Philosophy, Rhetoric and Medicine in the Writing of Robert Burton

By Yvonne Kiddle, B.A.

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Western Australia

School of Humanities

December 2015
Abstract

This thesis examines the intrication of philosophy, rhetoric and medicine in the writing of Robert Burton (*Philosophaster*, 1606/17; *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621). One of the key questions investigated, concerns the extent to which Platonic philosophy may be said to inform the conceptual framework of Burton’s two major works. The way in which rhetoric is used as a vehicle to strategically expound and promote Burton’s use of Platonic philosophy is explored, primarily in relation to the rightful approach to knowledge (which is equated to truth) as a palliative and salvationary quantity. The first part of this thesis offers an investigation of the latter as it occurs in Burton’s satirical play, *Philosophaster*, where both historical and contemporary sources are examined with regard to questions concerning the nature of ‘true’ philosophy and its impact on the salubrious order or health of individuals and communities; acts of social, individual and institutional vigilance against perceived pejorative change in this domain are investigated and assessed in accord with Burton’s commentary in *Philosophaster*. The second part of this thesis crosses the ideological bridge which may be said to exist between Burton’s two interconnected works, and concerns Burton’s investigation and treatment of the disease or disorder of melancholy, as demonstrated in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton’s ‘anatomizing of melancholy’, his process of diagnosis, disease categorisation, prognosis and proposed regimen/s for cure are explored primarily in terms of his investment in the convergent traditions of the Platonic and Christian/Patristic paideic programmes of self-examination and self-cultivation (self-education). The function of rhetoric in a contextually dynamic medico-philosophical framework is explored at length, especially in terms of its facilitating a transcendence of the material world (in the Augustinian sense), thereby
enabling the ascent to a realm where a condition of unity and wellness may be accessed.

The view that the rhetorical text *per se* embodies both in and of itself an ideologically-aligned (performative and/or illocutionary) vehicle for cure is considered, as is the more prosaic notion of rhetoric as a model for an Early Modern enquiry practice of experiment.
Statement of Candidature Contribution

Having completed my course of study and research towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, I hereby submit my thesis for examination in accordance with the regulations, and declare that this thesis is my own composition, that all sources have been acknowledged, and that my contribution is clearly identified. This thesis has been substantially completed during the course of enrolment in the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia, and has not previously been accepted for a degree at this or another institution.

I have read the rules relating to content and format of a thesis, word limits, and submission of a thesis for examination. The thesis is within the set word limit for my degree program and meets the required formatting and binding specifications.

I am under no obligation, nor am I aware of the university being under any obligation, to keep all or any part of my thesis confidential for any period of time.

I understand and agree that examiners are not required to return their copy of my thesis.

Yvonne Kiddle (ID 20737687)

December 2015
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Robert White, for his considerable tenacity, as well as his ever insightful, generous and ongoing support. Thanks must also go to Professor Van Ikin for his invaluable help and advice, especially as regards general review, administrative issues and his much appreciated assistance with proof-reading. I would also like to thank those individuals, who, whether through email exchange or allocating time to meet with me, made a significant impact on the way I approached this thesis. These names include (in no particular order): Professor Dana F. Sutton, Dr. Angus Gowland, Professor Peter Mack, Professor Rhodri Lewis, Professor Tom Settle, Dr. Christopher Tilmouth, Professor Cary Nederman, Dr. Jonathan Walker, Professor David Sedley and Professor Andrew Lynch. As recipient of the University of Western Australia’s Jean Rogerson PhD Scholarship, I would like to acknowledge the Jean Rogerson Trust; I am very grateful for the financial support I have received through the award of this scholarship. Finally, I would like to thank my family, who, with considerable patience and forbearance, have put up with the intrusion that any lengthy scholarly exercise necessarily demands.
# Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Statement of Candidature Contribution v

Acknowledgements vii

Table of Contents ix

A Note on Texts and Referencing xii

Introduction 1

Prelude: Setting the Scene 9

— *An Introduction to Burton’s Alba and Philosophaster*

1. *Philosophaster*: Historical Sources and Context 25

2. Rhetoric in *Philosophaster* 79

3. *Celare Artem*, Political Histories and the Phenomenon of the Philosopher-King 119

4. Burton and the Paideic Regimen: the Socratic and Patristic traditions 171

5. Rhetoric and Medicine; Rhetoric *as* Medicine in Burton’s *Anatomy* 205

Conclusion 229

Bibliography 237
A Note on Texts and Referencing:

In this thesis project, I have referred to three major editions of Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The editions I have used are the Faulkner/Kiessling/Blair edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), the A.R. Shilleto edition (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1913), and the New York Review of Books edition (William H. Gass, 2001); all of these sources are detailed in the Bibliography. For purposes of clarity and expediency, I have devised a system of notation which refers specifically to the NYRB edition. The system is as follows:

AOM refers to the NYRB edition. The number which immediately follows, refers to the three divisions or ‘Partitions’ of the *Anatomy*, and the following number denotes the relevant pages. Thus, “AOM, 1: 131”, for example, refers to *The Anatomy of Melancholy* [NYRB/Gass edition], Partition 1, page 131, and so on. I note that ‘Partition 1’ includes the various prefatory matter (The Argument of the Frontispiece, The Author’s Abstract of Melancholy, Democritus Junior to the Reader, etc.). I hope this makes the reader’s experience of accessing relevant material easier.
**Introduction**

This thesis examines the intricate relationship between philosophy, rhetoric, and medicine in the writing of Robert Burton (*Philosophaster*, 1606/17; *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621). One of the key questions investigated concerns the extent to which Platonic philosophy may be said to inform the conceptual framework of Burton’s two major works. The way in which rhetoric is used as a vehicle to strategically expound and promote Burton’s use of Platonic philosophy is explored, primarily in relation to the rightful approach to knowledge (which is equated to truth) as a palliative and salvationary quantity.

The first half of this thesis commences by investigating the various sources which Burton applied to in constructing his early plays and attempts to place these plays in an authentic contemporary context. An investigatory platform such as the latter constructs a solid framework from which we can determine not only those influences affecting artistic composition, we can also better observe aspects of authorial response to the cultural and socio-political events of the period. Burton’s commentary on a decaying or ‘disordered’ society is investigated at length in *Philosophaster*, where we witness the development of his initial critique of individual, social and institutional ideologies, trends and practices. In *Philosophaster*, Burton’s implication is that the practice of ‘true philosophy’ on both an individual and social level, is aligned with salubrious order and health (of the individual and community), whilst the degradation of true philosophy is aligned with disorder as a state of ‘disease’, corruption or compromise to health (order). As I will suggest later in this thesis, there is an ideological bridge that exists between *Philosophaster* and the *Anatomy*. That is, the observable effects of incomplete or imperfect knowledge and resultant vice and disorder that are presented in *Philosophaster* are expanded upon, re-examined and re-classified
in the later *Anatomy*. The new order of disorder is ‘melancholy’, and the further (self-imposed) challenge for Burton, is its rectification through the concerted application to a strategically formulated programme of remedy based on proper access to right knowledge and the subsequent access to health.

The second half of the thesis investigates the latter aspect of Burton’s significant and multi-faceted critique in greater detail, and ultimately discerns its nexus to be strongly Platonic in nature. We see how Burton’s ideological concept of the state of order (as related to the practice of right or true philosophy) is expanded to encompass the concept of its failure or degradation (disorder) as effecting a more general disease process (melancholy). Burton’s strategy to combat this disorder, is to refer his readers to a comprehensive, and indeed, encyclopaedic system of what is essentially a complex course for effecting [self] diagnosis and treatment of the ‘disease’ of disorder (the ‘curative project’ of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*). I investigate the possibility that in this anthropological-therapeutic project of the *Anatomy*, Burton attempts to institute a programme that is tailored to strategically respond to what he perceives as the need to address a general (if not endemic) problem of disease or disorder; furthermore, it is a problem that is best treated at its root cause – that is, it is best treated through the competent and strategically guided re-education of the afflicted or suffering individual. Burton’s ‘therapeutic re-education’ is both Christian and classically based; moreover, it is predicated upon two critical premises: (1) that man’s status is postlapsarian (and he is therefore in a state of separation from the providential deity), and (2) the notion that philosophy and religion, in their ancient representations, offer ‘cures’ or ‘cultures’ for the soul.¹ With regard to the latter, the concept of Burton’s promotion of a species of ‘paideic programme’ within the pages of the *Anatomy* is introduced. Following on from

this, consideration is made of the complex dynamic that is fostered between the project of the paideic programme (incorporating notions of self-examination and self-cultivation) and the function of rhetoric as it operates in a therapeutic-philosophical framework. In terms of continuity of the lines of investigation that are established, the theme of Burton’s early interest in classical theatre and theatrical sources is followed through here, with Saturn, the ludic ‘lord of Utopia’ providing the critical link to the converse and dystopian disorder of melancholy,\(^2\) as Burton traces its symptomatic history and cure in the pages of his later *Anatomy*.

In terms of academic scholarship, Robert Burton’s *Philosophaster* is a play which remains infrequently examined. This is unfortunate, as in itself Burton’s *comoedia nova* represents solid theatrical workmanship, at least as far as comparison with other university satires of the period is concerned. *Philosophaster* speaks, as one might expect, to similar contemporary productions concerning academic institutions and the part they play in the greater socio-cultural sphere which they inhabit. As audience, we are invited to observe a play constructed in the tradition of the *theatrum rhetoricum*; we also bear witness to the range of stock characters inherited from the classical stage. *Philosophaster* is a play with a stringently defined and specifically targeted didactic agenda.

