knowledge itself, that knowledge which is procured by interpretation of signifiers found within the physical world, whether they be symptoms of disease witnessed in the human body or semi-ruined artefacts. Perhaps we should not be surprised to see this theme of loss of coherence between readable symbols and meaning resonate in both medical and archaeological contexts with Browne, who both studied and practised medicine but whose fascination with antique culture carried him further afield into archaeological and antiquarian writing. *Urn Burial* begins with the admonishment to the reader in its opening lines that, just as "[t]hat great Antiquity *America* lay buried for a thousand years," in which sense he means that it lay undiscovered for centuries, so too "a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us," and therefore undiscovered or unknown to us (1:2). As the essay proceeds, the reader witnesses Browne's frequent notation of natural and historical anomalies which prevent researchers from "the deep discovery of the Subterranean world," a major example of which is the reality that grave markings, tombs and monuments, along with

the human remains and graves which they are understood to represent, are not always in the same place and therefore inaccurate in such representations (1:2). For instance, Browne writes that “[t]he variety of *Homers* Monuments made him of various Countreys. *Euripides* had his Tomb in *Africa*, but his sepulture in *Macedonia*. And *Severus* found his real Sepulchre in *Rome*, but his empty grave in *Gallia*” (*UB* 3:41).

By this “Subterranean world” Browne means both the literal underground of graves and other “treasures of time” like the Walsingham urns which could be potentially uncovered by way of archaeological research, but also, and more broadly, things unknown (*UB* 1:2). In fact, Browne’s clear interest as a matter of priority in the second of these senses of the ‘subterranean’ is evident in the attention he devotes in *Urn Burial*’s five chapters to topics other than the Walsingham urns, or rather to what the Walsingham urns come to symbolise for him, which is the futile but seemingly innate intuition in human nature to produce enduring memorials of one’s existence after death in the form of “visible conservatories,” leading to the unwelcome truth that time erodes such memorials (along with everything else) and with them valuable and irreplaceable information (*UB* 5:69).

These same kinds of questions about the reliability of signs to convey meaning provoked by the Walsingham urns in *Urn Burial* also appear to Browne in medical contexts, and, in fact, Browne seems to relish encounters in much of his writing with the curious, out-of-the-ordinary exempla in nature which provoke questions about the language of symbols and meanings, and with the archetypal symbolism upon which knowledge systems are founded. In one of Browne’s minor works, *A Letter to a Friend*, we see similar frustrations with the reading of signs surrounding the interpretation of the

morphology of skin and complexion in the pursuit of rendering a medical diagnosis, citing, as in *Urn Burial*, exceptional cases which are shown to compromise the accuracy of such diagnoses. I will compare these aspects of the *Letter* and *Urn Burial* later in this chapter, but for now it is worth noting that anomalies and exceptions appearing in diagnostic readings of a patient's visible symptoms often result in what he calls "fallible Predictions," or wrongful prognoses.<sup>77</sup>

Browne's understanding of the human body as itself the map of a knowledge system clearly involves the semiology of the body's characteristics, complexions and physical idiosyncrasies. This understanding surfaces intermittently in his writing and seems to have influenced the topic of his (now lost) doctoral dissertation, which, as it is now known, he had written on smallpox, a disease which ravages the face and so was, rationally, located somewhere in the morphology of the 'complexion' as a facial condition signifying internal compositions and humoural dramas. Smallpox was also, in the middle of the seventeenth-century, a disease whose cause remained unsolved, a matter of national concern.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, smallpox represents the disjunctive side of medical semiology in the seventeenth century – highly visible but difficult to understand from a causal perspective, in which sense the disease perhaps parallels melancholy in the domain of humoural theory, which was also visible symptomatically but irreducible to a clear set of causes.

---

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Browne, *A Letter to a Friend* (London: 1690) 5. Hereafter referred to as *LF*.

<sup>78</sup> See Donald R. Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer: Smallpox in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 35-38. In response to the growing number of deaths by smallpox in the early seventeenth century, says Hopkins, parishes in London began the practice of registering church burials by cause of death in the 1620s. These "Bills of Mortality" were eventually published, beginning in 1629. Mortalities resulting from smallpox, according to record, were in excess of one thousand in both 1634 and 1649, and from 1650 to 1699 over fifty thousand deaths were caused by smallpox, representing over five percent of all deaths in the Bills of Mortality, and an average of twenty deaths per week in London over these fifty years.

Like many other diseases whose causes remained mysterious or unsolved in seventeenth-century medicine, smallpox was, perhaps unsurprisingly, linked with black bile/melancholy. The difficulty of explaining it from a medical perspective increased its standing as a serious and widespread threat to public health in Browne's time. Smallpox "grows more pernicious than the great," observes Browne, and Burton lists it in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* among "many Epidemicall diseases vnheard of, and altogether vnknowne to *Galen* and *Hippocrates*" (LF 6; Burton 1:90 [1.1.1.2]). Burton never writes that smallpox *is* a melancholic disease; however, afflictions with no clear cause or resolution, but with visible signs, almost inevitably come to be associated with melancholy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such afflictions inevitably wind up in the pages of the *Anatomy*, as if the term 'melancholy' represents a categorical distinction that is synonymous with 'unknown or unverified ailment'.

Scholars of Browne have noted, on the basis of Browne's morose subject matter and prevailing tone expressive of a pessimistic attitude toward retrieving information about the remote past, that *Urn Burial* could be characterised as a 'melancholic' prose work; as William Engel writes, "[i]f one were to characterize *Urn Burial* by a color, it would be brown or black; its humour would be melancholy" (213-214). Engel's use of qualifiers ("[i]f one *were* to characterize *Urn Burial* by a color," "its humour *would* be melancholy") emphasises the hypothetical nature of this characterisation. I would argue, however, that we can take the melancholy as a serious point of departure for a discussion of Browne's essay. Many of the epistemological issues with which the essay concerns itself can be correlated to similar concerns evident in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral theory engaged in the task of 'comprehending' (to borrow Burton's word) the

humoural pathologies commonly associated with melancholy. It is in this sense that we can link *Urn Burial* to early modern melancholy – not to the *experience* of melancholy but to the attempt to define it, which Burton had demonstrated to be deeply problematic.<sup>79</sup>

This is not to suggest that *Urn Burial* should be *read* as a medical treatise disguised as an essay on cultural artefacts and archaeology, but that Browne’s somewhat opaque and seemingly cryptic essay is shown to concern itself largely with a broad and inclusive set of epistemological issues, arising in many cases from critical questions of semiological disorientation, into which humoural physiology was also absorbed in the seventeenth century. Indeed, the sense that *Urn Burial* is richly symbolic and that from the symbolism it is difficult to move to an identification of the essay’s ‘true’ subject matter alerts us to the fact that the essay intends to focus upon disharmony. The rich but splintered symbolism is also one of the chief reasons that *Urn Burial*, along with the companion *Garden of Cyrus*, seem to exist almost out of time and place. Browne has proved notoriously difficult to contextualise for scholars of his work, on account of his characteristic tendency to specify little in the way of local, historical detail. This tendency is both surprising and frustrating from a socio-historical perspective, given that he was writing and practicing medicine as a Royalist and Anglican in Parliamentary Norwich during the Interregnum.<sup>80</sup> Browne’s major works – *Religio Medici*, *Pseudodoxia*

<sup>79</sup> Although I should further note here that Burton frequently correlates the experience of melancholy, particularly in its sense as an emotional, depressive state, to the study of the humoural pathology. More than an analogy in the *Anatomy*, melancholy and academic study in general (see the “Miseries of Scholars” [1.3.15] section of the *Anatomy*) are shown in the treatise to exist in a mutually-reciprocating causal relationship, and so the study of melancholy in specific is a particular threat to contribute to melancholy. See *Anatomy*, 1:387 (1.3.1.2).

<sup>80</sup> See Achsah Guibbory, “*Urne-Buriall* and the Question of Jewish Readmission,” *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*, ed. Reid Barbour and Claire Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 222-241. Guibbory argues that Browne’s survey of funeral rites and the demonstration of apparent “reason and logic in all of them, no matter how seemingly bizarre,” may be construed as a kind of doctrinal pretext for allowing Jews back into England, one of the challenges with which the Protectorate was faced during the 1650s (237). See also Philip Major, “*Urne-Buriall* and the Interregnum Royalist,” *‘A man very well studied’: New Contexts for Thomas Browne*, ed. Kathryn Murphy and Richard Todd (Leiden: Brill, 2008)

*Epidemica*, and the companion pieces, *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* – all appeared during these extraordinarily turbulent decades in early modern England, and yet they contain no reference to civil war, regicide, or revolutions in government. He was, as Kathryn Murphy has recently noted, apparently “[d]ivorced from his time, unmarked by the civil strife through which he lived,” and “interrupted only by the importunities of uroscopy and the medical complaints of persons from Norfolk who would not leave his hours of composition unmolested.”<sup>81</sup>

Browne is certainly no pamphleteer; if his writings communicate attitudes of political activism, then they do so under the guise of neutral and non-polemical subject matter. Recently, scholars have begun to question the supposition that Browne’s works (both major *and* minor) are indeed “[d]ivorced from [their] time,” and “unmarked by the civil strife” of Interregnum England. Armed with the suspicion that they contain encrypted messages, such scholars have combed his writings for signs of attitudes about his times and his personal and professional life. *Urn Burial*, perhaps the most oblique of Browne’s writings and arguably the most difficult work to reduce to a clear purpose, has appeared to be especially fruitful in this regard.

These recent critical approaches have emerged in response to the difficulty of constructing a context for *Urn Burial* in particular because, in many ways, the subject matter of the essay seems to be the very deterioration of symbolic structures or modes of signifying. I do not want to exclude the possibility of political allegory from a reading of Browne’s essay by urging *Urn Burial* away from the turbulent political arena of Church and government, but I do wish to propose that humoural theory represents an alternate

---

191-210.

<sup>81</sup> Kathryn Murphy, “The Contexts of Thomas Browne,” *‘A man very well studied’: New Contexts for Thomas Browne*, ed. Kathryn Murphy and Richard Todd (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 3-12.

context that gives ground for parallels between antiquarian and medical investigation in Browne's writing. This is due to the critical issues which I have been describing as semiological, particularly because Browne viewed the human body as being centrally positioned to partake of the full potential of human knowledge. This view of the body as encompassing in compact form the mysteries of the world and God's architectural handiwork was a dominant theme in what Sawday refers to as the "sacred anatomy" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and one toward which Browne's epistemology was oriented, not only by inferences we can draw about his professional life as a diagnostician and the historical detail of his doctoral dissertation on smallpox, but because Browne frequently makes such statements in his writing to this effect.<sup>82</sup> "The world that I regard," he writes in *Religio Medici*, "is my self; it is the Microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on."<sup>83</sup>

That the body is itself a world, a "Microcosm," to be "regard[ed]" or explored and thus ultimately known, was a well-rehearsed concept of epigrammatic simplicity in theory in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical physiology, but it may have appeared to Browne to have become more complicated during the time in which he was writing his major pieces, in view of the tension between ancient paradigms for the medical study of the human body and newer empirical approaches. The middle decades of the seventeenth century were as turbulent for medical theory as for the structure of English government: Galenic medicine, long since challenged by Vesalius in the sphere of anatomy, was, as I

---

<sup>82</sup> Sawday, *Body* 85-140. The idea of human anatomy as a sacred area of study (in other words, the assumption that knowledge of the body could theoretically equal knowledge of divine construction) was, as Sawday writes, still a guiding principle in the rhetoric of Crooke's *Microcosmographia*, who writes that the human "body is, as it were, a Magazine or Store-house of all the vertues and efficacities of all bodies," an "Image of all this whole Vniverse" (3), and is a concept which informed in visible ways the 'Vitruvian' design of most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomy theatres in which the cadaver occupies the centre while balconies surround it concentrically.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1645) 2:162. Hereafter referred to as *RM*.

have indicated, made even less relevant in cardiovascular physiology following the publication of Harvey's *De Motu*, and humoral physiology had been in decline throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>84</sup> This is a circumstance which I believe to have been a major contributing factor in the rise of the genre of the humoral treatise, separated and excluded from the sphere of empirical anatomy. In contrast to developments in the study of anatomy, no clear successor had emerged to Galenic humoral physiology. As Stanley Jackson writes, "Paracelsian arguments against humoral physiology had been extant for over a century," and "[y]et the newer views had made very limited inroads into the explanations of disease" (113).

The medical philosophical treatises which concern humoral theory, and which appear as the result of the challenges to Galen in anatomy by the late sixteenth century, are largely regurgitations of the Galenic and Hippocratic medical corpora; there is, in large part, little original material in these essays and treatises not discussed in ancient and medieval sources. Among these treatises are works which I have been discussing in this dissertation, such as Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholy* (1586), Thomas Walkington's *Optick Glasse of Humors* (1607), Du Laurens's *Discourse, The Touchstone of Complexions* (1565) by Levinus Lemnius, and finally, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which also regurgitates and reiterates a great deal of medical physiology on melancholy but to the point that it appears to be an exaggeration, not only of the genre of the humoral treatise, but of the discourse of humoral physiology itself. The *Anatomy* differs substantially from these other treatises foremost in terms of sheer scope, but also more importantly in terms of illuminating some of the crucial ways in which humoral

---

<sup>84</sup> A good outline of Galen *versus* Harvey can be found in Donald Fleming, "William Harvey and the Pulmonary Circulation," *Isis* 46.4 (Dec. 1955): 319-327.

theory, as an episteme or body of knowledge, lacked coherence while at the same time suggesting little to the reader in the way of what comes next if indeed humoral theory in the seventeenth century was in the process, as Gail Kern Paster notes, of a “slow and incomplete disintegration” (*Humoring*, 6).