The pedagogic component of *Philosophaster* is of particular interest; we have a play where the practice of vice is placed on display, and where the audience are encouraged to observe the process of both the evolution and the potential for the elimination of vice as a culturally endemic factor. Overall, the message that Burton means to convey, when extracted from the page and translated into the full context of the period in which he was writing, is fairly easily comprehended. Burton wrote a play

---

about the “triumph of most serene philosophy”. Essentially, *Philosophaster* constitutes a commentary on the status of knowledge as a palliative and salvationary quantity (as a remedy for vice and disorder). In some respects, *Philosophaster* represents a quest narrative: two ‘wise’ and peripatetic scholars set out in search of a wise man, or by extension, a wisely-ruled *polis*. During the self-appointed task of their quest, however, they encounter just the opposite – they find a *polis* which is *ostensibly* ruled by a wise and informed ruler (the Duke, Desiderius), yet this ruler lacks the one crucial quality that might recommend him as a wise and prudent man: he lacks an appreciation of what constitutes true wisdom or ‘philosophy’. As a result of the Duke’s unfortunate investment in (and subsequent vulnerability to) the practise of ‘false philosophy’, vice and folly rule supreme; chaos, or disorder, not unexpectedly, ensues. The situation is only saved, when the two ‘true’ philosophers arrive and untangle the mess of a world devoid of the beneficent and salubrious rule of true philosophy (defined in terms, as we shall see, of Platonic ‘order’).

The question that arises when reading *Philosophaster* in this vein is: What does this tell us about Robert Burton as writer, scholar and Early Modern citizen? As a writer and politically aware and engaged commentator, Burton appears to endorse the Platonic thesis of the just society, a society which accesses normative order through the concerted application to knowledge. Wisdom or knowledge - its access and entrainment - is the quantity which promotes and sustains good rule. Moreover, it is the *persona* of the philosopher who is best able to facilitate access to this knowledge. How is this thesis verified in Burton’s works? With regard to *Philosophaster*, as observed, the temptation to affirm the Platonic association is compelling. When we add *The Anatomy of Melancholy* into the investigative focus, however, the evidence of Burton’s both

---

3 “…two wandering scholars in search of a wise man... also arrive here.” See the Argument, Robert Burton, *Philosophaster*, trans. Connie McQuillen (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), p. 27. For the earlier translation by Paul Jordan-Smith refer to the Bibliography.
espousing and pursuing a Platonic model in his extended authorial commentary across these two major texts appears substantial. Burton is on a quest to ‘mend’ or heal society. In concerning himself with the individual, he is also concerning himself with the state; in a very Socratic [Platonic] sense, the two are interconnected.

Burton’s project finds clear precursors in the Platonic writings; Burton “echoes a Socratic metaphor that identifies philosophical discourse with medicine for corrupt souls and cities, and calls for a ‘physician’ who can introduce it.” In both *Philosophaster* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton’s agent of healing, the requisite ‘physician’, is one who cogently incorporates the *persona* of the philosopher, the wise man who (by very nature of his wisdom) eschews the role of ‘King’. Furthermore, we observe that, particularly in the project of the *Anatomy*, Burton employs the Socratic [Platonic] and Patristic traditions with a view to constructing a text which both promotes and, in my view, embodies a regimen which epitomises the philosophical essence of the *medicina-cultura animi* genre. In this genre, medicine or physick is prescribed for the ‘diseased’ or ‘perturbed’ mind, and the cure offered is based “in ancient representations of philosophy and religion”, designed to provide palliative therapy for the soul. In such regimens, access to knowledge is equated with the ascent to truth. Paideic programmes connected with the *cultura animi* genre reintegrate with “the original conceptual matrix” of such projects of cure, demonstrating that the rightful pursuit of true knowledge infers a process whereby the entire mind (soul; physiology of the body) is targeted for change; a binding and responsive relation to the deity is also assumed:

---


This conception comprises the related notions of a need to diagnose the state of one’s cognitive and affective faculties through self-examination, and of a possibility – as well as duty – to cure their infirmities and cultivate their strengths. The cure and the cultivation are taken both as an office of the rational creature and as a task assigned to it by its Creator, and they have a central place among the values that govern the human being’s life as an individual, as a member of the community, and as a creature in relation to its deity.  

On the surface then, we see Burton adhering to the Platonic/Socratic paradigm of the just state, and its implicit endorsement and preoccupation with the training and development of the ‘just’ soul, the elements of which (through the acquisition of right knowledge), actively and indeed, innately seek to pursue the conditions of normative order. This observation, on its own, would be fairly facile and unrewarding had not Burton offered to place his thesis in a more complex and sustained context. Fortunately for us, this is exactly what Burton does. Burton offers his readers the full scope of his vision, taking us beyond the secular and material world, and into the world of the metaphysical and transcendent. Burton aligns his translation of the Platonic model with the enriching religious/theological context of the Fall (and its attendant notions of Christian grace, redemption and salvation). In Burton’s Anatomy, therefore, we see the Patristic tradition, with its strong Augustinian overtones, conjoined with that of the Platonic; Burton’s own strategic paideic programme is accordingly disclosed.

Through these two cumulative commentaries on the part of Burton then, we are introduced to the Good as Augustine’s (part-Neoplatonist inspired) ‘God’, the unhypothetical first principal of a causal, salubrious and indeed all-pervading and (potentially) redemptive unity. Separation from this unity (the Good/the God) leads man into the domain of disease; the way back to the unity (the Good/the God) is though the

---

7 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 2.
virtuous practice of application to knowledge, through the use of the rational will. Yet it would seem that on his own, the average individual is no longer capable of pursuing that quantity which would reinstate him with the Good (the Unity; his ‘God’). This is where Burton, following the lead of Plato, deems it necessary to supply his pilgrims with a ‘wise man’ (a philosopher) to guide his earthly quest. Two wise men-scholars save the day in *Philosophaster*, mirroring this feat, in the more challenging project of the *Anatomy*, ‘Democritus Junior’ (utilising the authoritative template of Democritus [Senior]), attempts to show the citizen-journeyer the same essential route to salvation, but on a slightly different and rather more complex scale; the journey from disease (disorder) to health (order) is undertaken.

In the closing chapter of my thesis, I question the actual parameters of Burton’s definition of ‘disease’ and accordingly reassess not only the ideological basis of his propounded cure, but also the apparent methodology of his cure. Following Lepenies’ lead, I consider both Burton’s utopian vision and his more prosaic ‘anatomizing’ as a response to perceptions of endemic and pathogenic disorder. Furthermore, I consider an element which I regard as being crucial to the ‘ideational project’ observed in Burton’s construction of the *Anatomy*, in particular; that is, I consider the written text as exemplifying, both in and of itself, a utilitarian and functional vehicle for ‘cure’.

Accordingly, I investigate how Burton employs rhetoric in the service of Early Modern medical/psychophysiological practice; I also examine how Burton’s particular version of discursive rhetorical investigation might be said to be instrumental (in the Early Modern sense) in effecting specific therapeutic outcomes. To this end, I examine the notion of the “rhetorical-medical mind set” and the associated “intrication of therapy and cure”.

---

Prelude

Setting the Scene: An introduction to Burton’s Alba and Philosophaster

In 1606, Robert Burton, fellow of Christ Church,¹ wrote a play entitled Philosophaster.² To some, it may come as a surprise to learn that this was not in fact, Burton’s first effort at writing for the stage. In 1605 he had contributed to a play called Alba, which was presented before King James I during his visit to Oxford in late August of that year. Lawrence Babb has reported this play to be a “pastoral comedy” and in fact the REED sources appear to support this classification.³ More recently however, Alba has been referred to as a satyr play.⁴ In this regard, the theatre historian, John Orrell states:

[At Oxford, 1605]... the three major productions covered the three ‘kinds’ of classical drama as recognized by Vitruvius (Book V, Chapter vi). Alba, on the first night, 27 August, was a satyr play, with pans and shepherdesses; Ajax Flagellifer, performed the following evening, was a tragedy on a well-known theme; and Vertumnus on the third night was a comedy with philosophical overtones.⁵

¹Burton matriculated at Brasenose College in 1593; transferred to Christ Church College in 1599; received his B.A. from Christ Church in 1602 and received his M.A. degree from Christ Church in 1605. Burton received his B.D. in 1614. Lawrence Babb, Sanity in Bedlam: a Study of Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1959), p. 30.
² Robert Burton, Philosophaster: Comedia Nova (Scripta: 1606; publice exhibita Academicis in Aula Aedis Christi Anno 1617). In this study, I will mainly be referring to Connie McQuillen’s translation of Philosophaster (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993). For the earlier translation by Paul Jordan-Smith refer to the Bibliography.
⁵ Orrell, p. 30.
One assumes that Orrell’s classification of Alba as a satyr play is based on the assumption of its adherence to the divisions of the Vitruvian tradition; moreover, it recognises the specifically classical nature of the Oxford plays which were performed before the university’s royal patron during the period 27-30 August, 1605. Nonetheless, given that no manuscripts of Alba are extant, and therefore no textual evidence may be cited as definitively supporting the satyric classification (as opposed to that of pastoral comedy), all such attempts at a definitive categorisation of genre with regard to Alba must remain purely speculative.

In fact, Alba was more significant as a marker in English stage history than Lawrence Babb in his Sanity in Bedlam gives it credit for. It was the first play to be performed on Inigo Jones’ innovative new stage at Oxford. Jones was working in conjunction with Comptroller of the King’s Works, Simon Basil, and his ‘new stage’ was based on a design by the Italian Mannerist architect Sebastiano Serlio. Alba’s performance in fact marked the first recorded example of a raked stage being used in England. Orrell refers to the drawing which detailed the scheme for the presentation of the Oxford academic plays which Alba headlined as “the earliest English theatre design yet to come to light [contemporary with the first Globe, the Swan, and the Fortune]… and which marked the first recorded introduction of perspective scenery into English drama.” Yet the introduction of this new stage and seating design concept was not without certain accompanying problems, and, as we shall see, these may have had an

---

7 Walker suggests that due to the nature of the satyr play as being “usually comical and pastoral in subject matter and setting”, the REED designation is equally appropriate, albeit perhaps more “anglicised” in both terminology and contemporary cultural connotations [personal correspondence].
8 John Orrell quotes Isaac Wake concerning the installation of the new “raked stage”: “The scene occupied the upper part of the hall; its stage (Proscenium) running down to a level part in a gentle incline which lent great dignity to the entrances of the players as if descending a hill”. John Orrell, “The Theatre at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1605.” Shakespeare Survey, 35 (1982), p. 31.
impact on the way in which the Oxford plays were received, especially in the case of *Alba* and *Ajax Flagellifer.*

Babb quotes the antiquarian, John Nichols’ source, when he cites King James’s rather negative reception of *Alba* on August 27, 1605. As it turns out, Nichols’ account, however, may be worthy of a more historically objective process of revision. Effectively, due to certain (mainly acoustic) problems that occurred as a result of a late and unanticipated change in the placement of the King’s “Isle” within the proposed seating plan, both *Alba* and *Ajax Flagellifer* were significantly disadvantaged as stage spectacles. With a seating capacity of 810 “without pressing,” and a King seated in a less than ideal position (from the point of view of perspectival access to the conceptually innovative stage), the production and performance challenges for these two ambitious theatrical enterprises would have been considerable.

The exact nature of Burton’s contribution to *Alba* in terms of content and proportion remains a matter of speculation; Robert Burton is generally listed as contributing author, in the absence of information concerning other known contributors. As regards the subject matter, Orrell has speculated that *Alba* relates the Ovidian story of Pomona and her lover Vertumnus.

---

10 *Ajax Flagellifer* is noted as “a tragedy, written in Latin, author unknown”. Elliott *et al, REED,* Vol. 2, p. 825.
11 Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam,* p. 31. It is important to note that Nichols simply (re)printed [as part of his *Progresses… of King James the First,* (London, 1828)], a document that was earlier attributed to Philip Stringer, Fellow and Senior Bursar of St. John’s College, Cambridge. Cambridge academic Thomas Baker was responsible for comparing two “original” documents which contributed to Nichols’ report, one of which was in Stringer’s hand, the other, which was later determined to be in someone else’s hand. The point is, Nichols’ source was a Cantabrigian, and therefore perhaps inclined to display bias in relating the events; ref. Orrell, “The Theatre at Christ Church,” pp. 24-26. Linda Shenk gives an interesting perspective on political motivations which might have coloured Stringer’s assessment and reporting of academic plays. Linda Shenk “Gown before Crown: Scholarly Abjection and Academic Entertainment under Queen Elizabeth I” in Walker and Streufert, *Early Modern Academic Drama,* p. 37.
14 John Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 36. Vertumnus was one of the inferior Roman deities, placed in the same category as Pan and Silenus. Vertumnus was able to assume various disguises; it was in the disguise of an old woman that he finally won Pomona.
this seems to be the most likely of the possible themes. In his Latin account of the royal visit (a tract entitled *Rex Platonicus*), the former Christ Church scholar, Isaac Wake writes:

In this comedy three rivals vie for Pomona’s love: Chaerilus, a vain poet; Sylvanus, a great drinker; and Vertumnus. He ensnares her by a trick of many forms, dressing up first as a fisherman, then a courtier, and thirdly as a soldier, to trick her into love… Finally he ceases to be a man, and as a woman assails a woman. And in that guise he awakens marvellous love for him in Pomona. Having done that he reveals himself and the real Vertumnus possesses the real Pomona.¹⁵

Although no manuscripts for *Alba* survive, both the plot synopsis and the manuscript for Gwinne’s *Vertumnus sive Annus Recurrens* are extant. In fact, both of these sources place the character of Vertumnus as God of the Year. In Gwinne’s play, Vertumnus’ task is to disclose the four ages of man aligned with the four humours (via the theatrical backdrop of the zodiacal calendar); no mention is made of Pomona or of the attendant Chaerilus or Sylvanus.¹⁶ By process of logical deduction then, the excerpt from Wake’s letter would seem to be best aligned with the plot sequence of *Alba* rather than that of *Vertumnus*.

Speculation as to what the title “Alba” refers to is purely conjectural. Possibly, the title is derived from the Alban legacy in Ovid where Alba Sylvius son of Latinus Sylvius, succeeded his father in the Kingdom of Latium and reigned for thirty-six years.¹⁷ Alba Longa, city of Latium, was also where Alba descendant of Aeneas ruled.¹⁸

During the rule of the Christmas Prince at Oxford (Revels 1607-1608), Thomas Tucker

---

was given the title of “Alba Fortunata, Lord of St John’s”.¹⁹ Boas states that “Alba Fortunata” refers in this case to Sir Thomas White’s foundation (St John’s College);²⁰ however, as Burton was a student of Christ Church and Alba was performed in the renovated hall at Christ Church in a totally different context, this particular connection seems unlikely. “Alba” is also the Scottish Gaelic name for Scotland, and therefore, perhaps a double entendre may be guessed at, concerning the play’s installment as ‘headline act’ amongst entertainments offered for a king of Scottish heritage. Burton’s fellow playwright, Matthew Gwinne, wrote a short entertainment in which three St. John’s undergraduates dressed as sibyls greeted King James as a descendant of Banquo on his arrival at Oxford on 27th August, 1605.²¹ All things considered, given the classical and Vitruvian context in which the University of Oxford sought to locate its entertainments that year, probably the Ovidian /Ajax connection concerning Alba is most likely. In this vein, the possibility of the association with Leuke (Leuce) Island, consecrated to the god Apollo also becomes apparent. Leuce Island, alternatively referred to as Alba (meaning white), had close ties with Apollo’s cult.²² The connection with the divine island of Apollo would seem to support the notion of a classically derived title, especially when one considers that:

In Alba… a flock of doves was released from a net and flew out into the hall. One made straight for the queen where she sat in her throne, and there was speculation whether a bird had been specially trained or the trick had been turned by some stage designer’s artifice²³

---

²⁰ Boas, Christmas Prince, p. xix.
²¹ Boas, Christmas Prince, p. xii.
²² The temple of the Hyperboreans in Leuce Island, Part 1, Ch. V, 3 & 6. According to Ovid, even the island of Delos had the epithet Alba (Hesiod XXI 82). http://www.pelasgians.org/website1/05_03.htm (accessed 27/03/2012). Note: Alba also means ‘dawn’; alternatively it may refer to the Medieval erotic lyric alba [personal correspondence].
²³ REED 2: 1022. See also: Orrell, The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, p. 37.
This particular theatrical effect would appear to fit quite neatly with the legend about the white birds which attended Achilles’ temple on the divine island of Apollo; moreover, Hecateus tells of the white swans which first flew around Apollo’s temple, “as if they wanted to purify it.”

The wardrobe list from the Oxford accounts also details “I flexen or yellow hayre to the shoulders for Apollo” and “One Robe for Apollo of cloth of Tissue blewe”, which again reinforces the classical connection. Of course, this inclusion of Apollo in Alba might also attest to the possibility of Alba existing as satyr play to Ajax Flagellifer, rather as Sophocles’ Ichneutae was conceived as satyr play to Ajax (given the general context and available textual evidence of the Oxford plays in August 1605), although such a pairing is probably unlikely.

Lists of costumes hired by the University of Oxford from the children of the Queen’s Revels are extant and detail costumes “of Antique fashions”; as mentioned earlier, Orrell highlights the inclusion of “pans and shepherdesses”. Further to these notations, there is an order for “10 satyr goates beards and pols of short hayre of [(.)] goates color.” In the same list there is also a request for “1 long black beard and hayre vncurreled for (k) magitian” which adds an element of extra interest as regards conjecture concerning the play’s content.

Set design seems to have been suitably extravagant for a performance styled for a King. Large triangular periaktoi were used to aid in effecting scene changes within Jones’ Serlian Neo-Roman styled theatre. Sebastiano Serlio was an Italian mannerist

---

24 Part 1: Chapter V. 6. [http://www.pelasgians.org/website1/05_03.htm](http://www.pelasgians.org/website1/05_03.htm) (accessed 27/03/2012).
25 Garman states that historically, satyr plays were written by tragedians and performed together with the tragedies. He asserts that “Sophocles’ Ichneutae…may be a parody of Ajax… later recounted by Ovid (Metamorphoses 2.676-707)”. See: “The Social Context”, Greek Tragedies. [http://kengarman.tripod.com/greektragedies/index.html](http://kengarman.tripod.com/greektragedies/index.html) (accessed 27/04/2012).
26 REED, Vol. 1, p. 289. See also: Orrell, p. 35.
architect “whose expressed aim was to reinterpret the Roman theatre for Renaissance courts and audiences”. Orrell continues:

His [Serlio’s] scheme proceeded by a deliberate method to accommodate the circular and radial inheritance from antiquity to the rectilinear demands of modern theatre conditions... At Christ Church, Simon Basil went to great lengths to establish a radial auditorium centred on the ‘Isle’ or state, even though the hall was long and comparatively narrow.  