The sense of epistemic crisis toward which the *Anatomy*'s messages appear to point will also strike the reader of *Urn Burial*, an essay of equal pessimism only here concerning the study of artefacts through antiquarian and historical speculation, with only this caveat: that Browne's essay does allow for the possibility of future discovery. The anticipation of what comes next in terms of the discovery of knowledge and knowledge systems is, in *Urn Burial*, every bit as important to Browne as that which has already passed; a great number of facts remain, he admits, “yet undiscovered” (*UB* 2:29, emphasis added). “[T]he wisest heads prove, at last,” he writes in *Religio Medici*, published fifteen years earlier than *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, “almost all Scepticks, and stand like Janus in the field of knowledge” (*RM* 2:153). Browne's allusion to Janus here suggests that “wisest heads” acknowledge discoveries of the past but also anticipate future discoveries, but perhaps more importantly, the comment signifies Browne's own recognition that knowledge systems come and go, that knowledge of anything may last until something is discovered to contradict it.

Humoral physiology was, in the seventeenth century, facing similar fundamental questions about what knowledge could be established within its parameters of analysis, probably seeming increasingly dated as it endured (to use Paster's phrasing) its “slow and incomplete disintegration” throughout the decades in which Browne studied and practised medicine and wrote his major pieces (*Humoring*, 6). In fact, in the 1650s, the body as an

entity possessing a living interior in which humoural dramas unfold may have perhaps seemed even less accessible to understanding than it did a century earlier. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* demonstrates historically both the remarkable endurance of it as a theory in the midst of fundamental ideological, practical and methodological changes in the science of anatomy in the sixteenth century, and also, as scholars have noted, the limitations and contradictions inherent in the humoural paradigm. The *Anatomy*, through rigorous and relentless taxonomy, defines melancholy as comprehensively as possible, while at the same time “unintentionally expos[ing],” as Douglas Trevor writes, “the perpetual deference and circularity of humoral explanations” (119). The *Anatomy* achieves this exposure of the limitations of humoural explanations while proposing no alternate system of explanation, and in this way the evolution of humoural theory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries differs from the study of anatomy, in which there was a clearer struggle between old and new models, out of which the new eventually emerged as the decisive victor. The publication of Vesalius’s *Fabrica* marks a significant symbolic event in this struggle between old and new – the old Galenic anatomy based on the authority of ancient texts of Galen and his later interpreters, versus the new empirical mode of anatomical investigation based on direct observation of actual dissected human specimens.

In humoural theory, which represented another important field of knowledge of the body of ancient (and Galenic) origin, there was no clearly discernible old and new system. And so the body’s interior from the perspective of physical, mental and psychological pathologies, remained in the seventeenth century, if humoural theory appeared to be disintegrating, a “yet undiscovered” entity. “The Field of Knowledge hath

been so traced, it is hard to spring any Thing new,” writes Browne in the dedication to Nicholas Bacon. “Of old Things we write something new, if Truth may receive addition, or Envy will allow any Thing new; since the Ancients knew the late Anatomical Discoveries, and Hippocrates the Circulation” (*GC* Preface 2).

That the “Field of Knowledge” has already “been so traced” is a pessimistic conclusion to come upon when read alongside *The Garden of Cyrus*’s accompanying essay on urns, and yet *Urn Burial*, an essay which specifically concerns a field, in Walsingham, in which a discovery is made, seems to suggest that perhaps fields of knowledge are never quite complete or mappable (*GC* Preface 2). Indeed, to repeat the sentence at which we looked earlier, “[t]hat great Antiquity America lay buried for a thousand years,” and just as so “a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us” (*UB* 1:2). Yet this is also the physician Browne who, in *Religio Medici*, writes that faraway lands do not interest him nearly as much as that “which without further travel I can do in the Cosmography of myself. We carry with us the wonders we seek without us: there is all Africa and her prodigies in us” (*RM* 1:30).

Phrases like “the Cosmography of myself” and “there is all Africa [...] in us,” scattered throughout his writings of the 1640s and 1650s, suggest that Browne considered the human body to be a vast and complex ‘territory’ with the *potential* to be known, the realisation of which, however, was complicated by inconsistencies in interpreting it. Thus, in *Religio Medici*, Browne is confident in the presence within us of “the wonders we seek without us,” while he also expresses, as we shall see in *A Letter to a Friend*, attitudes of pessimism in his work about the true extent to which knowledge of the body was possible within the modes of analysis available to him, in ways in which *Urn Burial*

expresses similar attitudes about the extent to which knowledge of the past is possible by the study of its incomplete remains. “The world that I regard is my self; it is the Microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on,” he writes, full of the enthusiasm of a young physician about to embark on a brilliant career, “whilst I study to find how I am a Microcosm, or little World, I find my self something more than the great. There is surely a piece of Divinity in us, something that was before the Elements, and owes no homage unto the Sun” (*RM* 2:162). There is, in *Religio Medici*, a sense of harmony that is intact, that quite distinguishes it from the later pieces of the 1650s which include both *Urn Burial* and *Letter*, and even *The Garden of Cyrus*, which most readers tend to interpret positively as symbolising regeneration and spiritual rebirth. Within this reading of the two essays *The Garden of Cyrus* is thus intended to contrast *Urn Burial*’s bleaker meditations on the eternal meanings implicit in cultural attitudes toward death, an essay characterised by the recognition that, as Browne writes in *Urn Burial*, “[i]t is the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man, to tell him he is at the end of his nature; or that there is no further state to come, unto which this seems progressionall, and otherwise made in vaine” (*UB* 4:67).

Readers of Browne’s funerary essay may note that for ‘melancholy’ may be substituted ‘hopelessness’ when characterising the many interrelated problems with reading meaning into signs, and the conclusions which Browne reaches by way of these confounding issues. But I would like to discuss toward the end of the chapter some of the problems in reading *Cyrus* as, thematically, offering resolution to the epistemological issues presented in *Urn Burial*. In the following section of this chapter I would like to focus my analysis on the problems of epistemology in *Urn Burial*’s surface reading of graves, and “of the

earth [which] is still in the Urne unto us” (*UB* 1:2). In this context, I think it is well worth our while to consult Browne’s *A Letter to a Friend* (originally published posthumously in 1690, but written largely in 1656 and partly in 1670), a consolatory letter written on the occasion of a deceased patient, one Robert Loveday (1620/1-1656). Apart from giving us some context for Browne’s professional career and its challenges in the years preceding the publication of *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* in 1658, the *Letter* also considers many of the same crises of reading and diagnosing which command his full attention in *Urn Burial*.

### **The Unburial of the Dead**

“[T]hat this visible World is but a Picture of the invisible,” writes Browne, is a concept which he maintains will not be shaken from his philosophy by the ridicule of “the severe Schools” (*RM* 1:23). Who it is that Browne has in mind by “the severe Schools” is not specified, but we may surmise that he is taking jesting aim at the radical factions representing rational and empirical science, Baconian in the pursuit of knowledge based on sound inductive reasoning. The very concept of a visual world and its invisible counterpart, in the sense that the visible one signifies one which cannot be seen (or more generally experienced in a sensible way), is one in which Browne had clearly taken an interest as early as *Religio Medici* and which comes to play a central role in *Urn Burial*, an essay which seems particularly interested in tensions within such relationships between signs and meanings.

Sections of *Religio Medici* seem to be immersed in a Platonic set of ideals by which the world is understood as being a reflection of another, truer reality which cannot be

experienced, a view that Browne shares with earlier Renaissance intellectuals like sixteenth-century mathematician John Dee, who writes that such a world of objects, one in which “bodies” exist, could only be known at the level of intellect. “[A]ll bodies have a borderline in common with their shadows (as is well-known to mathematicians),” writes Dee in the *Monas Hieroglyphica* (1564), a work largely devoted to outlining the common principles of alphanumeric characters and systems. “[T]hose who do not know that bodies exist,” that is, who are unable to distinguish between the two worlds, are “ignorant, rash, and presumptuous apes” who “grasp mere shadows, naked and inane, while the wiser philosophers enjoy the solid doctrine and very pleasing effects of the [real] bodies” (*MH* 145).

The reality or ‘world’ which we *do* experience, Browne suggests, is inferior or holographic – a “Picture.” Knowledge of the true mysteries of the universe involves rather the interrogation and interpretation of signs and symbols. Dee and Browne, then, two figures who have traditionally been difficult (or awkward) to situate in the picture of early modern empirical science, voice similar objectives in their work, in very similar language and from some (obviously) shared doctrinal sources.<sup>85</sup> Both speak of the body as a ‘microcosm’, the “Lesse world,” as Dee writes in his *Mathematicall Præface* (1570, c.iiiij). Browne writes in *Religio Medici* that “to call ourselves a Microcosm, or little World, I thought it only a pleasant trope of Rhetorick, till my neer judgement and second thoughts told me there was a real truth therein” (*RM* 1:73). There are thus always two “distinguished worlds” to be recognised: “the one visible, the other invisible” (*RM* 1:73). I should point out here, as we move on to closer analysis of *Urn Burial* as a topography

---

<sup>85</sup> See especially Plato’s *Timaeus* 28-46, which outlines the creation of the universe, a physical world as a “secondary reality” and the composition of the human body as a copy of the universe or world body (28, 45).

of the unknown body in the next section, that Browne has taken license with some Platonic concepts, mixing cosmography and anatomy. There *are* two worlds, but also two different senses of this term: the world of the universe (macrocosm) and the human world of the body (microcosm) and also the two worlds of surface and subterranean realities.

Yet in spite of the apparent confidence the younger Browne of *Religio Medici* displays in the clarity with which one world can be taken to signify another, Browne's main interest in *Urn Burial* appears to be in the demonstration of the collapse of structures of signification, and unhappy complications in the fundamental ways in which symbols are understood to convey meaning, all of which are suggested, ostensibly at least, by the mystery of the Walsingham urns.

Such complications, which leads to interpretation of the urns as a kind of hieroglyphic puzzle and a general emphasis on what is *not* known about them, are immediately striking and, as scholars have noted, assume priority in the essay over the documentation of factual details about the urns.<sup>86</sup> On its surface, the subject matter of *Hydriotaphia: Urne Buriall; Or, A Discourse of the Sepulchrall Urnes Lately Found in Norfolk* is, as the title indicates, the forty or fifty urns discovered near Walsingham. (See the frontispiece to *Urn Burial*, Figure 7). "We were hinted by the occasion," writes Browne,

not caught the opportunity to write of old things, or intrude upon the Antiquary.

We are coldly drawn unto discourses of Antiquities, who have scarce time before us to comprehend new things, or make out learned Novelties. But seeing they arose as

---

<sup>86</sup> Concerning Browne's interpretive treatment of the urns as symbols of lost knowledge, see C.A. Patrides, "'The Best Part of Nothing': Sir Thomas Browne and the Strategy of Indirection," *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. C.A. Patrides (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982) 31-48. Patrides notes that in *Urn Burial* the Walsingham urns "have been transmuted by Browne into symbolic entities that elicit a diversity of fully premeditated responses," one of which is their admonition that "time resists us, misleads us, defeats us. It resists us where we endeavour to establish the time of the urns, only to discover 'nothing of more uncertainty'" (35).

they lay, almost in silence among us, at least in short account suddenly passed over; we were very unwilling they should die again, and be buried twice among us.

(*UB* Preface 3)

The circumstances of their discovery underscore the symbolic value of the Walsingham urns, brought to attention by the fact that “they arose as they lay, almost in silence among us” (*UB* Preface 3). These are no ordinary urns; or, rather, I should say, they *are* ordinary urns, but ones which, over time, have extraordinarily managed to escape time, “ar[ising] as they lay,” that is, in the condition in which they were buried. The remarkable circumstance of the urns’ preservation, prompting some of Browne’s most memorable philosophical and sermonic lines, is the real “occasion” by which “we are hinted” to marvel at them. “Time,” as Browne reflects, “antiquates Antiquities,” and yet, time, which “hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these *minor* Monuments,” just beneath the surface of the ground (*UB* 5:69).

That the Walsingham urns have been overlooked by time, ordinarily omniscient and thorough in its destructiveness, is the direct result of the privacy of their burial and the ability of the earth to conceal things beneath its surface. “He that lay in a golden Urne, eminently above the Earth,” Browne writes,

was not like to find the quiet of these bones. Many of these Urnes were broke by a vulgar discoverer in hope of inclosed treasure. The ashes of Marcellus were lost above the ground, upon the like account. Where profit hath prompted, no age hath wanted such miners. For which the most barbarous Expilators found the most civill Rhetorick. (*UB* 3:41)

As with a great many of Thomas Browne's famous and quotable lines, "the quiet of these bones" is readable in multiple (and equally valid) ways; these bones have had a quiet resting place, tucked secretly away from the loud intrusions of the "vulgar discoverer" and "barbarous Expilators," but they also are voiceless bodies, or remains of bodies, unable to "complai[n]" about being robbed. Within their place of burial nothing can be heard, and of them nothing can be spoken. Browne then proceeds further to emphasise the remarkable occurrence of their survival by contrasting the biblical expanses in time over which they appear to have travelled with the rather unremarkable and even pathetic feebleness of their construction. "Now since these dead bones have already out-lasted the living ones of *Methuselah*, and in a yard under ground, and in thin walls of clay, out-worn all the strong and specious buildings above it; and quietly rested under the drums and tramlings of three conquests; what Prince can promise such diuturnity unto his Reliques" (*UB* 5:69).

This last question is rhetorical; the answer is, of course, that no "Prince" can make such promises. Burial monuments and tombs, exposed to the corrupting elements of air and rain and to the damages of ransacking grave-raiders, stand less chance of survival. "In vain we hope to be known by open and visible conservatories," Browne writes, "when to be unknown was the means of their continuation and obscurity their protection" (*UB* 5:69).