In the second book of his series Tutte l’opere dell’architettura et prospectiva (the second book being entitled On Perspective) Serlio details three theatrical scenes (comic, tragic and satyric) along with architectural drafts for a stage plan and cross section. Together, these highly influential designs formed the effective blueprint for the theory and construction of stage design in Early Modern and Renaissance theatre. The triangular periaktoi which were covered in “cloathes painted” and which were “turned according to need”, were derived from Vitruvius. As far as the use of these periaktoi was concerned during the Oxford performances, it is recorded that Alba required just the one scene as backdrop; Ajax apparently required three different scenes.  

We have evidence then, that the hall at Christ Church was ‘state-of-the-art’ in terms of contemporary theatrical design, but the question remains, how was Alba actually received? Burton wrote a letter to his brother on 11th August, 1605, commenting that the part of the play which he had written was “well liked, especially those scenes of the Magus.” Yet this letter and indeed the statement it contains re the

---

29 Orrell, The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, p. 58.  
30 Orrell, The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, pp. 57-8.  
31 Orrell, The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, p. 33.  
32 Orrell, The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, p. 32.  
33 Orrell, The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb, p. 37.  
reception of *Alba* remain as a curious artefact, especially when placed alongside John Nichols’ report of the royal reception of *Alba*. Nichols states:

> The royal spectators were not amused. According to a visitor from Cambridge, who apparently saw the performance, “The Comedy began between nine and ten, and ended at one… In the acting thereof, they brought in five or six men almost naked… and also many rustical songs and dances, which made it very tedious, insomuch that if the Chancellors of both Universities had not intreated his Majesty earnestly, he would have gone before half the Comedy had been ended.”

Nichols’ report of the King’s apparent displeasure concerning the performance of *Alba* might be viewed in a different light, however, if one takes into account the story concerning the altered seating plan in the Great Hall and the consequences that this change entailed.

In his introduction to *Early Modern Academic Drama*, Jonathan Walker refers the reader to the manuscript leaf which supplies the cover illustration for the latter volume. As it turns out, this illustration is of some importance - it details a design for the adaptation of the Great Hall at Christ Church, Oxford into a theatre for a visit by James I in 1605 (this is the same drawing, of course, which Orrell refers to in his paper on the Serlian stage at Christ Church). The plays to be presented on this stage, namely, *Alba*, *Ajax Flagellifer* and *Vertumnus* were all written in Latin; King James, like Elizabeth I, was an accomplished Latinist. The three Latin plays were regarded as

---

35 The dates in this letter are unable to be confirmed and it is therefore not certain whether Burton was referring to the [royal] reception of his part in the play or simply alluding to another unsourced assessment of its content. The date given in the letter concerning the publication date of *Alba* is incorrect; the date of the letter itself may also be incorrectly cited.

36 Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam*, p. 31. John R. Elliott Jr. has recently indicated that the author of this report may have been Henry Mowtl:oe, fellow of King’s College, who once possessed the manuscript. John R. Elliott Jr., *From Page to Performance: Essays in Early English Drama* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1995), p. 194.


38 Orrell, “The Theatre at Christ Church,” pp. 129-140.

39 Samuel Daniel’s *The Queen’s Arcadia (Arcadia Reformed)* which was performed before Queen Anne and Prince Henry on 30 August, was written in English.
the main drawcard in the list of dramatic attractions which had been organised by the University for the king and his entourage. The extended programme of events over the three days of the royal visit included, as the visiting Venetian Ambassador detailed in his letters home, “disputations in the daytime” and “comedies in the evening after dinner”.\(^40\) Orrell maintains that *Alba*, *Ajax Flagellifer* and *Vertumnus* were, amongst the general programme of entertainment, “the academic plays, illustrating the breadth of classical drama and the vitality of the universities’ rhetorical culture…”; “…Oxford’s heart was surely set on the Latin plays.”\(^41\) These assertions raise two important considerations, as far as the focus of the early chapters of this thesis is concerned. First, Orrell’s comments serve to demonstrate the extent to which the university pursued a curriculum centred on a classical and rhetorical theatrical/oratorial tradition. Secondly, they illustrate the degree of talent which the young Robert Burton must have exhibited with regard to this medium of expression. Such observations are further enhanced when we read Burton’s succinct, but telling comment in his letter to his brother William (re *Alba*): “I had great thankes for my paynes of Dr Kinge, our new Deane.”\(^42\) This venture into the realms of university theatre was of no small importance to the young scholar. Burton’s interest in theatre, along with his apparent talent in that arena, seem confirmed, when we consider Oxford’s apparent endorsement of him at this significant time.

An intriguing inclusion in the list of the “Actorum Nomina” in Burton’s subsequent play *Philosophaster* (performed on Feb. 16, 1617, some twelve years after the performance of *Alba*) details “Sr. Kinge, the Bishop of London’s sonne” as playing the role of *Desiderius Dux* (the Duke of Osuna).\(^43\) This was Robert King son of John King (the “new Deane” whom Burton refers to in his letter) and brother of Henry King,
English poet and Bishop of Chichester. John King was created Dean of Christ Church in August 1605 and appointed Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University from 1607-1610. Gowland lists King as being amongst those who “apparently supported Calvinist Canon John Prideaux, Laud’s arch-enemy and Regius Professor of Divinity”. One wonders whether Burton had an ongoing acquaintance with the King family, or whether perhaps the choice of Robert King as Desiderius Dux in Philosophaster was arbitrary.

The transformation of the Great Hall at Oxford then, was significant. For the first time, certain structural and architectural alterations were made to an English dramatic stage, with a view to enhancing audience perspective; seating arrangements were thus specifically designed to “optimize the perspectival effects.” This is where we start to see a little light forming, with reference to Nichols’ source’ rather denigrating report. The design of the actual auditorium was under the direction of Comptroller Simon Basil who modelled “much of the spectatorial space on wood-cuts and descriptions in Sebastiano Serlio’s Tutte l’opere dell’architettura (1566 edition).”

Walker continues:

…Despite the confluence of classical authority, modern learnedness, and cutting edge technical innovations in staging and seating, the plan for the auditorium had to be changed because several of James’s courtiers objected to the placement of “the Isl for the kinge, a foote eleuated aboue the ground.”

The consternation which ensued in this instance (subsequent to the courtiers’ observation of the placement of the King’s “Isle”), is worth noting:

---

They (but especiallie Suffolk) vttterlie disliked the stage at Christchurch, and above all, the place appointed for the Chayre of estate because yt was no higher and the Kinge soe placed that the Auditory could see but his Cheeke onlie… on the Sondaye morning the matter was debated in the Councell chamber, in the end the place was removed… 48

The result of the “Councell” appraisal of the King’s seating was that the halpace was moved further back into the auditorium to a more conventional location, where the King could be more easily viewed by all those present. This move was not so commendable from the point of view of the desired perspectival effects however, and this is where Nichols’ source’s estimation of Alba’s reception might well be re-assessed, or at least offered in a more considered light. Somewhat ironically, given the no doubt well-meant interventions of the nobles concerned (who were, it must be noted, working very much against the recommendations of the stage workmen), the records state:

The place was… sett in the midst of the hall, but too farr from the stage (vizt.) xxvij. feete, soe that there were manye longe speeches delivered , which neyther the kinge nor anye neere him could well here or vnderstand.” 49 [Italics mine]

The conflicting and indeed, competitive accounts supplied by both Isaac Wake and Nichols’ Cambridge source do not add to the clarity of any assessment that may be ventured with regard to how the king actually received the plays which were put on before him at Christ Church in 1605. One can assume however, that an impaired view of the stage for productions that went on for “at least three hours” 50 – not to mention the fact that James could hardly hear what was being said – would be thoroughly disadvantageous. Somewhat amusingly then (given the circumstances), when the

Cantabrigian observer states that the King “fell asleep”\textsuperscript{51} during *Vertumnus*, the Oxford chronicler [Wake] states (more discreetly):

It [Vertumnus] was worthy indeed of lasting for the cycle of a whole year but, so that leisure for resting might be granted the princes who were exhausted by the great weariness of that day, the sun seemed to have traversed its zodiac more quickly.\textsuperscript{52}

Likewise, concerning the performance of *Ajax Flagellifer*, the Oxonian commentator remarks:

The choice of its argument was made not only because it provided, with a splendid and stately variety of representations, abundant delight for such great spectators, but because the matter also seemed to be very appropriate for both courtly and academic ears and minds.\textsuperscript{53}

The unnamed Cantabrigian, in reply, proffers:

The King was very weary before he came thither, but much more wearied by it, and spoke many words of dislike.\textsuperscript{54}

Ultimately then, the truth of the matter as to whether King James found Burton’s *Alba* so tedious that he had to be entreated to stay, or whether his apparent boredom was simply due to an unfortunate and ill-conceived alteration to an innovative seating plan (or a day spent indulging in too many disputations, food and wine, etc.) may never, with any degree of certainty, be adequately fathomed. Alan Nelson offers the suggestion that “…James was not much enamoured of plays in any case…. His main purpose in

\textsuperscript{51} Nichols, *The Progresses of King James*, p. 553.
\textsuperscript{52} REED, Vol. 2, p. 1024
\textsuperscript{53} REED, Vol. 2, p. 1023.
\textsuperscript{54} Nichols, *The Progresses of King James*, p. 550.
attending a play, was not to see, but to be seen”, a strong tradition for the monarchs of the period. Yet given James’ reception of George Ruggle’s *Ignoramus*, for example, where the monarch reportedly “liked it so much that, two months after its premiere, he returned to Cambridge and had it performed once more and probably saw it again in 1616”, we observe that James, under the right circumstances, could be very supportive of the spectacle being performed before him.

The fact remains that Burton’s inaugural ‘performance’ as playwright seems to have occurred at an important moment in the history of English theatre, indeed, one in which the technical innovations employed evidently exceeded the more prosaic socio-political inclinations of the court. One assumes that it wasn’t coincidence that placed Burton’s work squarely in the spotlight of the Oxford academic stage at this time, but rather a degree of motivation and talent on his part. If we are to believe Sir Thomas Bodley’s assessment of the efforts of Burton [et al (?)], one might be persuaded that any problem with the plays lay with the actual acting rather than the scripting of them. Nonetheless, Burton’s subsequent effort at the writing of a play (*Philosophaster*) seems to have been comparatively precipitate in its production. When one takes into account Burton’s no doubt ongoing commitments to study (he did not achieve the rank of *philosophus primi vicenarii* until December 1607), one assumes Burton was inspired by what he viewed as his earlier success therefore, in late August 1605 at Christ Church. *Philosophaster* was written just a year after Burton’s initial experience as playwright, and yet, it too, has a singular history. Although it was written in 1606, Burton’s second charted involvement in the theatre, and indeed his first wholly independent stage effort, was not actually given its first performance until some eleven

---

57 See footnote 12.
years later, in February 1617. The possible reasons for such a delay in the play’s performance are speculative. Kathryn Murphy has suggested that the opportunity to once again perform before the king\(^{60}\) may have been a motivating factor in Burton’s curious timing. A play by John Marston entitled *Parasitaster* or *The Fawne* was also produced at this time (performed by The Children of the Queen’s Revels at Blackfriars in 1604).\(^{61}\) Given the similarity in the title, if not the actual content (although Marston’s *Parasitaster* also treats the practice of certain abuses with regards to the problematic relationship between courtiers and Crown, thus echoing a theme in *Philosophaster*), perhaps Burton considered that the time was not optimal for his own production. Of course, in the period of the interim, we know that Burton was hard at work on his other rather larger and more commanding offering, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Over the years, the critical reception of *Philosophaster* has been both sporadic and problematic. Scholars such as Murphy assert that “the later activities of its author… hamper readings of the text on its own terms.” Murphy’s own response to the play is to restrict its imputed commentary to the failed 1605 Gunpowder Plot. In constraining the reading of *Philosophaster* in this fashion, however, Murphy risks excising other contributory factors which might serve to better contextualise this play, in terms of its author’s relation to (and commentary upon), evolving contemporary issues. Considering Burton didn’t secure a substantial preferment until he was fifty-five years of age,\(^{62}\) along with the fact that he lived at (or in the vicinity of) Oxford University for the most part of his life, one assumes that the political, cultural and sociological status of the university and its masters and students were of great, if not vital interest to him. Bearing this in mind, Burton’s play might well offer a certain socio-political commentary, but

---

\(^{60}\) Kathryn Murphy, “Jesuits and Philosophasters: Robert Burton’s Response to the Gunpowder Plot”, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 1:1 (Spring 2009), 119.


\(^{62}\) At this time (1624), Lord Berkeley gave Burton the rectory of Seagrave. See: O’Connell, *Robert Burton*, pp. 25-6.
my own research suggests that this commentary was less exclusively engaged, and more like Burton’s own apparent personality, catholic, philosophically informed and wide-ranging.\textsuperscript{63} In many ways, the project of this thesis, is to refine this point.

\textsuperscript{63} That is, the inherent thesis of \textit{Philosophaster} may be interpreted as commenting on more than one issue. For example, it may be read as a critique of University-Court practices, yet it may also sustain the possibility of alternative readings, as scholars such as Kathryn Murphy and Connie McQuillen have demonstrated.
Chapter 1

Philosophaster: Historical Sources and Context

In this chapter, I commence with an investigation of the possible sources of influence on Burton’s conceptual and compositional framework of *Philosophaster*; I also seek to determine those traditions (cultural, political and philosophical) which might have informed Burton’s satirical drama. My investigation will centre, at least initially, on the heritage of the university plays as they emerged from the early liturgical/miracle dramaturgy and English School Drama.

In tracing the dramaturgical paradigms which informed Burton’s experience and therefore his artistic process, we see that Burton’s *Philosophaster* was not so much an accident of spontaneous theatrical gesture, but rather a consciously sustained working out of his own socio-political, cultural and literary/dramaturgical heritage and experience. As a humanist scholar in the tradition of Erasmus, More, Melanchthon and Vives, Burton produced a play in which the elements of construction and delivery were not only expository of the humanist tradition, they were highly defensive of it. Nonetheless, Burton’s *Philosophaster* falls less into the strategically manipulative Humanist model that Cartwright proposes,¹ and more into the stereotypical paradigm of Roman New Comedy.

¹ Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 56; 75-7. Cartwright sees the humanist tradition as evoking “pedagogical drama’s affective power”, citing the play of character “against stereotype” as being instrumental in delivering the latter, arousing audience *pathos* and therefore interest, agreement and sympathy. I do not refute this view. However in the case of *Philosophaster*, I believe that Burton, in fact,
Philosophaster is overtly instructive (and entertaining) in the Plautine-Terentian sense. Burton doesn’t choose to “play a character against its stereotype”; rather he relies on the template of that specific stereotype to help deliver his didactic message. In this way Philosophaster is closer to the Italian quattrocento dramatists’ appropriation of the dramatic structures of Plautus and Terence than it is to other more contemporary interpretations of that tradition. As far as archetypal precedents go, I am of the opinion that Burton (whether coincidentally or not) owed a considerable debt to such Quattrocento writers as Pier Paolo Vergerio and Leon Battista Alberti.

The locating and foregrounding of formative sources would appear to be a valid and indeed, even an essential exercise, if one is to arrive at a critically enlightened reading not only of Philosophaster, but also of the later The Anatomy of Melancholy. Socio-political factors affecting the nature and sociological impact of university scholarship in Early Modern England are also investigated, with a view to better understanding the true nature of Burton’s university play. A critical analysis of Burton’s Philosophaster is offered, with due regard to these considerations.

A Short History of University Theatre in England circa 1480-1615

In tracing the possible contributing sources which might have influenced Robert Burton’s writing of Philosophaster, we also delineate the history of university theatre which both inspired and informed Burton’s early interest in the stage. Moreover, in determining those factors which contributed to the end-product which was

utilises the dramatic force of playing directly into stereotype (and therefore more closely imitating the classical models) to facilitate the delivery of his message.

Adapted from Cartwright, Theatre and Humanism, p. 76. See also note 14 of this chapter.
Philosophaster, we enter into two discrete, but aligned areas of scholarly investigation. First, the evolution of the university play is traced, from its early liturgical and recreational origins through to its more comprehensive incorporation into academic and court culture. Secondly, the pedagogical origin of the university play is examined. The university drama is assessed as exemplifying the expository dimension of a system of education which evolved alongside a burgeoning cultural expansion, and concurrent development of English national identity.

University drama originated with the performance of early liturgical or miracle plays associated first with King’s College at Cambridge (circa 1482) and Magdalen College, at Oxford. Magdalen became “the home of the classical Renaissance” in Oxford. Records of documented evidence of university drama are scarce, until we reach the period circa 1485, when the first recorded Christmas lord, or “Lord of misrule” (Rex fabarum or Rex Regni Fabarum) is registered at Oxford’s Merton College. With the formal establishment of these ludic exercises in “inversion of status” and the creation of mock dignitaries and ceremonies, the status of the stage as a valid ground for expository expression under the aegis of the university was advanced. Commentary supporting this development comes from sources such as Protestant Bishop John Ponet’s An Apologie Fully Answeringe… a Blasphemous Book (1556). Bishop Ponet had previously published A Defence for Marriage of Priestes by scripture and auncient writers proved (1548). The Roman Catholic civil lawyer and polemicist, Thomas Martyn replied to Ponet’s Defence with his treatise of 1554 (A Traictise Declarying… that the Pretensed Marriage of Priests... is no Mariage), a work which Oxford playwright and cleric Nicholas Udall was rumoured to have assisted with.