This revelation about the urns' diuturnity deriving from their privacy leads Browne, inevitably, to contemplate the possibility of *other* such urns, urns having a secret and subterranean existence. There is, of course, no means of sensing where such urns are buried, or when they may arise from the ground, otherwise their survival would be (or

would have been) compromised not only by desecrating grave-robbers and thieves, but also by cultural historians, archaeologists and antiquarians whose interests in analysing objects ironically contributes to their demise. “He that looks for Urnes and old sepulchrall reliques,” says Browne, “must not seek them in the ruines of Temples: where no Religion anciently placed them. These were found in a field, according to ancient custome, in noble or private burial” (*UB* 3:46). There is no way to anticipate where or when these treasures will appear. “In the deep discovery of the Subterranean world,” Browne proclaims,

a shallow part would satisfie some enquirers; who, if two or three yards were open about the surface, would now care to rake the bowels of *Potosi*, and regions towards the Centre. Nature hath furnished one part of the Earth, and man another. The treasures of time lie high, in Urnes, Coynes and Monuments, scarce below the roots of some vegetables. Time hath endlesse rarities, and shows of all varities; which reveals old things in heaven, makes new discoveries in earth, and even earth itself a discovery. That great Antiquity *America* lay buried for a thousand years; and a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us. (*UB* 1:2)

It is the “deep discovery of the Subterranean world” that comes to preoccupy the Browne of *Urn Burial* as the essay unfolds, rethinking and reconsidering the claim he makes earlier in his career in *Religio Medici*, composed only a couple of years after he received his doctorate diploma in Leiden in 1633, “that this visible World is but a Picture of the invisible” (1:23).

Although *Urn Burial* becomes preoccupied, from its opening lines, with the “Subterranean world” or the “invisible world” which should be known to us by its

“Picture” presented to us in the “visible World,” underlying anxieties about the incongruity *between* these two worlds, brought to our attention by the opening admonition of the essay that “a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us,” frequently commandeer the essay (*UB* 1:2, *RM* 1:23).

The incongruous relation between the two worlds of visible and non-visible happens by way of Browne’s contemplation of one thing in which both antiquarian researchers and grave-robbers alike have a vested interest, and which they read as inscriptions on treasure maps: grave monuments. The grave monument, whether an elaborate tomb or simply “large stones in circle about the Urnes,” participates, intentionally or not, in a semiotic economy in the surrounding world referring to a subterranean reality to which we have no immediate access (*UB* 2:28).

As an index of what lies in the subterranean landscape, the grave monument fails. Here the underlying “invisible” and “Subterranean world” has been called into question, and as Browne soberly admits, grave markings frequently turn out to be false in their claims – graves are discovered to be, once opened, empty. The visible, terrestrial world and the subterranean world, the text and subtext, are not, so to speak, on the same page. It is impossible to know for certain where anybody is buried, because grave markings may signify empty, bodiless sepulchres, as multiple tombs in diverse locales attest. Just as “[t]he variety of *Homers* Monuments made him of various Countreys,” and “*Severus* found his real Sepulchre in *Rome*, but his empty grave in *Gallia*,” so too do potentially limitless possibilities for such discrepancies in location between the graves and their signifying markers exist (*UB* 3:41). “The certainty of death is attended with uncertainties,” says Browne, finally, “in time, manner, places. The variety of Monuments

hath often obscured true graves; and *cenotaphs* confounded Sepulchres. For beside their reall Tombs, many have found honorary and empty Sepulchres” (*UB* 3:40-41). The possibility that an empty grave lies under a grave marking, or that one’s “real Sepulchre” might be elsewhere in an undisclosed location, is one of the problems with trusting the accuracy of surfaces to signify sub-surfaces which *Urn Burial* raises, but to which the essay provides no clear solution.

Instead, the essay moves on to alternative methods of interment which equally complicate processes of (various kinds of) reading. The alternatives to burial mentioned by Browne are also problematic in the way that information about dead bodies is similarly “obscured” and made unintelligible. Cremation, the funeral pyre, is Browne’s main alternative to burial, but his survey of funeral customs includes examples of every elemental type of interment. “The Ægyptians,” he says, “were afraid of fire, not as a Deity, but a devouring Element,” and so they favoured “depositure in dry earths,” while “[t]he *Scythians* who swore by winde and sword, that is, by life and death, were so farre from burning their bodies, that they declined all interment, and made their graves in the ayr: and the *Ichthyophagi* or fish-eating Nations about Ægypt, affected the sea for their grave” (*UB* 1:8-9).

However, while air, water and earth have been mentioned as favourite elements among the traditional four in which to be interred, the only ‘solution’ to the problem that worms will devour our flesh (repugnant to Browne), is fire. “Others conceived it most natural to end in fire,” writes Browne, “as due unto the master principle in the composition, according to the doctrine of *Heraclitus*. And therefore heaped up large piles, more actively to waft them toward that Element, whereby they also declined a visible

degeneration into worms, and left a lasting parcell of their composition” (*UB* 1:6).

“Urnall interments and burnt Reliques,” Browne reflects, “lye not in fear of worms, or to be an heritage for Serpents; In carnall sepulture, corruptions seem peculiar unto parts, and some speak of snakes out of the spinall marrow,” even if he thinks that the assumption that worms eat dead bodies in graves is an exaggerated cliché, since “’tis not easie to finde any [worms] there; few in Churchyards above a foot deep, fewer or none in Churches, though in fresh decayed bodies” (*UB* 3:48).

Exaggerated or not, flesh is eventually eaten by time, if not worms, while ashes are eaten by nothing. *Urn Burial* presents cremation as an appealing option in the sense that it constitutes an act of prevention against putrefaction; ashes do not rot, and Browne, for whom there is something sacred about the human body even after death, does not hide his approval of and admiration for the pagan pyral custom. Indeed, “[t]o be knav’d out of our graves, to have our sculs made drinking-bowls, and our bones turned into Pipes, to delight and sport our Enemies,” he says, “are Tragically abominations escaped in burning Burials” (*UB* 3:48).

The problem with *fire*, however, is that it erases signs altogether, for ashes are entirely unreadable and illegible to future discoverers. In this sense, as Brent Nelson writes, “[t]he ashes themselves are significant not for what they reveal but for what they do not,” and, inevitably, “these urns arouse a curiosity that they cannot satisfy.”<sup>87</sup> Fire wipes the slate clean, and memories are, literally, incinerated. Not only select historical facts, but indeed, “[a]ll identity,” as Williamson remarks, “is lost in ashes” (116), especially since, as Browne points out, the ashes of multiple bodies are sometimes mingled together in a

---

<sup>87</sup> Brent Nelson, “Curious Readers and Meditative Form in Thomas Browne’s *Hydriotaphia*,” *‘A man very well studied’: Thomas Browne in Context*, ed. Richard Todd and Kathryn Murphy (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 107-126 (118, 121).

single urn: “All Urnes contained not single ashes” (*UB* 3:38). As an alternative to burial – that is, interment by earth *alone* – cremation thus presents its own set of problems to the discoverers attempting to piece together chronologies, histories and identities. The Walsingham urns, cremated *and* buried anonymously, prove unreadable from a variety of perspectives. In every sense, the readability of bodies is irreparably compromised, and the anonymous Walsingham urns find a place among some of Browne’s finest exempla of irresolvable riddles of history, only, in the end, to outrank them:

What Song the *Syrens* sang, or what name *Achilles* assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling Questions are not beyond all conjecture. What time the persons of these Ossuaries entred the famous Nations of the dead, and slept with Princes and Counsellours, might admit a wide solution. But who were the proprietaries of these bones, or what bodies these ashes made up, were a question above Antiquarism. (*UB* 5:71-72)

The problem for us as readers of *Urn Burial* is that, time and again, Browne returns us to questions that are “above Antiquarism,” and the essay is largely preoccupied with using whatever means available to reconstruct stories and histories, and to arrange its many collected items, both urnal fragments and varied bits of information, into an intelligible hieroglyphic syntax.

Regrettably, the Walsingham urns contained no coins, which would have helped identify their date. “That they buried a peece of money with them as a Fee of the *Elysian Ferriman*,” Browne writes of the “*Romanes*” or “*Brittains Romanised*,” to whom he thinks these urns, almost certainly Anglo Saxon, belonged, “was a practise full of folly. But the ancient custome of placing coynes in considerable Urnes, and the present practise

of burying medals in the Noble Foundations of *Europe*, are laudable wayes of historical discoveries, in actions, persons, Chronologies; and posterity will applaud them” (*UB* 4:60, 2:15). The value of coins as means of archaeological dating is more pertinent than the value of the metals from which they were constructed: “Gold once out of the earth is no more due unto it; What was unreasonably committed to the ground is reasonably resumed from it” (*UB* 3:41). Yet the extent to which even coins can be trusted is called into question, since they are easily melted and re-stamped. Browne notes, in fact, that “so few of the *Saxons* [coins] remain, because, overcome by succeeding Conquerours upon the place, their Coynes, by degrees, passed into other stamps and the marks of after-ages” (*UB* 2:19-20). They, too, have memories that are lost – literally “stamped” out.

*Urn Burial* proceeds from item to item, from urns, to ashes, to monuments, to coins, in order to piece together their story and restore voices to these “sad and sepulchral Pitchers, which have no joyful voices,” and indeed, no voices at all, each object seemingly less reliable or legible than the last (*UB* Preface 1). As an act of preservation and a record of antiquarian discovery, *Urn Burial* frequently comes up empty like its famed “Sepulchres,” and even the style and form of Browne’s prose has a tendency in places to behave as its subject matter, both of which withhold certain items of information from their ‘reader’. Early in *Urn Burial*’s second chapter, during the introduction of the Walsingham urns which we have been promised by the essay’s title but before a discussion of their contents, Browne teases the reader, playing with the information he chooses to release, or not, to his reader. I will quote here at length, and would like the reader to pay special attention to what we are given versus what we are *not* given:

The Solemnities, Ceremonies, Rites of their Cremation or enterrment, so solemnly

delivered by Authours, we shall not disparage the reader to repeat. Only the last and lasting part in their Urns, collected bones and Ashes, we cannot wholly omit or decline that Subject, which occasion lately presented, in some discovered among us. In a field near Walsingham, not many moneths past, were digged up between forty and fifty Urnes, deposited in a dry and sandy soil, not a yard deep, nor farre from one another: Not all strictly of one figure, but most answering these described: some containing two pounds of bones, distinguishable in skulls, ribs, jawes, thigh-bones, and teeth, with fresh impressions of their combustion. Besides the extraneous substances, like peeces of small boxes, combes handsomely wrought, handles of small brasse instruments, brazen nippers, and in one some kind of Opale.

(*UB* 2:14)

The omissions here are, I think, significant, and cohere neatly with the subject matter which they (fail to) describe. Browne discusses similarities, but almost deliberately avoids or withholds facts which do not appear more than once. He notes symmetries, but (quite unusual for Browne) ignores exceptions to these symmetries. “Not *all* strictly of one figure,” he says, “but *most* answering these described” (*UB* 2:14, emphasis added). A careful antiquarian or historian would, we imagine, be very interested in *exactly* how many urns were unearthed. “Fourty-two urns,” he could have said. Important details, which we presume the writer must possess, are lost amidst the fragmentary remains which the essay is documenting. What is the significance of this?

It seems clear that the omissions are related to Browne’s overall interest in delivering to the reader a sense of incompleteness. Instead of imbuing the essay with a sense of the whole surrounding the discovery, Browne seems in *Urn Burial*, as other scholars have

noted, rather to draw attention to voids, elliptical gaps, spaces and absent factual details. “Browne,” as Claire Preston writes, “is concerned precisely with the failure of documentation, including the epigraphic, the incompleteness or incorrectness of surviving textual sources, both as an aesthetic of loss and as a project of reparation” (*Thomas Browne*, 146). This description of not only Browne’s approach as tending toward the study of gaps, absences and elliptical voids in their own right but also the attitude of pessimism which accompanies his conclusions calls to mind Michael Ann Holly’s categorisation of historiographic work, which is concerned with the improbable recovery of meanings and contexts but is also closely related, he writes, to feelings of emptiness deriving from such investigations: “The urge to recover meaning, context, precedents, whatever,” writes Holly, inevitably “presses on the scholar, but so, too, does the recognition of the futility of the search, thus converting her or him into a melancholic subject who nonetheless often possesses an ethical commitment to the past” (667).

Within the shared disciplinary framework of antiquarian and archaeologist, converging on a site of excavation like old Walsingham, the study of (necessarily incomplete) artefacts, but specifically those which intend to preserve the memories of the dead, can be situated, as Preston writes, within “two discrete teleologies: one type expects the monumental to preserve evidence, and seeks to assist that preservation; the other exercises reconstitutive speculation on the incomplete or illegible, and meditates on the obliterative properties of time itself. The first yields chronologies and surveys; the second does not” (*Thomas Browne*, 144). Clearly Browne belongs to this second category, the one which does *not* believe in the possibility that evidence will be preserved, and meditates rather on the “incomplete or illegible.” Unable to infer from pieces some

sufficient sense of the whole, Browne's essay does not hazard a solid guess or, to use one of Browne's favourite terms, "conjecture" (*UB* 3:51). "Instead, the aesthetic of loss, of incompleteness," says Preston,

occupies his thought on its own terms, and is itself the aggrandised feature of recovery and investigation: the deficit in creation and knowledge – together with the pervasive nostalgia of the humanists – prompts the recuperation and reminiscence promised by the prophets. However, as *Urne-Buriall* reminds us, the amplification of loss is the best that antiquarian research can offer.

(*Thomas Browne*, 132)

*Urn Burial*'s chief concern, as Preston suggests, is with the enterprise of *undoing* reliquary dispersion: *Urn Burial*'s "structure and texture seem at first to replicate the antiquarian project of after-discovery and reassembly," which is to say that the essay registers the desire to put 'together' archaeological fragments in order to reconstruct meaning, and yet it also seems only to point out time and again the impossibility of carrying out such an objective (*Thomas Browne*, 146). "In its conclusions, *Hydriotaphia* [*Urn Burial*] is profoundly pessimistic," argues Philip Schwyzer,

both about the possibility of memorialization and about the ability of the living to recover true and meaningful messages from the dead. Even where monuments are permitted to survive, and even where the desires of the dead are compatible with those of the living, the former seeking to live in memory and the latter to remember, the result is always an ironic failure. (184)

"We cannot hope to live so long in our names," Browne declares, "as some have done in their persons, one face of *Janus* holds no proportion unto the other. 'Tis too late to be

ambitious. The great mutations of the world are acted, or time may be too short for our designes” (*UB* 5:73). The losses accumulate in not only earthly but also celestial bodies, which are too unstable to support human knowledge of the heavens: “*Nimrod*,” he notes dispiritedly, “is lost in *Orion*, and *Osyris* in the *Doggestarre*. While we look for incorruption in the heavens, we finde they are but like the Earth; Durable in their main bodies, alterable in their parts: whereof beside Comets and New Stars, perspectives begin to tell tales” (*UB* 5:79).