Martyn had apparently acted as Lord of Misrule in his earlier years at Oxford, a fact

---

4 Boas, University Drama, p. 2.
5 Boas, University Drama, pp. 4-5.
6 Boas, University Drama, pp. 4-5.
7 Boas, University Drama, pp. 6-7.
which did not go by unnoticed by Bishop Ponet, who took the opportunity to voice the following opinion concerning Martyn and his work:

…in playnge the Christmas lords minion in New Colledge in Oxford in thy foles coat… thou didest learne thy boldness, and lost thy witt, and began to put of all shame and to put on all impudencye

Ponet then, was obviously unimpressed with the Marian polemicist. Nonetheless, as Boas infers, these words serve to confirm the ludic nature of the Oxford dramaturgical experiments at this time, validating the premise of a burgeoning theatrical tradition. Humanism and its process of classical revision and revival did much to promote the cause of drama at the English universities. Theatre historian Frederick Boas makes good use of the Magdalen accounts when he cites the changing use of terminology as an evolutionary marker in relation to the development of university drama. Boas reports:

In 1486, 1487 and 1495 ‘ludos’ (or ‘lusores’) is used; in 1502, 1512 and 1631 ‘interludia’ is substituted; in 1532 ‘ludus’ reappears in ‘ludus baccalaureorum’; in 1535, 1539, 1540, 1541 and 1544 ‘comedia’ and ‘tragedia’ take the place of the earlier terms. Without unduly pressing the phraseology, it is a fair inference that we see reflected in it the broad lines of transition from the morality to the interlude and thence to the comedy and tragedy of classical origin or inspiration.

The evolution of university drama at this point can be traced at Oxford, through the playwright Nicholas Grimald, and at Cambridge, through the playwrights John Christopherson and Thomas Watson. The early scriptural dramas which were penned (especially in the case of the latter two playwrights) were largely didactic and devotional. However, as the era advanced, so did the range of genres; vernacular and comedic pieces were soon added to the university repertoire. The records of this

---

8 Boas, University Drama, p. 7.
9 Boas, University Drama, pp. 11-12.
10 Boas, University Drama, pp. 11-12.
evolution, nonetheless, remain sparse. Boas laments that Grimald’s “two Oxford comedies have disappeared” and that “nothing survives of the academic dramas in the vulgar tongue to whose existence Bucer bears witness at Cambridge in 1555.”

What is interesting at this time (especially with regard to Robert Burton’s subsequent literary efforts), is that the names of Terence and Plautus in particular, keep recurring in the list of sources for the university plays. The heritage of classic or neo-classic comedy as rediscovered by the humanists was well and truly beginning to make its mark on the university stage. The historical records show that the liturgical and moral genres became increasingly side-lined, as comedies and tragedies with plots and characters borrowed from the classical corpus increased in number. Many of these new comedies were written in the English vernacular, especially those which gained popularity beyond the university stage. Nicholas Udall wrote *Ralph Roister Doister*, a play which is generally regarded as the first “English comedy” in 1553. *Ralph Roister Doister* draws heavily upon the Plautine-Terentian heritage and although written in the vernacular, it still contains 35 Latin words, as well as some dialogue in “rustic dialect”. *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, which theatre historian Martin Wiggins attributes to William Stevenson was most probably performed at Cambridge circa 1553. This play contains just two Latin words and again includes some dialogue written in rustic dialect. Cartwright suggests that this play gains advantage by “playing a character against its stereotype”, facilitating the theatrical space as a site in which “the play explores theatre’s emotional life”. Boas claims *Jack Juggler* (attributed to Nicholas Udall, circa 1555) took advantage of the workings of the Plautine “confusion of

---

11 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 69.
identity” in *Amphitruo* and turned it into “an attack on transubstantiation.” Wiggins however, makes no mention of this particular reading.

The Aristophanic and Plautine-Terentian corpus then, such as it was, was providing fertile matter for contemporary translation even in these early days of university drama. As we shall see, these plays were also informed by Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italian drama, and other works of continental translation relating to the classical corpus. Bruce R. Smith cites the mid-1480s performance of Seneca’s *Hippolytus* by the students of Pomponius Laetus’ academy in Rome (probably witnessed at the time by English scholar and educator William Lily) as being hugely influential in challenging the “prominence that had belonged for centuries to morality plays and cycles that dramatized the great events of the Bible”. Seneca and Euripides along with Plautus and Terence were challenging and to some extent reinventing the inheritance of the medieval past. Yet what was to give university drama its biggest boost, was not so much its matrix of classical resources and humanist endeavour, but rather the association it enjoyed with the court. This association began in earnest with Queen Elizabeth’s visits to Cambridge and Oxford in 1564 and 1566, respectively.

Elizabeth’s visits to the universities provided an impetus to the academic stage in two ways. First, the visiting Queen required entertaining, and with her enjoyment of masques and theatre being generally acknowledged (as were her considerable abilities as a Latinist), the universities were quick to accommodate Her Majesty’s tastes with the performance of diverse “spectacles”. Moreover, in entertaining Elizabeth in this way, the universities were also able to assess royal interest, court royal favour and therefore, potentially at least, gain access to royal patronage. More often than not, however, once the Queen had departed from the festivities, the universities were left with the

---

15 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 69.
considerable debt which tended to accumulate with the privilege of such entertaining. The Colleges and, in some cases, even the scholars themselves were left to pay the balance of the debt. Secondly, the new necessity to entertain demanded a more transparent fiscal policy; universities were now forced to keep more detailed records of accounts. As a result of this energetic new book-keeping, entries such as the following occur (with reference to the “Expenses of Christechurche by occaision of the Queenes Maties cominge thetther”):

12 Sept. to Rob. Burton & his boy for v dayes after xvid the daye and Willm Carter and Rob. Hart and Ouens man as longe after xd th daye taking down th scaffolds, stage, porche and setting vp partitions beaten down before… xixS. Ijd.

14 Sept. [items similar to those above, and] to Berell for iiij dayes labor about the playes and alterations of the stage… ijs. iiijd.18

Records such as these are important in that they enable a more accurate historical rendering of the comparative importance, cost and actual nature of the genre of plays being performed at the universities during this period.

With regard to the plays which the universities chose to put on for their royal patron at this time, we see Plautus (the fabula palliata: New Comedy)19 coming to the fore again. On the opening night of the Queen’s visit to Cambridge in 1564, Plautus Aulularia was the play that was selected for performance. This Plautine comedy was acted on a Sunday evening in a Cambridge college chapel.20 Considering that the appropriateness of attending plays on a Sunday was still a key subject under debate by Gager and Rainolds in 1591-92, this latter performance in 1564 seems quite remarkable. It is interesting to note that a play “of Sophocles, entytuled Ajax flagelifer” was also performed at this time before Elizabeth, predating the play of the same title (although

18 Boas, University Drama, p. 106; Note: The “Rob. Burton” cited here is not the Robert Burton of this thesis.
20 Boas, University Drama, p. 93.
reportedly not of the same content) which was performed before James I in Oxford in 1605, the time at which Burton’s *Alba* was presented. From the available records, we see that during the period 1564-1578, the most popular (that is, the most regularly performed) of the dramatic repertory at the universities continued to be those plays by the Roman dramatists, especially Plautus, as well as those plays derived from translations of the growing body of work made available by the humanists. This trend continued through to the 1580s, when university drama “varied its traditional forms, coincident with important developments in English literature.”\(^{21}\) English history plays also began to come into vogue during this period. These plays were largely Senecan in influence. The first of these was the trilogy *Richardus Tertius* by Thomas Legge (1579), following on from the more mythopoeic *Gorbodoc* written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville in 1562.

During the early to mid-1500s, we also see the influence of contemporary Italian comedy permeating university drama, with Ariosto’s *I Suppositi* (1509) providing a substantial source for George Gascoigne’s *Supposes* (1566), a comedy which also drew on Plautus’s *Captivi* for its plot. Other Italian playwrights influencing humanist enterprise and the academic stage during the first three decades of the sixteenth century were Machiavelli, Aretino, Lodovico, Dolce, Grazzini and Giordano Bruno.\(^ {22}\) These writers tended to adapt “the types and techniques of Roman comedy… to the conditions of Renaissance Italy”\(^ {23}\), combining such a heritage with the additional heritage of the Italian *novella*. J.B. Leishman cites *Laelia*, a “metrical and considerably altered version of a French prose translation of an Italian prose comedy entitled *Gl’ Ingannati*” as being exponent of the continental imports, with the character of the pedant being enhanced

\(^ {21}\) Boas, *University Drama*, p. 111.
\(^ {22}\) Boas, *University Drama*, p. 133.
\(^ {23}\) Boas, *University Drama*, p. 133.
considerably in the ‘English version’ of the play, performed at Queens’ College, Cambridge on 1 March 1594/5.\textsuperscript{24}

Reflecting upon the research efforts of Boas and Leishman, I believe that the quattrocento Italian playwrights, for example, Algerio, Alberti, Pisani and Mezzo, tend to be somewhat neglected in the research into the dramaturgical sources of sixteenth century English humanism and its playwrights. This situation represents a significant oversight, particularly with reference to Robert Burton, whose \textit{Philosophaster} in many ways has more in common with Vergerio’s \textit{Paulus} and Alberti’s \textit{The Play of Philodoxus} than it has with certain other texts it has historically been aligned with. If one compares Burton’s play with \textit{Philodoxus}, for example, we see not only more overt similarities in dialogic form (variations on Plautus’s “oratorical dialogue” combined with “Terentian” monologue used to clarify the plot or moralize, for example),\textsuperscript{25} we also see the appropriation of the standard authorial “distancing device” in the prologue, whether or not (given the play’s delayed performance date) Burton actually required its use. Jones and Guzzi state:

\begin{quote}
The authors of many humanistic comedies claim… that they wrote their plays as youths or university students – a complaisant allusion, probably, to Terence’s prologue to \textit{Heauton timorumenos}. Alberti, for example, says that he wrote the first version of his play while a student of canon law at Bologna, before he was twenty.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Burton of course, contends that he wrote his play eleven years previous to its actual production date, “but [it was] hidden among the roaches and moths until this day”.\textsuperscript{27} One wonders if perhaps he is entirely truthful in this claim, and whether the acknowledged “renovations” were more comprehensive in nature than mere

\textsuperscript{24} J.B. Leishman, \textit{The Three Parnassus Plays (1598 -1601)}, (London: Nicholson and Watson Ltd), 1949, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{26} Jones and Guzzi, \textit{Philodoxus}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{27} Burton, \textit{Philosophaster}, p. 37.
adjustments. Alternatively, perhaps the play was only altered minimally; we have no way of assessing such claims. The fact is, however, that the content of Burton’s prologic statement seems to coincide with the kind of “distancing device” employed by Alberti, which was in turn modelled on the self-defensive artistic strategies of Terence.

Burton also tends to use the Roman custom of pairing characters (Polumathes/Philobiblos; Eubulus/Cratinus; Stephanio/Polupistos, etc), and stylistically follows the pattern of “character opposition” as regards moral types, a ploy which is typically representative of classically inspired early European drama such as Fernando de Rojas’s La Celestina for example, a work which Burton was familiar with, and referred to on more than one occasion in the Anatomy.). The strategy of character opposition works well in the humanist moralistic enterprise; it creates a bridge between two worlds, between idealism and the possibilities (and results) of transgression, providing a useful didactic vehicle. Certain other aspects of Quattrocento influence inform Burton’s Philosophaster; I will offer further examples and pursue this line of argument as my investigation of Burton’s oeuvre progresses.

Boas cites Gascoigne’s production of Supposes performed first at Gray’s Inn in 1566, (and then later at Oxford’s Trinity College in 1582) as being the incisive mark of introduction of Italian literary and cultural influence in England (notwithstanding the earlier more generic influence of Laetus’ production of Seneca’s Hippolytus). The first university play generally considered to be of distinct Italian origin was Hymenaeus, a play which was acted at St John’s College, Cambridge in 1578/9. (135) Hymenaeus is

---

28 Jones and Guzzi, Philodoxus, p. 92.
30 In fact, Burton would have known Celestina as Pornoboscodidascalus Latinas, from the Neo-Latin translation by Kaspar Barth (1624). Reference is made to the “Spanish bawd/Spanish Celestina” in AOM pp. II/34 and III/125.
31 Boas, University Drama, p. 133.
32 Boas, University Drama, p. 135.
of special interest, because it bears specific correlation to Burton’s later *Philosophaster*, as I will explain.

*Hymenaeus* is a play loosely based on Boccacio’s *Decamerone*. Sutton defines it as being a comedy in the Plautine-Terentian tradition; its author is usually designated as “anonymous”. *Hymenaeus* makes use of what we now call “the significant name”, that is, the play’s stock characters are named according to their inherent personal qualities. In the first three decades of the sixteenth century in Italy, the merchant, the gallant, the parasite and the braggart, traditional stock figures of Roman comedy were in fact updated, and joined by the “more modern figures” of the clerical confessor, the doctors of medicine and of law, the sorcerer, the more socially elevated heroine and the pedant. *Hymenaeus* incorporates in its plot a university town (in this case, Padua), the standard authoritarian father, and a student (‘Erophilus’) who is one of the two rivals competing for the love of a beautiful heroine (Julia). These elements are placed alongside the usual New Comedy trappings of deception, thieves, rich merchants and quacks. The name of the medical braggart and quack in *Hymenaeus* is Pantomagus (“falsely entitled a doctor” as the servant Pantaleo describes him), a name which Burton likewise chooses for his ‘quack physician’ in *Philosphaster*. In the character of the Innkeeper, we see the embodiment of the sort of “town vs gown” sociological conflict which Burton was later to use to such effect in *Philosophaster*:

> And indeed in this city there’s a certain breed of imperious fellows, proud, clever, sophistic, who in a word they call scholars. If I could come across one of those, how I’d sent my puppies [dogs] against him! For we townsmen who live in Padua pursue them with hatred, worse than dog and snake. But this doesn’t happen just to us, they say that it occurs elsewhere too. But why do I

---


35 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 133.

demand they fall into my nets? Everywhere they squabble and swap syllogisms about subtleties, but don’t own even a grain of silver…

Within the paragraph dedicated to the Prologue in *Hymenaeus*, there are references to Plautus, Terence and Menander; the author also protests loudly against suggestions of his appropriating material from these very sources:

…For what certain evil-minded people state, that we are giving you somebody else’s comedy dressed a little bit in a new guise, reveal either their own ignorance, or (if they don’t wish to seem ignorant) their malice…I swear the characters, the stage-set, the slight amount of stage-furniture, and the ending are my own…

These lines seem almost reminiscent of Burton in his prologue to *Philosophaster*, in their stylised and self-defensive posturing, if not in tone.

Already then, we can see at work those influences which, through their establishment in the dramatic canon at Cambridge and Oxford, would have been handed down to Burton, who matriculated from Brasenose in 1593, fourteen years after the St. John’s production of *Hymenaeus*. *Hymenaeus* is described as a play which shows exceptional “technical dexterity, economy of action and dialogue and effective blending of humour and pathos.”

With Cambridge scholar Abraham Fraunce’s production of *Victoria* (circa 1583), a version of Luigi Pasqualigo’s *Il Fedele*, the character of the pedant was enlarged upon still further. Fraunce took the original “interlarding” of the pedants speech, and added still more Latin tags, including quotations from the Latin poets and Catallus, Virgil and Ovid. Fraunce then adds “a number of quotations from Latin works of medieval or Renaissance origin”. Boas comments:

---

39 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 139.
The development of the pedant’s part on these ingenious lines speaks well both for Fraunce’s wide reading and his skill as an adapter.\footnote{Boas, \textit{University Drama}, pp. 143-5.}

What is striking is that upon reading parts of \textit{Philosophaster} or even the \textit{Anatomy}, one might well find oneself saying the same thing about Burton’s “wide reading” and “skills as an adapter”. With the production, therefore, of plays such as \textit{Hymenaeus} and \textit{Victoria} in 1582/3, we are witnessing the tone of the dramatic heritage which Burton as a student, was about to enter. Recently, supporting Boas’ assertion of 1914,\footnote{Boas, \textit{University Drama}, p. 135.} Dana Sutton has argued that Abraham Fraunce may well have written both \textit{Hymenaeus} and \textit{Victoria}.\footnote{Hymenaeus, Introduction, \url{http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/hymen/intro.html} (accessed 5/05/2012).}

We now come to something slightly more provocative in terms of an immediate dramatic precedent with regards to Burton’s era at Oxford, and that is the play \textit{Pedantius}. \textit{Pedantius} was probably produced in 1580/81, and although this play showcased “types” derived once again from Plautine comedy, Boas suggests that for the first time, new and old comedy were combined to introduce “a contemporary figure [Gabriel Harvey] burlesqued in the true Aristophanic vein”.\footnote{Boas, \textit{University Drama}, p. 151.} Certainly the author of \textit{Pedantius} is thorough in his apparent caricature of Harvey, even inserting excerpts from Harvey’s own writing into the dialogue. Again, the interlacing of Latin and Aristotelian apothegms and dialectic are intended to signify and satirize the character of the pedant. Boas, however, also suggests that this new species of comedy was something that belonged to Cambridge rather than Oxford.\footnote{Boas, \textit{University Drama}, p. 151.} This comment itself signifies a trend of some importance with regard to Burton’s \textit{Philosophaster}. In fact it suggests that Burton may well have been working outside the established paradigm of contemporary theatrical tradition at Oxford, when he wrote his play in 1606. Indeed, examining the historical records of plays produced at the two universities at this time, one gets the
sense that in many ways, Burton was “importing a Cambridge-style play into Oxford.”

*Philosophaster* was, as far as one can tell from the distance of historical perspective, not as specifically satirical as *Pedantius*, yet it most certainly pointed a highly critical finger at the institution of the university and the integrity and authenticity of the scholarship (and perhaps some of the people) associated with it. ‘Osuna’ has often been read as Oxford, and certainly some of the dialogue and even the songs Burton inserts in his play make specific mention of his own university town. In order to examine more thoroughly this notion of Burton “importing” a Cambridge genre of play into Oxford, it is expedient to make a further detour into the history of the academic plays at this particular time.