Parallels between Browne’s *Urn Burial* and Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* on the basis of epistemological themes, specifically the critical difficulties and paradoxes which the *Anatomy* shows to be implicit in defining melancholy from medical perspectives and Browne’s similar thematic interests in exploring in *Urn Burial* the apparently non-negotiable limitations of what knowledge is possible within the framework of archaeological research and antiquarian speculation, bear with them the suggestion that, as I implied earlier in this chapter, seventeenth-century humoral physiology participated in a much wider sphere of critical questioning which implicated many diverse domains of enquiry. Browne’s chief concerns with the retrieval of knowledge by way of analysis of surviving (but in many cases ruined or fragmentary) cultural materials brings to our attention the seeming inability of such a mode of investigation to deliver this kind of information and the very incoherence of such a knowledge system, whether it is cultural history, archaeology, or some composite of these.

As I also indicated earlier in this chapter and in chapter three, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* stands out uniquely among a large crop of humoral treatises from the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries for its encyclopaedic scope, its treatment of one

specific branch of medical semiology as a vast body of knowledge as well as using the conceptual model of melancholy for critiquing socio-political and institutional dysfunction as examples of cultural sicknesses, but (most relevantly for me among these) for also turning the mode of medical analysis upon itself and viewing *it* as a malady.

The ways in which medical analysis is demonstrably construed by Burton as itself a malady stem from the circuitousness of humoural explanations, the absence of any clear voice of authority among many voices in the *Anatomy*, not to mention the many verbal indications Burton makes to his reader to this very effect.<sup>88</sup> But mainly, the malaise of humoural analysis which Burton imparts to the reader consistently concerns the difficulty it entails of proceeding toward definitive knowledge. The epistemic questions which the *Anatomy* raises are, naturally, context-specific: to what degree can melancholy be known, indeed, “Who can sufficiently speake of these symptomes, or prescribe rules to comprehend them?” and the aim to “describe melancholy” is no more reasonable to the description of “a phantasticall conceipt, a corrupt imagination,” “which who can doe?” (1:407 [1.3.1.4]). But such questions as to how melancholy can be defined and thus known also voice concerns that resonate in a multitude of disciplinary contexts and discourses in which the validity of knowledge systems are questioned, and frequently tied to the debate over how or to what extent knowledge could (or could not be) determined by experiencing phenomena and interacting with objects through the senses, which

---

<sup>88</sup> Burton further blurs these lines dividing the analysis – thus the pathway to cure – and the subject of study by suggesting that the study of melancholy can itself contribute to melancholy; readers will think, he writes, “that they shall have every fearefull disease they see others have, heare of, or read, and dare not therefore heare or read of any such subject, no not of melancholy it selfe, least by applying to themselves that which they heare or read, they should aggravate and increase it” (1:387 [1.3.1.2]).

engaged not only empiricists such as Francis Bacon but also English philosophers like Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century.<sup>89</sup>

It is also worth noting that, in addition to some of the parallel ‘diagnostic’ issues of reading meaning into signs or symptoms, which the citation of Burton’s *Anatomy* above illustrates, had become by the seventeenth century issues which surrounded the definition of melancholy within humoral theory, *Urn Burial* also channels the iconography and medical folklore of melancholy from a variety of perspectives, chief among them the predominance in the essay of the material symbolism associated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical physiology with melancholy. The nature of this symbolism, described in the medical literature and frequently represented in poetry and drama of the period, includes, as scholars have noted, earth-related imagery, and specifically reference to graves and burial grounds.<sup>90</sup> These latter represent an appropriate setting in which to depict a melancholic personality type as both unremittingly sad and pensive, and the qualities of earth itself are relied upon in medical contexts to rationalise the psychological depth of the melancholic mind in material terms; for instance, a person afflicted with too much black bile is said to possess an excellent faculty of memory because of the fact that

---

<sup>89</sup> Hobbes’s epistemology, outlined in his *Leviathan* (1651) and favouring an empiricist outlook of knowledge, centers on the theory that knowledge of ideas happens strictly by way of sense perception, in which case objects imprint themselves, as he writes, “either immediately, as in the taste and touch; or mediately, as in seeing, hearing, and smelling: which pressure, by the mediation of the nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the brain and heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself: which endeavour because outward, seemeth to be some matter without” (9).

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, Lyons’s analysis of *Hamlet*’s graveyard scene (97-112), which she points out, contrasts the first half of the play which “has dramatized the social aspects of melancholy by means of [Hamlet’s] melancholy role-playing,” shifting instead to presenting a “more objective and impersonal picture of the melancholic as a thinker, by means of the visual impression of the [graveyard] scene” consistent with both medical definitions available to Shakespeare such as Timothy Bright’s *A Treatise of Melancholie* and also Renaissance visual arts (97).

earth is by nature coarse and dry, natural qualities conducive to retaining the shape of impressed objects.<sup>91</sup>

Thus the suitability of Browne's epistemic themes, largely pessimistic in the underlying attitude which seems to accompany the conclusions to which they point, and the objects related to his subject matter, should not, I would argue, strike us as coincidence; rather, we should recognise that specific and pre-eminent elements of the iconography associated with representations of melancholy are substantiated theoretically in medical discourse of the period as being of descriptive value in such medical contexts. In this sense, earth, as suggested above, is significant in Renaissance medical semiology for conveying the qualities of black bile as retentive, meaning by analogical extension that melancholics tend to have 'long memories', because of the fact that both black bile and earth are, according to humoural theorists, comparably cold and dry.<sup>92</sup>

Further psychological meanings surround and derive from this basic analogue of earth and black bile in literary representations of the melancholic personality, such as the sense in which exhumation or the re-surfacing of buried objects enacts, so to speak, the mental processes of recollection. Such meanings are not theorised by sixteenth- and seventeenth-

---

<sup>91</sup> See Lemnius, for example, who theorises the retentive qualities of earth and illustrates his point by contrasting a 'dry' memory with the metaphor of a moist one which he compares to a wax seal that is too fluid to retain a seal impression; "even as stamper or Seales, being affixed [sic] and imprinted into substance or matter that is too moist, liquid, and fluible, maketh therein no stampe, forme, or print, but such, as presently fleeteth, and immediately vanisheth away againe," so is the brain likewise rendered incapable of preserving an impression in its memory (192).

<sup>92</sup> The description of black bile as earthy and therefore cold and dry is Hippocratic-Galenic in origin and is more or less standard in the sections of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoural treatises in which are listed details of complexional typology. Bright, for instance, writes that black bile is a "grosse, thicke, cold & earthie humour" (6), while Lemnius, emphasising the occult elements of humoural theory in the tradition of Agrippa's *De occulta*, writes that the astrological influence of "the grim and surly Planet of Saturne" is, "together with Melancholy," responsible for the pathologies associated with melancholy outlined in the treatise and also "a great many other like, [that] are incident unto that Complexion and habit, which is cold and dry" (233). The classical source from which the characterisations of earth as being able to retain shapes of objects, from which writers on humoural exegesis inferred additional analogical meanings about the processes of memory, is most likely Plato's *Timaeus*, in which Plato states that earth signifies a good memory, because it is "the most immobile of the four bodies and the most retentive of shape" (pt.55).

century humoral physicians so much as they are demonstrated in artistic interpretations of melancholy, illustrating that the iconography associated with melancholy, especially in the Elizabethan period, derive in equal parts from both medical tradition and from artists who elaborated on these traditions by situating melancholic characters in settings congenial to their disposition. For instance, Hamlet, regarded in 1960s scholarship on melancholy in English literature as the iconic melancholic character in Elizabethan drama, is compelled to reminiscence of Yorick's jesting by way of an encounter with his skull which has resurfaced from its grave in the churchyard. Hamlet's instantaneous reaction to the skull's personal significance and the skull's ability to stir distant (or literally 'buried') memories implies a certain correlation between the two events of unearthing and remembering.<sup>93</sup>

To return our focus to the issues surrounding Browne's *Urn Burial* and the various problems it specifies of transforming analysis of objects into knowledge, and which become, it seems, the subject matter of the essay, striking parallels emerge when we compare these problematic issues with the study of partially ruined artefacts in which the essay takes an interest and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discourse of humoral theory, considered in its basic function as a medical physiology as well as in light of the increasing scepticism with which it seemed to be viewed as an accurate system in the seventeenth century. Its function within ancient medicine was essentially the theorisation of the body's internal chemistry and psychology through the interpretation of visible signs; indeed, as Carlino writes, until the eighteenth century, the theory of the humours,

---

<sup>93</sup> The famous section of dialogue by Hamlet beginning "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest" takes place at 5.1.3515-3525, following Hamlet's verbal exchange with the grave-digging clown who has uncovered Yorick's skull while digging Ophelia's grave, presenting the skull to the prince.

“in its diverse variants, was the paradigmatic response to all pathological manifestations, whether they afflicted the external or internal organs of the body” (123).

Whatever the “pathological manifestations” in question they were thus understood as existing within the patterns described in Galenic humoral physiology, patterns with visible and identifiable symptoms. The iconography of melancholy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century culture, particularly the imagery associated in some way with earth, as we have just seen, is understood to signify a personality type, and so much of the imagery which we come to associate with the melancholic character type in Renaissance drama and art – graves, graveyards, skulls and dark clothing, for instance – is found in medical treatises written in many cases by physicians. This dark imagery thus functions within diagnostic interpretations, which held that certain diseases could be determined by complexion and psychological states and temperaments, by additional signifiers like wardrobe and tendencies to inhabit certain places. In addition to the influence of Yates and Klibansky *et al*, the flourishing scholarship on Renaissance representations of melancholy in art and literature characteristic of the 1960s seems to be based on an unsatisfied desire within Shakespeare studies to make sense of Hamlet’s motivations from the perspective of early modern psychology, which necessarily involves by extension knowledge of the theory Galenically-derived humoral physiology into which material conceptions of mental and emotional phenomena like depression and melancholia are situated.

Support for the parallel between *Urn Burial* and similar issues engaged within the context of seventeenth-century humoral physiology is further strengthened when we consider that Browne trusts complexional characteristics as reliable signifiers of internal

pathologies in *A Letter to a Friend*, written around the same time as *Urn Burial*.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the analysis of complexions clearly interested Browne in his years of study at Leiden, playing a central role in his doctoral studies and forming the subject matter of his dissertation on smallpox, a condition of the skin readable by its own set of unique markings – rashes, blisters and (finally) pock marks. The ‘textual’ authority or what Reid Barbour terms the “hieroglyphics of skin,” however, as a set of topographical features describing diseases originating inside the body, was not unquestioned or self-evident in the seventeenth century, and it was almost ignored in ancient anatomy.<sup>95</sup> Barbour writes that “[a]lthough literally and figuratively skin was often imagined as the binding of the book of human anatomy, Browne’s early grounding in ancient medicine would have given him mixed messages about the actual anatomical value and meaning of skin; on the one hand, skin figured prominently as a guide to humoural complexion,” but on the other, Galenic medicine was largely silent on the significance of skin (280).

Browne’s own words in *Religio Medici*, asserting the body’s transparency, so “that this visible World is but a Picture of the invisible,” are words that seem to ring hollow by the time we arrive at *Urn Burial*, in which the visible terrain is rather a misleading indicator of subterranean realities, which Browne identifies literally in the essay as empty graves and sepulchres existing underneath grave markers and tombs, but which the essay suggests can be interpreted more universally in its opening admonition to the reader. One can sense a sharp change in attitude in these respects from the younger Browne brimming

---

<sup>94</sup> *A Letter to a Friend* was published posthumously in 1690, and although the date of its composition is slightly contested, most of it was written in 1656, while Claire Preston believes that roughly the last third of the letter was likely written in the 1670s (Preston, “‘An Incomium of Consumptions’: *A Letter to a Friend* as Medical Narrative,” *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [206-221, 217]).

<sup>95</sup> Reid Barbour, “The Hieroglyphics of Skin,” *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 279-295.

with enthusiasm in *Religio Medici*, about to enter his career, who “tak[es] my circle to be above three hundred and sixty” and “above Atlas his shoulders,” but who seems outgrown and even defeated by the sceptical Browne of *Urn Burial* who finds fault with determining knowledge by signifiers (2:162).

Perhaps we can speculate on a connection between events in Browne’s professional career which the *Letter* documents, and which were clearly a great blow to him, personally. *A Letter to a Friend* was written on the occasion of the death of one of Browne’s patients, Robert Loveday, who perished as a result of a consumptive disease. Already by this time we can sense on Browne’s part confusion and skepticism about the extent to which a patient’s disease can be known, understood and (ultimately) treated from the reading of physical signs, symptoms and complexions. Whether or not Browne was conscious of the thematic symmetries existing between *Urn Burial* and the *Letter*, he provides no indication in these works, but I sense in *Urn Burial*’s problematic landscape of unreadable grave monuments and urns continuity with the *Letter*’s diagnostic frustrations.

In the *Letter*, these frustrations are chiefly brought to our attention by Browne’s initial outline of conventional approaches to reading symptoms on the surface of the patient’s body and then by his complication of these readings with exceptions and critical circumstances, *e.g.*, the late stages of a terminal disease, in which the body stops transmitting signals to the physician altogether through features in the skin. “Omnibonus Ferrarius in mortal Dysenteries of Children,” Browne says, for instance, “looks for a Spot behind the Ear; in consumptive Diseases some eye the Complexion of Moals; Cardan eagerly views the Nails, some the Lines of the Hand, the Thenar or Muscle of the

Thumb,” while others, he says, “are so curious as to observe the depth of the Throat-pit, how the proportion varieth of the Small of the Legs unto the Calf, or the compass of the Neck unto the Circumference of the Head.”<sup>96</sup> “[B]ut all these, with many more,” writes Browne, in the case of this particular patient, “were so drowned in a mortal Visage and last Face of Hippocrates, that a weak Physiognomist might say at first eye, This was a Face of Earth, and that Morta had set her Hard-Seal upon his Temples” (*LF* 5).

Browne makes reference throughout the *Letter* to the “Hippocratical Face” or “Face of Hippocrates,” which is the character that the face takes on when death is imminent (3, 5). It signifies that a disease has entered a stage beyond therapy, in which the unique features of the face become lost, or, as he says, “drowned,” to the extent that, as Browne explains, the patient displayed an “odd mortal Symptom in him not mention’d by Hippocrates, that is, to lose his own Face and look like some of his near Relations” (*LF* 3).<sup>97</sup>

So mixed are the messages that the body is capable of sending that even hair, as Browne writes, can hardly be trusted as an approximate marker of age, since hair can turn grey prematurely, and he lists here the example of Louis II of Hungary (1506-1526). “Lewis, that virtuous but unfortunate king of Hungary,” says Browne, was said “to have shewn some gray Hairs about Twenty; from whence the Diviners conjectured, that he would be spoiled of his Kingdom, and have but a short Life” (*LF* 5). He satisfied his “Diviners” when he died young in battle, “[b]ut Hairs,” Browne says, “make fallible Predictions, and many Temples early gray have out-lived the Psalmist’s Period” (*LF* 5).

---

<sup>96</sup> *LF* 5. I am assuming that by “Moals” Browne means ‘moles’, as in blemishes or marks on the skin. I am not aware of another meaning, and have not seen any scholars of Browne suggest otherwise.

<sup>97</sup> “Face of Hippocrates” – commonly known as the ‘facies hippocratica’, the “term describes the face of a person at the terminus of a long and devastating illness before impending dissolution. A vivid account occurs in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. This is characterized by a pinched nose, hollow and dull eyes, sunken temples, cold and contracted ears with lobes turned out, and rough, tense and parched skin having a sallow or dusky color” (Mohammad Diab, *Lexicon of Orthopaedic Etymology* [New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999] 113).

The hairs which have most “amused” him, says Browne (meaning, I presume, that they caused him wonderment rather than amusement in the ordinary sense), were on the backs of young children rather than grown men, where they would be expected, “as I long ago observed in that Endemial Distemper of little Children in Languedock, called the Morgellons, wherein they critically break out with harsh Hairs on their Backs, which takes off the Unquiet Symptomes of the Disease, and delivers them from Coughs and Convulsions” (*LF* 5-6). In the case of the Languedoc children, not only were the hairs on their backs quite unusual, but the represented, Browne believes, an expression of the body’s natural defence to an illness, in this case to “delive[r]” the sufferers “from Coughs and Convulsions.”

In many of his works, certainly in *Urn Burial*, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* and *A Letter to a Friend*, Browne takes as much delight and “amuse[ment]” in rare, out-of-the-ordinary details and inconsistencies as he does in establishing patterns and repetitions in the way that he does in *The Garden of Cyrus* (to which I will turn below). In *Urn Burial*, for instance, Browne writes that a significant funeral pyre is necessary to cremate the average body according to ancient usage, and yet “the Funerall pyre of *Patroclus*,” he says, “took up a hundred foot,” while “a peece of an old boat burnt Pompey” (3:44). But in *A Letter to a Friend*, such curiosities have practical consequences because they render diseases difficult to read by way of symptoms. Taken together, these passages in the *Letter* concerning exceptional circumstances which confuse diagnosis – the unusual case of the “Children in Languedock” whose body hair actually serves to “delive[r] them from Coughs and Convulsions,” the “fallible Predictions” which hairs suggest, the teeth of Egyptian mummies which amaze Browne because “’tis not easie to find any wanting or

decayed,” and the “Bannyans of India” in whom “[c]orruption had dealt more severely with [their teeth] than sepulchral Fires and smart Flames with those of burnt Bodies of old” – together these add up to a complaint about the problems inherent in visualising the invisible by collecting and processing the visible (*LF* 6). *Urn Burial*, which Browne actually began writing in 1656, the same year as Loveday’s death and *A Letter to a Friend*, explores these same crises of reading and interpreting signs, only from a safe and remote distance – through the analysis of dead, nameless bodies rather than living ones, and reading the surface of the earth rather than the skin.

Without suggesting that *Urn Burial* and *A Letter to a Friend* point to one another, it is nevertheless interesting to witness Browne documenting semiological inconsistencies and conundrums in such diverse contexts and which lead him to similar pessimistic conclusions about the ways in which knowledge is an impossible result in practical settings. The archaeological subject matter of *Urn Burial* is far removed from the more immediate subject matter of the *Letter*’s concern with diagnosis and prognosis of a patient suffering from illness, and so *Urn Burial*’s philosophical conundrums are rightfully characterised by scholars of Browne as epistemological rather than diagnostic and prognostic. The overall sense that *Urn Burial*’s “ashes themselves are significant not for what they reveal but for what they do not” (Nelson 118) supports Preston’s argument that Browne’s chief interests in the essay are *not* in reconstructing complete images of the past but rather in the “incompleteness” which accompanies such endeavours.

Hair, skin, moles and even teeth are mixed up in a confused dialogue between diseases and symptoms in *A Letter to a Friend*, which suggests to us that the language of visible and envisaged markers in the complexion had been rendered unintelligible to Browne in

ways which resonate with the problematic surface markers of *Urn Burial*, to the extent that the only prognosis a doctor could safely hand down to his patients, as Browne writes in the *Letter*, is a death sentence: “That you should be so little acquainted with Plautus’s sick Complexion, or that almost an Hippocratical Face should not alarum you to higher fears, or rather despair of his Continuation in such an emaciated State, wherein medical Predictions fail not, as sometimes in acute Diseases, and wherein ’tis as dangerous to be sentenced by a Physician as a Judge” (*LF* 3).

*Urn Burial*, I would like to emphasise, is not ‘about’ melancholy, and it does not concern afflictions in living bodies – it concerns, rather, dead bodies invulnerable to disease. However, many of the concerns which it identifies with transcribing surface readings into patterns of knowledge resonate with those of the *Letter* from a diagnostic perspective, such as, for instance, the “Hippocratical Face,” which Browne encountered in his analysis of the patient’s condition, within which were lost or “drowned” clear and visible signs by which any accurate knowledge of how long the patient had to live and even any familiarity of his own characteristic face.

Perhaps the frustrations in which both *Urn Burial* and *A Letter to a Friend* seem to be absorbed stand out more vividly to us if we think in terms of the kinds of desires which the essays register and how they are themselves unilaterally frustrated. In *Urn Burial*, the central desire could be characterised as that which seems universal in the human spirit to ensure the protection of one’s lasting memory, a vain “hope to be known by open and visible conservatories” (*UB* 5:69). From the perspective of Browne’s antiquarian and cultural historical research, that desire is subordinated to the always ungratified one to retrieve cultural information, knowledge and ultimately meaning from incomplete

remains and whatever apparatuses of interment are favoured by the historical culture to which they belong.

In Browne's admiration of "Urns and burnt Reliques" which "lye not in fear of worms, or to be an heritage for Serpents" is, I think, a sympathy for what he considers a primitive human desire to be preserved in some way (whether in body or memory), but these desires to be preserved, linked by contrast to fears of being eaten or otherwise disintegrating, are less of a priority of Browne than the concern that bodies tend to become unintelligible over time (*UB* 3:48). Similarly, in *A Letter to a Friend*, the predominant desire of the essay is to make coherent sense of the patient's condition and expectations by way of the interpretation of symptoms and facial morphology.

Nonetheless, like the many examples listed of exceptions which complicate and confound such readings, the physician's task, like the antiquarian's, is reduced inevitably to the "fallible Predictions" which mar proclamations of lifespan based on the observation of signs as superficial as premature grey hairs (*LF* 5). In the context of the *Letter*, the withering of flesh accompanies the process of dying, the saving grace perhaps being the gratified desire of the patient in question that he should not pass the disease on to any children, since he had none who could inherit the consumptive illness, "willing to quit the World alone and altogether," writes Browne, "leaving no Earnest behind him for Corruption or Aftergrave, having small content in that common satisfaction to survive or live in another, but amply satisfied that his Disease should dye with himself" (*LF* 3, 5, 7). Yet there is also a sense of helplessness in the *Letter* at witnessing the visible transformations in the patient's physical degeneration. There is clear regret, too, about the inability to intervene in, as Browne describes it, the "deliberate creeping progress unto

the Grave,” as well as the regret frequently expressed in the essay at being unable to prevent the patient’s loss of physical character and distinction resulting from the illness (*LF* 8).

In both essays, we therefore have distinct contexts, subjects and disciplinary methodologies but from which arise parallel frustrations connected specifically with establishing knowledge by way of reading signs. Both objectives and frustrations are also comparable to those characteristic of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humoral physiology. The kinds of desires which we can trace in Browne’s two essays, emphasised inversely by fears connected in both medical and archaeological contexts which concern the decay of the body’s flesh, bring *Urn Burial* and the *Letter* into dialogue with one another at the same time that they also help us understand how these same themes represent central concerns within the domain of medical enquiry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which are described humoral pathologies, and in which features of complexion are key objects of analysis for determining such pathologies.

*Urn Burial* is not, then, about humoral melancholy in the sense that it describes the disease, its symptoms and how to treat it – there *is* no treatment for dead bodies. Yet the suggestion of melancholy’s iconography in *Urn Burial*, cognate with melancholy as an affliction or a kind of temperament if we consult both medical literature and artistic renderings, seems also to call attention to feelings of hopelessness and pessimism characteristic of one described as melancholic and the morose conclusions toward which his or her contemplations inevitably lead. Moreover, the suggestiveness of the material subject matter calls attention to the frustrated investigations in which Browne’s archaeological analysis and humoral definitions of melancholy can be seen as equally

participating in the seventeenth century. In attempting to organise melancholy from a medical perspective into clear categories of definition and description, André Du Laurens writes that “we must looke that we understand this place aright, for there are many sorts of melancholie,” admitting a sceptical position as to whether or not from these “many” variations could indeed derive an understanding of melancholy, a concern which Burton clearly and repeatedly amplifies in the *Anatomy*, and an attitude certainly comparable and commensurate with similar degrees of pessimism we see in the *Letter* and especially *Urn Burial* (85).

In contrast to the voids, gaps and discontinuities with which *Urn Burial* appears to be concerned above all else, and certainly in contrast to its pessimistic conclusions, the essay paired with *Urn Burial* in Browne’s original publication in 1658, *The Garden of Cyrus*, is mostly about continuity and hopefulness. Its themes are patterns and repetitions in nature, uninterrupted by processes of time and decay, which *Urn Burial* has shown to interfere with historiographic and antiquarian procedures of reconstructing the past into knowledge. Thus *Cyrus* is ordinarily understood by Browne scholars to counter-balance in its optimism the themes of *Urn Burial*. I would argue, however, that when read together, the two essays complicate the sense of resolution toward which they are understood to proceed, specifically with regard to the epistemologies by which each essay appears to be oriented – *i.e.* the different ‘fields’ of knowledge which dominate the essays. In addition to their thematic contrasts, there are also many concepts, images and symbols through which the essays resonate with one another and which together undermine the theory that *Cyrus* institutes the order and wholeness whose absence is the real concern of *Urn Burial*. It is with these issues in mind that I would like now to turn

my attention in this next and final section of this chapter to an analysis of *The Garden of Cyrus*.

### **‘Garden-Graves’**

“[T]he delightful World comes after Death,” writes Browne in his dedication to Nicholas Bacon which precedes *The Garden of Cyrus*, “and Paradise succeeds the Grave. Since the verdant State of Things is the Symbol of the Resurrection, and to flourish in the State of Glory, we must first be sown in Corruption” (4). *Cyrus*, an essay on gardens, not graves, sounds refreshingly optimistic. Such is the reason, Browne explains in the letter, that “we conjoin these Parts of different subjects,” this “Garden Discourse,” as he calls it, being a sequel to his non-optimistic meditation on funerals and urns (*GC* Preface 4).

“Beside, the ancient Practice of Noble Persons,” he adds, “to conclude in Garden-Graves, and Urn themselves of old, [was] to be wrapt up in flowers and Garlands” (*GC* Preface 4-5).

The rationale for the union of the two essays is clear according to Browne’s epigraphic description of their interrelated themes: conjoined they form a larger parable which charts the progression from death to the “delightful world” which follows it, thus inverting the logic which dominates the essay on urns, which is that all life proceeds inevitably towards death. “One concerns death,” says Huntley of *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, “the other, life; one the body, the other the soul; one passions, the other reason; one accident, the other design; one substance, the other form” (209). *Urn Burial*, says Engel, “addresses the terrestrial world, the ‘earthy.’ It takes as its point of departure the natural order of life and death, and the dissolution and perishing of the body [...] It

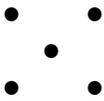
recounts the pathetic efforts of men, tenants of corruptible bodies, to overcome oblivion by their own means” (213). Whereas *Urn Burial* is “bound up in temporality, *The Garden of Cyrus* addresses timelessness”; “whereas *Urn Burial* emphasizes enclosure and compactness, *The Garden* emphasizes disclosure and exfoliation”; “*Urn Burial* addresses death and decay; its counterpart, *The Garden*, rebirth and everlasting life” (Engel 213, 214, 215). “One is a Solomonic lament on human limitation,” writes Post, “the other a Baconian celebration of human potential; one a meditation on fragments, the other an encomium to order and continuity” (134-135). In the end, argues Post, we are to rejoice that gardens triumph over graves, and “it seems fully appropriate that the last works Browne himself saw published should not only attempt to strike a balance between the two worlds, but that a vision of order and generation – a vision not just of sustaining but of producing – should prevail” (Post 135).

The images which predominate and preside over each of the two essays certainly contrast in dramatic ways with one another: the interred ashes which captivate the melancholic curiosity of *Urn Burial*, for instance, give way to flourishing trees in *Cyrus*, and burial grounds become Cyrus’s garden plots. The formula is simple, says Post: “One concerns death, the other life” (Post 134). But more importantly, the message apparently built into this double-essay design, and Browne spells it out for us should we somehow miss it, is that life comes after death, “and Paradise succeeds the Grave” (*GC* Preface 4).

*The Garden of Cyrus* is so titled because everything the essay contains has in common the number five and a five-point pattern according to which, as Browne writes, Cyrus, a “Lord of Gardens,” had been known to design his garden as well as his battle formations, “disposing his trees, like his armies in regular ordination” (*GC* 1:93-94). The “Lord of

Gardens” whom Browne has in mind is, as Post points out, the less-celebrated Cyrus the Younger (d.401 BCE), son of Darius II of Persia, rather than the famous and heroic Cyrus the Great, Persian Emperor (?600-530 BCE) (*Sir Thomas*, 136).

The peculiar, spellbinding pattern of this pattern of plantation captivates Browne in *Cyrus*, and is an emblematic template for everything else which the work discusses. It resembles, as Browne says, the “Cinque point of a dye,” as thus:



Cyrus, “[a] person of high spirit and honour,” writes Browne, “naturally a King, though fatally prevented by the harmlesse chance of *post-geniture*,” was, according to Browne, keen about patterns and repetitions in nature, and the symmetry of the number five (*GC* 1:93).

The divinity of the quincunx pattern stems from the number five itself which the pattern both signifies and of which it is a transcription. The number five, says Browne, is significant in itself, as “nature delighteth in this number” (*GC* 3:139). “The rose at first is thought to have been of five leaves,” writes Browne, while “[i]n many the flowers, blades, or staminous shootes of leaves are all equally five, as in cockle, mullein and *Blattaria*; wherein the flowers before explication are pentagonally wrapt up, with some resemblance of the *blatta* or moth from whence it hath its name,” and “the number five,” he says in one of his more cryptic passages, “is remarkable in every circle, not only as the first sphærical number, but the measure of sphærical motion. For sphærical bodies move by fives” (*GC* 3:139, 141).

But the full esoteric appeal of the quincunx only emerges for Browne, and is clarified for the reader, by the explanation of the way in which it can be crossed or “decussated” by drawing lines from its corners through its middle-point, thus forming an *X*. By this method, quincunxes, once situated alongside one another, can potentially weave in endless fashion, one into the other, forming an intricate, web- or net-like pattern or fabric which Browne’s frontispiece to *The Garden of Cyrus* illustrates (Figure 8). “[T]he *decussis* is made within a longilaterall square,” Browne writes, explaining how the “fundamentall figure” is crossed, “with opposite angles, acute and obtuse at the intersection; and so upon progression making a *Rhombus* or Lozenge figuration, which seemeth very agreeable unto the Originall figure” (*GC* 1:95).

Once the quincunx pattern and its decussation are established, the stage is set for Browne to fill the remainder of the essay with examples, of which Cyrus’s gardens and battle formations represent only the beginning. He sees the pattern of the quincunx and/or the decussated web everywhere “both in Art and Nature,” in its “several commodities, mysteries, parallelismes, and resemblances” (*GC* 1:94-95). The quincunx is to be observed, he says, in the “Civickall Crowns of Laurel, Oake and Myrtle,” in coins like those of “*Constantine* and his Sons,” in the flowers of the “medicall bush of Elder” and “French honeysuckle,” while he sees in “Retiarie” woven fabrics, embroideries, and eminent needle-works” examples of the decussated web, as well as in the leaves of “stalk plants,” the “linen folds” of “*Ægyptian Embalmers*” (*GC* 1:95, 3:125, 2:106, 3:125, 3:148). One could certainly continue citing examples from the essay just as Browne does within it, but this gives an idea of the range of exempla of the quincunx pattern, both natural and hand-wrought, that he adduces.

The decussated ‘web’ of “Quincunciall Ordination,” which Browne describes as a “Net-work” or “not unaptly compared unto a Net,” functions on both the physical and metaphysical levels in the essay and for Browne; he literally (citing examples) sees the cross-woven pattern in fabrics, linens, plants, but metaphysically, the sky is the limit, and quincunxes everywhere are conjoined, he seems to suggest, by an unseen fabric (*GC* 3:148, 5:188). The quincunx represents, within natural phenomena like plant life and flora and indeed entire gardens which are nevertheless prone to decay, the immutability of design throughout nature. The essay itself enacts growth and proliferation, making, essentially, a “vast production from nothing,” thus imitating the “exiguity and smallnesse of some seed extending to large productions [which] is one of the magnalities of nature” (*GC* 3:136). In so doing it also constructs, I like to imagine, a mechanical or analogue prototype of networked ‘hits’ forming what is in essence a ‘world wide web’. In *Urn Burial*, non-matching entities are (as in a search engine) omitted – they slip through the net. “Not all strictly of one figure,” we will recall Browne saying of the forty to fifty Walsingham urns, “but most answering these described”; at which point he goes on to describe their matching contents and we as readers become aware that some of the discovered items have escaped his discourse (*UB* 2:14).

The essay therefore emphasises totality whereas *Urn Burial*’s emphasis is precisely the opposite – the fragmentary, the disintegrated and (by extension from these) the unknown. Browne’s *Garden of Cyrus*, its woven web of quincunxes, has been constructed and conceived so as to ensure that nothing escapes his discourse or slips through his decussated net. Even Browne’s sleep and dreams are places in which his quincunx web threatens to expand and enlarge. “[T]he Quincunx of Heaven runs low,” he says in his

memorable conclusion to the essay, “and ‘tis time to close the five ports of knowledge; We are unwilling to spin out our awaking thoughts into the phantasmes of sleep, which often continueth praecogitations; making Cables of Cobwebbes, and Wildernesses of handsome Groves” (*GC* 5:200). The quincunx is both symbol and evidence of continuity throughout artificial and natural works, in which the essay itself, divided into five chapters, participates. But it is also more than that. “The quincunx,” Preston writes,

as an elaboration of the divine natural signature, is the framework of a restored, Edenic order which scientifically generated gardens of the time were exemplifying and which symbolised the redemptive possibilities of empirical investigations, a framework grounded in the most fundamental of all studies, the miracle of generation. (*Thomas Browne*, 182)

Indeed, as Browne writes, highlighting the potential “Edenic order” that the quincunx suggests, “even in Paradise itself, the tree of knowledge was placed in the middle of the garden” (*GC* 1:103). The design of Eden, in other words, Browne imagines, is quincuncial, with the “tree of knowledge” occupying the centre point of the figuration.

Problems with reading the two companion essays as a progressive narrative which proceeds to triumph (represented as verdant garden imagery) arise in the form of echoes which point the reader from one essay to the other and make such a reading – suggested by Browne’s proclamation that “Paradise succeeds the Grave” – quite difficult to sustain (*GC* Preface 4). To which “Paradise” Browne refers is open to question. Does he mean the assurance of a “Paradise” in the afterlife? It cannot be intended to escape the reader’s notice that Eden, the first Paradise *and* a garden, was squandered and corrupted. Thus while *The Garden of Cyrus* celebrates universality and “Paradise,” as Browne writes,

“succeeds the Grave,” these messages are equivocal from the outset, and they are conveyed, strangely, using imagery that seems rather to insist on the vulnerability of natural, growing things to decay (*GC* Preface 4).

If *The Garden of Cyrus*, as Engel writes, truly “addresses timelessness,” then it may have to be read in isolation, and quite apart from *Urn Burial* (213). By the same measure that *Cyrus* can be said, figuratively, to grow and proliferate just as the gardens it describes, it can equally be said to be vulnerable to (over-) ripening. The exchange of images and conceits between *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* is not without complications which arise especially when each essay is considered in the context of the other; such complications are presented in the form of certain unmistakable clues about the ‘other’ essay.

These complications tend to surround Browne’s tendency in both essays to relate knowledge to different, and often either shifting or otherwise simultaneously proleptic and analeptic, perspectives in time, a kind of conceptual orientation which emerges throughout not only *Urn Burial* and *Cyrus* but also in sections of his other writings, including both *Religio Medici* and *A Letter to a Friend*, both of which we have examined in this chapter. In *Urn Burial*, time is clearly a destructive influence on cultural and historical knowledge; carnal and corporal corruption, over time, causes the disintegration of both remnants but more importantly, in the essay’s context, the knowledge which can be procured by way of their analysis.

And it is corruption which is shown in *Cyrus* to be excluded from the archetypal design of “Quincunciall Ordination” appearing everywhere in nature, reflecting as a collective the “Æquivocall production of things under undiscerned principles” (*GC*

5:188, 3:135). However, some of the symbolism related to both the imagery which predominates *Urn Burial* and *Cyrus*, but also some of the symbolism which the essays communicate more discreetly via mythological and historical figures such as Saturn/Kronos and even the “Lord of Gardens” and “manuall planter thereof” himself, Cyrus, who lends his name to the essay’s title, is flexible. This flexibility can significantly alter some of the essays’ most basic messages and meanings when considered from the perspectives in time discussed above, and it is an openness which Browne not only allows but which also seems to influence his view of knowledge more fundamentally throughout his work (*GC* 1:93).

Like Cyrus, “the splendid and regular planter” (and by “regular” Browne seems to refer to that which is highly patterned and contrived), Saturn, the reaper who levels crops and who is, of course, the deity presiding over the melancholic disposition according to the Medieval Arabic astrologers, is mentioned by Browne only a few paragraphs later as one of the earliest horticulturalists, a planter in “the first Plantations not long after the Floud,” a figure “who divided the world between his three sonnes, who beareth a Sickle in his hand, who taught the plantations of Vines, the setting, grafting of trees, and the best part of Agriculture” (*GC* 1:93, 1:100, *UB* 3:49).

Clearly Browne has drawn upon the good character of Saturn described by Macrobius, who was celebrated by Romans as a fertility god or a god of harvest during the festival of Saturnalia, which bears his name. However, if the good Saturn is instated in *The Garden of Cyrus*, his bad alter ego is certainly implied in *Urn Burial*. If *The Garden of Cyrus* truly concerns the “delightful World [that] comes *after* Death,” then it is difficult to know where to place details such as the presence of Saturn that disrupt or are not continuous

with the message outlined in the preface to *Cyrus* (*GC* Preface 4, emphasis added). In addition to Saturn, not simply an agricultural god but a “god of opposites” who had become by the sixteenth century a symbol of death or transience (Klibansky *et al.* 58), *Urn Burial* refers to the “tomb of *Cyrus*” (*UB* 3:49). *Cyrus*, the “Lord of Gardens” and a “manuall planter thereof,” has already appeared in *Urn Burial* (*GC* 1:93). There, he is just another puzzle, another set of fragmentary remains to attract observers and inspire conjecture, although these, says Browne, might be promising in one respect: “When *Alexander* opened the tomb of *Cyrus*,” says Browne, “the remaining bones discovered his proportion” (*UB* 3:49). “[S]ince bones afford not only rectitude and stability, but figure unto the body; it is no impossible Physiognomy to conjecture at fleshy appendicies, and after what shape the muscles and carnous parts might hang in their full consistencies” (*UB* 3:50). In the context of the historical and antiquarian analysis with which *Urn Burial* is mostly concerned, *Cyrus*’s bones are positively useful. But in the larger context of *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* as companion essays which we are instructed by Browne to read as a parable of the afterlife to come, the presence of *Cyrus*’s tomb in *Urn Burial* has the effect of giving the essay which bears his name an after-the-fact quality.

In *A Letter to a Friend* we find an image of the physician Browne struggling against the pressures of time. Though obviously the epistolary essay was written by Browne after the patient’s death, its concerns are with the imminence of the event and of the necessity of delivering news “[u]pon my first Visit,” as he writes, to “them who had not let fall all hopes of his Recovery, That in my sad Opinion he was not like to behold a Grasshopper, much less to pluck another Fig” (*LF* 3). The Browne of *Urn Burial* is under no such pressure; these bodies are already dead, and whatever crisis it presents – of being unable

to read landmarks and reconstruct coherent historical narratives (“[w]hether they were the bones of men or women or children” or “the time of these Urnes deposited, or precise Antiquity of these Reliques”) – is not confined to a strict time frame (*UB* 3:22, 20).

*The Garden of Cyrus* returns, however, to the living world of over-ripening bodies, a garden full of plants, “Crowns of Laurel, Oake and Myrtle,” “firre and Pine tree[s]” (*GC* 2:106, 3:125). It is, in fact, within verdant settings that corruption lies, certainly an irony which cuts against the grain of Browne’s instructions on how to read his essays, and the tendency of Browne scholars to follow such a reading, as a sequence in which “Paradise succeeds the Grave,” the condition of which is that “we must first be sown in Corruption,” (*GC* Preface 4). Browne states in *Religio Medici*, “we live, move, have a being, and are subject to the actions of the elements, and the malice of diseases, in that other World, the truest Microcosm, the Womb of our Mother” (1:84). The body, a “slough of flesh,” is the temporary encasing of the soul; “that immortal spirit and incorruptible Substance of my soul,” says Browne, “may lye obscure, and sleep a while within this house of flesh” (*RM* 1:85). Yet in *Religio Medici*, flesh is synonymous with grass: “Now, for these walls of flesh, wherein the Soul doth seem to be immured before the Resurrection, is nothing but an elemental composition, and a Fabrick that must fall to ashes. *All flesh is grass*, is not onely metaphorically, but literally, true; for all those creatures we behold are but the herbs of the field, digested into flesh in them, or more remotely carnified in our selves” (*RM* 1:79-80). The logical sequence here – that the soul is “immured” in the body, that the body is flesh, and that all [*a*]ll *flesh is grass*” – leads us to an inevitable conclusion: bodies of flesh, while serving as a temporary “house” in

which to “sleep a while” and from which the soul will triumphantly emerge, is prey to carnivorous diseases, worms, and serpents while it is in the grave *and* while it is living.

The growth of body and flesh means the inevitable growth of diseases, and indeed, says Browne, “the Mercy of God hath scattered the great heap of Diseases, and not loaded any one Country with all: some may be new in one Country which have been old in another. New Discoveries of the Earth discover new Diseases” (*LF* 6). That the living body, “these walls of flesh,” as Browne writes, is “a Fabrick that must fall to ashes,” is a sequence of words that rings like a bell throughout *The Garden of Cyrus*, a work devoted to crafting a fabric of woven quincunxes, and which, while it grows, also ripens. Like “Small-pox,” to return to the topic of Browne’s doctoral dissertation, which, as he writes, “grows more pernicious than the Great,” the growth of disease corresponds to the growth and proliferation of the bodies which it, along with the soul, temporarily inhabits (*LF* 6). The ready-made responses of textbook humoural physiology fail to address the crisis; the interior of the body, like “a large part of the earth,” remains “still in the Urne unto us,” still undiscovered (*UB* 1:2). *Urn Burial* is poised “like Janus in the field of knowledge,” looking back at ancient discoveries about the human body, now in incomplete fragments, but awaiting, very patiently, any word on new discoveries by after ages (*RM* 2:153). Perhaps there is no reason for optimism: “The Field of Knowledge hath been so traced, it is hard to spring any Thing new,” says Browne in *The Garden of Cyrus*, though the “Field of old *Walsingham*,” in which “were digged up between fourty and fifty Urnes” in unmarked plots, has proven the opposite – that the “Field of Knowledge” has *not* “been so traced” (*UB* 2:14, *GC* Preface 4). In closing, I think one should feel compelled, while reading about Cyrus planting in his garden and digging holes according to his favoured

‘quincuncial’ pattern, to consider the possibility, following Browne in his speculation that “a large part of the earth” remains ever “still in the Urne unto us,” that, just perhaps, an urn might turn up.

## 5

*Epilogue*

Until the sixteenth century, the theory of the four humours existed cooperatively and without contradiction alongside the study of anatomy. In the medicine of Galen, human anatomy and humoral pathology existed as complementary aspects of the study of the human body – the former addressing the functions of the parts of the body including bones, organs, veins, arteries, and the latter addressing the behaviour of the four humours inside the body whose effects included passions, personalities and diseases.

The humours and human anatomy in Galen overlapped where the humours were linked to specific organs (blood with the liver, yellow bile with the gall bladder, phlegm with the lungs, black bile with the spleen), and theorised as being carried throughout the body by veins and arteries. The organised system of the body according to Galen is one in which organs assert a role in generating, maintaining and refining the four humours. The location of black bile in the spleen was sufficient justification for discussing anatomy and humoral physiology as disciplinary subsets of the study of the human body; moreover, the presence of veins in the body along with the acceptance that blood travels through these veins serve as the basis in Galen's writings for anatomical explanations of melancholy – literally an 'anatomy' of 'melancholy'. Says Galen in *De locis affectis*, the atrabilious blood in the stomach causes a "kind of sooty and smoke-like evaporation or some sort of heavy vapors [which] are carried up from the stomach to the eyes," "produc[ing] melancholic symptoms of the mind by ascending to the brain like a sooty substance or a smoky vapor" (92). For these reasons, "[a]lthough each melancholic patient acts quite differently than the others," says Galen, "all of them exhibit fear or

despondency,” “find fault with life and hate people” and “dread death and desire to die at the same time” (93).

By the late sixteenth century, the position of the physiology of the humours was no longer certain in the study of the human body. Humoural physiology was mostly a separate field of enquiry from the study of anatomy, and in spite of the fact that the title of Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* appears to suggest otherwise, the physiology of the humours was not sustainable (at least not clearly) in human anatomy. Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century humoural theory belonged rather to the humoural treatise and not the anatomical treatise. The separation of humoural physiology and anatomy into distinct discourses is not in itself a major development; indeed, Galen had discussed the topographical layout of the human body and the range of pathologies thought to arise from humoural causes in separate treatises, and so sixteenth-century writers concerned with either anatomy or humoural pathologies refer to Galen’s relevant works accordingly. These humoural treatises, most of which treat melancholy as the major category of interest, still contained many traces of Galenic *anatomy*, in which case it is not unusual to find descriptions of the ways in which black bile courses through the veins, usually using the distinction that one type of black bile is capable of being transported to certain arteries by being contained in the blood, a form of the melancholic humour which Galen classifies as the ‘atrabilious’ blood in *De locis affectis*.

What *is* significant is that, whereas a science of the body in terms of its topography develops in the sixteenth century, no such science of the humoural body appears imminently ready to replace or augment the old humoural system of Galen. The atrabilious blood is capable of “obstruct[ing] the outflow from the cerebral ventricles,”

says Galen, and sometimes “causes epileptic spells,” “delirium” and “melancholic depression” (*De locis* 88). As Levinus Lemnius writes in *The Touchstone of Complexions* (trans. 1576), “of this Melancholicke humour there be two differences, the one naturall, the other beside nature,” this second or “naturall” of which, he says, “being carried and conveyed into the Veines together with the blood, it nourisheth the members that be of like nature and condition to it selfe, and unto them ministreth nourishment, as the Bones, Gristles, Ligaments and Sinewes” (217-218). Similarly, Timothy Bright writes in his *Treatise of Melancholy* that “[t]his humour is of two sorts: naturall or vnnaturall,” the natural being “the grosser part of the blood,” which “either by abundance or immoderate hotnesse, passing measure, surchargeth the bodie, and yeeldeth up to the braine certain vapors, whereby the vnderstanding is obscured” (1-2). This kind of melancholic “juice” is an “excrement” which causes “vapors” which in turn “affec[t] the understanding, & do alter the affection,” among innumerable other “perturbanc[es]” once it is transported to other areas of the body, including the brain (2).

In the passages quoted above, both Lemnius and Bright are relying on the Galenic model in which human anatomy and the theory of the humours are mutually supportive, and comprehended within the larger picture of Galen’s picture of the human body. Anatomy and humoral physiology refer and defer to one another in Galen’s body of work, but anatomy after Vesalius’s *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) did not (and, for many reasons, *could* not) provide a place for the discussion of the humoral pathologies discussed by Galen, nor did it provide a set of questions to determine by what method(s) the doctrine of the humours could be studied or determined. There is no decisive moment when Galen’s humoral theory is called into question. In the study of human anatomy,

this decisive moment is Vesalius's *Fabrica*. The *Fabrica* proposed a comprehensive approach to anatomy which included ancient texts as the basis of study, but also included – most importantly – dissection and observation of human bodies, and the use of image and text together in his book as a complete picture of the human body and all of its parts and functions.

The result of the more unified study of human anatomy proposed by the *Fabrica*, however, apart from subjecting Galen's anatomy to question, resulted in less of a sense of recognition of the humours as part of the study of anatomy. Reduced to a single statement, Galen's anatomical and physiological assessment of melancholy is thus: the spleen regulates and reduces the amount of black bile in the body/blood system, and when the spleen becomes over-taxed in this function, the result is too much black bile and, by consequence, the many diseases with which black bile is connected. Absent in the *Fabrica*'s anatomical analysis of the spleen is the final component of this statement. The results of black bile are not clearly known by way of observation. Missing are also Galen's directives to the reader to see his, or anyone else's, doctrine or treatise concerning the functions of the melancholic humour on the mind and body.<sup>98</sup> Says Vesalius: "I am not bold enough to make a firm statement about the residue [*i.e.* black bile] squirted into the stomach by the spleen and about the function of this" (5:126). Vesalius is not confident enough to state what kind of function black bile has in the gastric system without equivocation, but as for making any comment as to the effects of black bile on the "melancholic symptoms of the mind" listed by Galen and other commentators on the humours, he does not even appear interested (*De locis* 92). The

---

<sup>98</sup> See Galen's *De locis affectis* (80, 86) and *De usu partium* (232, 260), to cite just a few instances in which Galen instructs his reader to consult his other treatises and commentaries for supplemental information outside the scope of the treatise at hand.

above comment in the *Fabrica*'s fifth book, in the section which concerns the spleen and its functions and about which Vesalius admits no "firm statement" is possible, is not a claim which humoral physiology in the sixteenth century must get around, because, essentially, no claim is made.

Yet, although no comment or position on the function of black bile is possible, and no statement is advanced, the subtext is somewhat clearer, which is that the pathologies of the humours – and all of the illnesses and various other effects which melancholy in specific entails – are not discernible in the context of the progressive study of the human body from about the middle of the sixteenth to the early seventeenth century. Reading between the lines of the *Fabrica* and the discourse of anatomy more broadly, in other words, the doctrine of the humours and melancholy appears to have been (very quietly) expelled from the study of human anatomy. This is much different than the complete picture of human anatomy which Galen proposed, which included the physiology of the humours as a complementary field of speculative study to account for the experiences of the body for which anatomy could not. Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia* (1615) is a possible exception of a comprehensive anatomical treatise after 1600 which represents the 'old' anatomy of Galen. The aim of Crooke's anatomy is to present the *entire* picture of the body, which he says is "the measure and exemplary patterne of all corporeall things," the "liuely Image of all this whole Vniverse" (3, 4). And he seems to suggest that the ability of anatomy to convey (as it did from ancient times) the human body as the "Image of all this whole Vniverse" has been handicapped by more recent anatomists, namely Vesalius, whom Crooke identifies as the foremost among a group of "new

Writers” who “continually carpe and barke at [Galen], yea tear and rend him,” and have left in pieces the “perfect and exact knowledge of Anatomy” (22).

In this “perfect and exact knowledge of Anatomy” there is at least an *implied* place for the theory of the humours, if not necessarily an expressly stated one; among Crooke’s thirteen books in *Microcosmographia*, none are concerned with the explication of the functions, effects and diseases linked to blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. Even in Crooke’s attempt at a definitive book of anatomy which *properly* reflects the “perfect and exact knowledge” of the discipline according to Galen’s original intention, Galen’s expertise has been divided. In the context of the *Microcosmographia*, not *just* an anatomy but an all-encompassing one, Galen the anatomist deserves to be defended. Galen the humoral physiologist, however, deserves no mention. Crooke’s general outline of melancholy is limited to the recognisable analogy involving Saturn and the reiteration of the colour and texture of the spleen, in which case the “cold and harmfull Starre *Saturne*, that loose and flaggy flesh of the Spleene, being the receptacle of melancholike humours, dooth liuely resemble” (3, 7). Like Vesalius, he too is not “bold enough” to guess at what kinds of functions black bile, or melancholic juice, or atrabiliar blood has on a person with too much of it (5:126). In other words, Crooke’s textbook, which attempts to restore anatomy to a sense of wholeness – worthy of the human body, the “liuely Image of all this whole Vniverse” – which he suggests has been hacked into pieces by Vesalius, has nevertheless done so in a very post-Vesalian treatise of anatomy, using a strikingly similar set of images and admitting humoral physiology nowhere in its enterprise (4).

Six years after Crooke's *Microcosmographia* appears Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. These two works are comparable in the sheer sense of large-scale ambition with which they seem to have been attempted – *Microcosmographia* as a “perfect and exact” textbook of comprehensive anatomy, and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as a book which aims to provide a complete body of work on melancholy, its symptoms, causes and cures, in a single volume. But the two treatises are more valuable to me for the ways in which they contrast one another; Crooke's textbook aims at a complete anatomy of the human body and appears confident that it can accomplish it, while the *Anatomy* is concerned with just one specific sense of the human body – the melancholic – and appears *not* to believe its ability to deliver it. “*What this humour is, or whence it proceeds, how it is ingendred in the body*” are determinations which the *Anatomy* is incapable of making, and the book makes no attempt to conceal its inability to make them (Burton 1.5-6 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader,” 1:166 [1.1.3.3]). The progression which this dissertation has charted from the early sixteenth-century melancholy of Ficino and Dürer, to that of Burton's *Anatomy* in the early seventeenth century is thus not just a transition from good melancholy to the bad Galenic kind, in which case different forms of melancholy or different elements of the doctrine were favoured at different points throughout these years in order to suit different intellectual trends. Rather, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* emerged when it did because, really, nothing else had. Vesalius's *Fabrica* positioned itself as an observational science of the human body, but the fact that nobody could ‘witness’ melancholy in an anatomical experiment or demonstration resulted in the necessity of the humoural treatise to discuss the pathologies of the humours and (specifically) melancholy; the *Anatomy*, in a way, reintegrates the two – the humoural

treatise and the anatomical textbook – but also (knowingly) shows this reintegration to have been a problematic exercise. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* must be viewed to a certain extent as being responsive to the messages implicit in sixteenth-century anatomy, and in Vesalius's admission that he can discern from observation alone no clear function of the residue (black bile) which is "squirting into the stomach by the spleen" must be read, as I think it was by Burton, as a silent proclamation that no anatomy of melancholy exists (5:126).

The inclusion of Browne in this dissertation suggested itself in consideration of the *Anatomy's* concerns with obtaining knowledge. Both writers also express attitudes to their subject matter as oriented, not by knowledge which does not exist, but by that which is concealed or otherwise impenetrable by reductive analysis. In *Urn Burial*, for instance, not only have natural processes of decay over time and destructive cultural procedures of interment erased potential knowledge of the past, but the entire essay is dominated by a general doubt and uncertainty related to a lack of coherence between surface and subsurface, or terranean and subterranean realities, established in the essay's opening admonition that the "deep discovery of the Subterranean world" is buried or concealed, comparable to the "treasures of time" which lie "scarce below the roots of some vegetables" (*UB* 1:2). That "a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us," meaning that much remains concealed from us, further links the realisation of knowledge to the promise held out by future discovery (*UB* 1:2).

The sense in which things which are unknown are 'buried' is both literally and figuratively implied by the discovered urns which occasioned Browne's essay; the urns themselves were buried, concealed and thus unknown for several centuries, and they also

symbolise the concept of the unknown, which Browne frequently describes in some manner as not yet discovered. Why certain other urns discovered in the Norfolk region, for instance, were buried with “their mouths downward, remains,” he writes, “yet undiscovered” (*UB* 2:29).

The conceit of burial in earth, suggesting the link between concealment and doubt, is one that is also employed by Burton in the *Anatomy* to represent knowledge that is mysterious and buried in earth, or hidden in the ground. In a subsection of the *Anatomy* entitled the “Digression of Ayre,” in which Burton compares himself to “a long-winged Hawke,” by which he means to suggest an aerial or insightful perspective, he presents a series of queries in some way related to the Earth, or specifically its centre or interior (2:33 [2.2.3.1]). “What is the center of the Earth,” he asks, for instance, “is it pure element only, as Aristotle decrees, inhabited (as *Paracelsus* thinks) with creatures, whose Chaos is the Earth: or with *Fayries*, as the woods and waters (according to him) are with *Nymphes*; or as the Aire with spirits?” (2:39 [2.2.3.1]). In this rather dreamlike sequence of the *Anatomy*, Burton expresses a desire to know of such mysteries by an imagined descent into the Earth: “I would haue a convenient place to goe downe with *Orpheus*, *Vlysses*, *Hercules* & *Lucianus Menippus*, at *St Patricks* Purgatory, at *Trophonius* denne, *Hecla* in *Island*, *Aetna* in *Sicily*; to descend and see what is done in the bowels of the earth: doe stones and mettles grow there still?” (1:38 [2.2.3.1]). Thus Burton thus reverses but also preserves the idea of discovering or coming to know as a process of unearthing.

Burton writes that “I will end the controversie in *Austins* words, *Better doubt of things concealed, then to contend about uncertainties, Where Abrahams bosome is and hell*

*fire,*” and so, “[i]n the meane time, let vs consider of that which is *sub dio* [in the open], and find out a true cause, if it be possible, of such accidents, Meteors, alterations, as happen aboue ground” (1:41 [2.2.3.1]). Yet in spite of Burton’s seemingly positive statement that contrary to uncertainty, which is “concealed,” certainty exists “aboue ground,” the text, like *Urn Burial*, seems preoccupied with demonstrating the impossibility of gaining any sense of certainty about knowledge, but more accurately knowledge collected by reading surfaces. Making comprehensive sense of melancholy by anatomy, an analytical system deployed precisely to embody it as a totality, is compared by Burton to other illogical and improbable endeavours, such “as to reconcile those Chronologicall errors in the Assyrian monarchie, finde out the *Quadrature* of a Circle,” or to “perfect the Motion of *Mars* and *Mercury*, which so crucifies our Astronomers, or to rectifie the *Gregorian* Kalender” (1:23 [“Democritus Junior to the Reader”]).

We find resonance with the rhetorical force of such comparisons in Browne’s essay as well; mysteries like “[w]hat Song the *Syrens* sang, or what name *Achilles* assumed when he hid himself among women,” he writes, “though puzzling Questions are not beyond all conjecture” (*UB* 5:71). But simple details of the urns in question in the essay, such as “who were the proprietaries of these bones, or what bodies these ashes made up, were a question above Antiquarism” (*UB* 5:71-72). To be “above Antiquarism” seems to be the ultimate characterisation of something which is unreachable by human understanding.

One must conclude simply that “[t]he certainty of death,” writes Browne, is itself “attended with uncertainties, in time, manner, places” (3:40-41). I think that we are meant to take from this statement that one can not know where, when or under what circumstances one is to die, only that it is inevitable, and also that details are thereafter

inevitably scattered and lost, recalling Browne's famous question posed in his dedication at the beginning of *Urn Burial*, "who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried?" (*UB* Preface 1). Browne's antiquarian presence of mind puts him immediately to concern that "they should die again, and be buried twice among us," that is, buried for a second time and thus again concealed or unknown (*UB* Preface 1).

## Primary Works Cited

- Agrippa von Nettesheim, Heinrich Cornelius. *De occulta philosophia*. London, 1650.
- Bacon, Francis. *Novum Organum. The Broadview Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Verse & Prose*. Ed. Alan Rudrum, Joseph Black & Holly Faith Nelson. Orchard Park, New York: Broadview Press, 2000. 47-57.
- Bright, Timothy. *A Treatise of Melancholy*. London, 1586.
- Browne, Thomas. *Hydriotaphia, urne-buriall, or, a discourse of the sepulchrall urnes lately found in Norfolk. Together with the garden of Cyrus, or the quincunciall, lozenge, or net-work plantations of the ancients, artificially, naturally, mystically considered. With sundry observations*. London, 1658.
- *A Letter to a Friend*. London, 1690.
- *Religio Medici*. London, 1645.
- Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. 3 vols. Ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989-1994.
- Crooke, Helkiah. *Mikrokosmographia*. London, 1616.
- Dee, John. *The Mathematicall Præface to the Elements of Geometrie of Euclid of Megara*  
[1570]. New York: Science History Publications, 1975.
- *Monas Hieroglyphica*. Trans. C.H. Josten. *Ambix* 12 (1964): 84-221.
- Du Laurens, André. *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight*. Trans. Richard Surphlet. London, 1599.
- Estienne, Charles. *La dissection des parties du corps humain diuisee en trois liures: avec les figures & declaratiõ des incisions*. Paris, 1546.

- Ficino, Marsilio. *Three Books of Life (De Vita Triplici), A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes*. Trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark. Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998.
- Galen. *Galen on the Affected Parts: Translation from the Greek Text with Explanatory Notes*. Trans. Rudolph E. Siegel. Basel: S. Karger, 1976.
- *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body (De usu partium): Translated from the Greek with an Introduction and Commentary*. Vol 1. Trans. Margaret Tallmadge May. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- *Medicorum Graecorum Opera quae extant, Claudii Galieni*. Ed. Carolus Kühn. Leipzig: C. Knobloch, 1821-1833.
- Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Shield*. Trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Levinus Lemnius. *The Touchstone of Complexions*. Trans. Thomas Newton. London, 1633.
- Macrobius. *Saturnalia*. Trans. Percival Vaughan Davies. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.
- Ovid. *Ovid's Metamorphosis, Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures by George Sandys*. Ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.
- Paré, Ambroise. *Œuvres complètes d'Ambroise Paré, revues et collationnées sur toutes les éditions antérieures*. Ed. Joseph-François Malgaigne. Paris: Baillière, 1840-1841.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1991.
- Plato. *Timaeus and Critias*. Trans. Desmond Lee. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977.

*Problemata XXX, I.* Trans. Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl. *Saturn and Melancholy*. London: Nelson, 1964. 18-29.

Sandys, George. "Vpon the Thirde Booke of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*." *Ovid's Metamorphosis, Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures by George Sandys*. By Ovid. Ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet. The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Ed. David Bevington. New York: Longman, 1997. 1060-1116.

Tertullian. *The Apology of Tertullian for the Christians*. Trans. T. Herbert Bindley. Oxford, 1890.

Vesalius, Andreas. *On the Fabric of the Human Body: A Translation of De corporis humani fabrica*. Trans. William Frank Richardson and John Burd Carman. 5 vols. San Francisco: Norman Publishing, 1998-2007.

Walkington, Thomas. *The Optick Glasse of Humors*. London, 1639.

#### Secondary Works Cited

Babb, Lawrence. "The Cave of Spleen." *The Review of English Studies* 12.46 (Apr. 1936): 165-176.

--- *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642*. East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951.

--- *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977.

- Bamborough, J.B. Introduction. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Vol.1. By Robert Burton, Ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Barbour, Reid. "The Hieroglyphics of Skin." *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*. Ed. Reid Barbour and Claire Preston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 279-295.
- Barczyk-Barakonska, Lilian. "'Never to go forth of the limits' Space and Melancholy in Robert Burton's Library Project." *Journal of European Studies*. 33.3-4 (2003): 212-226.
- Barker, Francis. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London: Verso, 1998.
- Carlino, Andrea. *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*. Trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Crignon-De Oliveira, Claire. "Is There a Melancholic Gaze? From Visual Distemper to Visionary Fancy." *Journal of European Studies* 33.3-4 (2003): 227-236.
- Dear, Peter. *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and its Ambitions, 1500-1700*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Diab, Mohammad. *Lexicon of Orthopaedic Etymology*. New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.
- Edgerton, Samuel Y. "When Even Artists Encouraged the Death Penalty." *Law and*

*Literature* 15.2 (Summer 2003): 235-265.

Engel, William E. *Mapping Mortality: The Persistence of Memory and Melancholy in Early Modern England*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

Ferrari, Giovanna. "Public Anatomy Lessons and the Carnival: The Anatomy Theatre of Bologna." *Past & Present* 117 (Nov. 1987): 50-106.

Fish, Stanley. *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

Fleming, Donald. "William Harvey and the Pulmonary Circulation." *Isis* 46.4 (Dec. 1955): 319-327.

Fox, Ruth. *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." Trans. Joan Riviere. *Collected Papers*. Vol. IV. London: Hogarth Press, 1925.

Gowland, Angus. "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy." *Past & Present* 191 (May 2006): 77-120.

--- "Rhetorical Structure and Function in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*." *Rhetorica* 19.1 (Winter 2001): 1-48.

--- *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Grafton, Anthony. "The Importance of Being Printed." Rev. of *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11.2 (Autumn, 1980): 265-286.

Guibbory, Achsah. "A rationall of old Rites: Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Buriall* and the Conflict Over Ceremony." *Patronage, Politics, and Literary Traditions in England, 1558-1658*. Ed. Cedric C. Brown. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993. 231-246.

--- "Urne-Buriall and the Question of Jewish Readmission." *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*. Ed. Reid Barbour and Claire Preston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 222-241.

Holly, Michael Ann. Michael Ann Holly. "Mourning and Method." *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 660-669.

Hopkins, Donald R. *The Greatest Killer: Smallpox in History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Huntley, Frank Livingstone. *Sir Thomas Browne: A Biographical and Critical Study*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962.

Jackson, Stanley W. "Acedia the Sin and Its Relationship to Sorrow and Melancholia." *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*. Ed. Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

King, Henry C. *The History of the Telescope*. Cambridge, Mass.: Sky Publishing Co., 1955.

Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl. *Saturn and Melancholy*. London: Nelson, 1964.

Lüthy, Christoph. "The Fourfold Democritus on the Stage of Early Modern Science." *Isis* 91.3 (Sep. 2000): 443-479.

- Lyons, Bridget Gellert. *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1971.
- Magner, Lois N. *A History of Medicine*. New York: Dekker, 1992.
- Major, Philip. "Urne-Buriall and the Interregnum Royalist." 'A man very well studied': *New Contexts for Thomas Browne*. Ed. Kathryn Murphy and Richard Todd. Leiden: Brill, 2008. 191-210.
- Mitchell, Dolores. "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp: A Sinner Among the Righteous." *Artibus et Historiae* 15.30 (1994): 145-156.
- Murphy, Kathryn. "The Contexts of Thomas Browne." 'A man very well studied': *New Contexts for Thomas Browne*. Ed. Kathryn Murphy and Richard Todd. Leiden: Brill, 2008. 3-12.
- Nelson, Brent. "Curious Readers and Meditative Form in Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia*." 'A man very well studied': *Thomas Browne in Context*. Ed. Richard Todd and Kathryn Murphy. Leiden: Brill, 2008. 107-126.
- Porter, Roy. *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998.
- Post, Jonathan F.S. *Sir Thomas Browne*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.
- Preston, Claire. "'An Incomium of Consumptions': A Letter to a Friend as Medical Narrative." *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*. Ed. Reid Barbour and Claire Preston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 206-221.
- *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Richardson, William Frank. Historical Preface. *On the Fabric of the Human Body. Book I, The Bones and Cartilages (De Humani Corporis Fabrica Liber I)*. By Andreas Vesalius. Trans. William Frank Richardson. San Francisco: Norman Pub., 1998. ix-xxi.

Saunders, J.B deC, and Charles D. O'Malley. Introduction. *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*. New York: Dover, 1973. 9-40.

Sawday, Jonathan. "The Fate of Marsyas." *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture C. 1540-1660*. Ed. Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn. London: Reaktion Books, 1990. 111-135.

--- *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995.

--- "Shapeless Elegance: Robert Burton's Anatomy of Knowledge." *English Renaissance Prose: History, Language, and Politics*. Ed. Neil Rhodes. Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997. 173-202.

Sebald, Winfried Georg. *The Rings of Saturn*. Trans. Michael Hulse. Frankfurt: New Directions, 1999.

Schleiner, Winfried. *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance*. Wiesbaden: In Kommission bei Otto Harrassowitz, 1991.

Schmidt, Jeremy. *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

Schwytzer, Philip. *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Siegel, Rudolph E. *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology, and Function and Diseases*

*of the Nervous System: An Analysis of his Doctrines, Observations and Experiments.*  
Basel: Karger, 1973.

Siraisi, Nancy G. "Vesalius and the Reading of Galen's Teleology." *Renaissance Quarterly*. 50.1 (Spring, 1997): 1-37.

--- "Vesalius and Human Diversity in *De humani corporis fabrica*." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994): 60-88.

Spiller, Elizabeth. *Science, Reading and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Trevor, Douglas. *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Vicari, Patricia. *The View from Minerva's Tower: Learning and Imagination in The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.

Webber, Joan. *The Eloquent "I": Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968.

Williams, Grant. "Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*." *ELH*. 68.3 (Fall 2001): 593-613.

Williams, R. Grant. "Resisting the Psychotic Library: Periphrasis and Paranoia in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*." *Exemplaria* 15.1 (Spring 2003): 199-221.

Williamson, George. "The Purple of *Urn Burial*." *Modern Philology* 62.2 (Nov., 1964): 110-117.

Yates, Frances. *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. London: Routledge, 1979.