From a survey of the available records, I would tend to agree with Boas’ deduction that Cambridge appears to have been more influenced by the heritage of Italian comedy at this time. Leishman agrees that the “topical and satirical comedies in Latin were… popular at Cambridge”. Moreover, Leishman identifies an attitude of reluctance on the part of the universities to stage plays in any language other than Latin. The records from Oxford, which from 1582 become somewhat more detailed, indicate that Oxford was more conservative in its dramatic tastes, and in the period 1582-1592, the more ambitious theatrical efforts at Oxford tended to take the form of tragedies. *Caesar Interfectus* (1582), written by Christ Church scholar and cleric Richard Eedes (later Dean of Worcester) was a tragedy, as was *Meleager* penned by William Gager. Sutton suggests that *Caesar Interfectus* was in fact staged on the same occasion as the first performance of William Gager’s *Meleager*. Eedes also wrote a lengthy satire at this time, entitled *Iter Boreale* (1583). The latter exposed certain abuses

---

46 Dana Sutton (personal correspondence)  
47 Boas, *University Drama*, pp. 134, 151  
48 Leishman, *Three Parnassus Plays*, p. 41  
49 Leishman, *Three Parnassus Plays*, p. 38  
50 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 160  
which were going on in the diocese of Durham implicating, amongst others, Bishop Richard Barnes and the Canons of the Cathedral Chapter. Lord Burleigh and Sir Francis Walsingham were induced to examine and act upon certain financial misdemeanours which were unearthed due to the revelations of Edes’ *Iter Boreale*. Sutton states:

…collegiate and diocesan wealth consisted chiefly of landholdings, and in reading both academic and ecclesiastical histories of the period, one rapidly becomes aware that squabbles involving real or imagined abuse of rents and leases were endemic; charges of incompetence or maladversion were easily made and readily heard. William Gager, for example, at least imagined that some sort of scandal, probably of this type, was occurring at Christ Church during [Tobie] Mathew’s time as Dean…

This sort of commentary provides a useful and enlightening background regarding the motivations which fuel the sort of textual exposition the reader experiences reading Burton’s *Philosophaster* and the later *Anatomy*. Evidently, Burton arrived at Christ Church at a time when intrigue and innuendo were rife. It is not surprising therefore, that he, like others, might choose to write about what he saw.

In the late 1580s, William Gager was “Oxford’s premiere poet and playwright”. Apart from *Meleager*, Gager also contributed the tragedies *Dido* (1564) and *Ulysses Redux* (1591) as well as the comedy *Riuales* (1583). There is no extant manuscript for *Riuales*, but working from other records (mainly those pertaining to the Rainolds-Gager controversy) Boas states that the play deviated from the usual schema in two ways. Firstly, its main “love protagonists” were rustics. Secondly, *Riuales* had in its cast list, a group of drunken sailors. Other than these anomalies, there were “customary types from classical and humanist comedy”. Rainolds famously found fault with Gager’s provocative *Riuales*, stating that there was “such filth in *Riuales*… as

---

53 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 178.
54 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 182.
can not be matched, I thinke, sure very hardly throughout all Plautus.”

Rainolds’ mention of Plautus in this regard, highlights the extent to which the works of Plautus were considered commonplace enough to be used as a point of synecdochal reference.

The extent to which the classical dramatists influenced Early Modern and Renaissance theatre could be described as pervasive, yet the form that these appropriations often assumed, was of an interesting nature. In his *Thomas Heywood’s Theatre*, Richard Rowland offers the view that New Comedy made its presence felt with an almost “clandestine anonymy”. Rowland in fact suggests that the comedy of ancient Rome was so prevalent in the theatre of Early Modern England, that it was all but background noise, taken for granted. Rowland states that the university playwrights were in fact very poor at acknowledging or even literally quoting their classical sources. Similarly, he states, classical plays were adapted to existing play spaces “as if the ancient plays were indigenous products of the English morality tradition”. Such a critique suggests just how ubiquitous the influence of classical theatre would have been to a scholar such as Burton, who was a product not only of the university system generally, but who had a further specialist interest in theatre.

The playwright William Gager shared several similarities with Robert Burton. Both were students of Christ Church; both wrote their plays within the span of a single decade; both wrote extensively in Latin and both were fond of the use of elaborate dedications and prefatory material in their work (the latter being more evident in Burton’s case, in the prose of the *Anatomy*). Gager’s famous defence of university plays occurred in the 1590s, in the period during which Burton transferred from Brasenose to Christ Church. An examination of the letters and pamphlets which were very publicly passed between Rainolds and Gager reveals quite a lot about the nature of both

---

55 Boas, *University Drama*, p. 182.
humanist study and the influence of classical drama upon the university curricula in this period. On the subject of Rainolds’ orations as Greek Reader at Oxford during this period for instance, Boas states:

…He illustrates freely from the whole range of classical authors, including not only poets, philosophers and historians, but the Greek tragic dramatists, Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence and Seneca. The two last named are amongst the writers whom he most frequently quotes.\textsuperscript{58}

It is not surprising therefore, that in 1593 in response to Gager’s earlier letter, Rainolds returns to those authors he knows so well with a certain literary and rhetorical dexterity, when he says:

If they should not as much as salute Terence, the finest Comical Poet, for pureness of the Latin toung in Tullies judgement: much lesse should they be made well acquainted with Plautus…\textsuperscript{59}

These reiterated and revisited allusions to the classical playwrights emphasise the extent to which the universities and their notable graduates had interiorised the humanist classical learning paradigm, as initially promoted by educators such as Ascham, Elyot and Cheke. The classical and New Comedy playwrights were coercively ‘main-stream’ in the curricula of institutional higher learning. This fact does not detract from the issue at hand (being the controversy over the staging of drama at universities), however, it does suggest that Burton, being a gifted and committed scholar had similarly internalised these lessons from the classical dramatists, to the point where he duly imitated them not only in \textit{Alba} and \textit{Philosophaster}, but also in the later \textit{Anatomy}. Perhaps he did this in much the same way as Rainolds ‘leaked’ that same assimilation of classical drama through the texts of his orations, such was the success of humanist pedagogy.

\textsuperscript{58} Boas, \textit{University Drama}, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{59} Boas, \textit{University Drama}, p. 243.
In understanding how the stage influenced the writing of Robert Burton, both in his early dramatic efforts, and later, in the *Anatomy*, it is expedient to place Burton within the greater historical perspective of the development not only of university drama, but also of the English public stage during this period. The universities were by no means insulated from the professional players and the public stage during the late Elizabethan/early Jacobean period, even although the authorities at both Cambridge and Oxford regularly paid professional travelling companies to leave their environs.\(^6\)

Burton was at Oxford at a time when English theatre, despite the political constraints which worked to contain it, was in a period of intense creative activity and growth. The vernacular was in the ascendant, and this was nourished by a highly interactive combination of the expression of an emerging discourse on English history as it was both invested with, and defined by, a vibrant intersection with foreign literature and history. A quick overview of the status of the English stage at this time demonstrates such activity. For example, in 1574, Elizabeth I issued a patent to The Earl of Leicester’s Men, authorizing them to produce “…stage plays …and other such like… throughout our realm of England”.\(^6\) In 1583, Elizabeth issued a similar warrant for the Queen’s Men. In 1576, James Burbage built ‘The Theatre’ in Shoreditch in London; the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were to use this theatre from 1584-1596. The open air amphitheatre called ‘The Curtain’ opened in 1577; ‘The Rose’ (in Surrey) opened ten years later. Slightly later still, the Lord Chamberlain’s Company was formed (1594).

---


with William Shakespeare as a founder-sharer. In 1597, Shakespeare’s company of actors moved to ‘The Curtain’, and in 1599, the now iconic Globe theatre was opened on Bankside. By the time Burton received his BA in 1602 therefore, he had already been witness to a considerable array of English theatrical landmarks. When you add into this equation the fact that the theatre was often a site of controversy, not only within the universities (for example, the Gager Defence and purported attitudes towards professional actors), but also in the public arena (epitomized by the Jonson/Marston Poetomachia and the famous Injunction of June 1599), one realises the extent to which Burton’s literary compositions might have similarly harboured some of his deepest concerns and commentary.

Burton wrote Philosophaster in 1606. It is expedient to examine what other plays were published at this time, both to see what was in “vogue” during this period, and also, to understand in what ways Philosophaster both exhibited similarities with and deliberately deviated from contemporary trends. An analysis of such information offers considerable commentary not only on Burton’s play, but also on his later prose work.

Of the masques, dialogues, interludes and plays from 1550s onwards (as recorded in Wiggins’ British Drama), a considerable number demonstrate biblical and classical sources. Many of the plays with classical sources are derived from translations of Seneca, Sophocles, Virgil or Ovid. This group includes, for instance, Jasper Heywood’s Hercules furens (1561); Agamemnon and Medea by John Studley (both produced in 1566), Edward Halliwell’s Dido (1564) and the 1564 Latin translation of Sophocles entitled Ajax flagellifer. In many of the comedies listed, the sources are repeatedly denoted as Terence and Plautus, with Horace, Ovid and various biblical sources additionally mentioned. As we progress towards the late sixteenth century, the

---

63 Leishman, Three Parnassus Plays, pp. 44-5.
productions of the “University wits” become more prominent. Lyly contributes *Endymion* (“The Man in the Moon” in 1588), based on Lucian and Ovid. Marlowe gives us *Tamburlaine* in 1587-88 and *Doctor Faustus* in 1588-92; Peele delivers *The Arraignment of Paris* in 1581-84, sourced from mythological and pastoral themes and Greene offers *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589-92), reworking a history about the 13th century English polymath, Roger Bacon. Chapman draws on Terence and Plautus for his *All Fools* (1599-1604); Marston gives us the innovative *The Malcontent*, bringing ‘humor’ characters firmly into the public gaze (1604). Edward Forsett’s iconic portrayal of the scholastic pedant in *Pedantius* is first produced in 1581, and *The Parnassus Trilogy* (1598-1603) asks “what becomes of England’s hopeful young scholars?”64 who having taken their degrees, appear to be at a loss in the acquiring of a secure (and suitable) position in society. In addition to these diverse socio-cultural commentaries, we have William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson adding their genius into the mix. The Jonson-Burton relationship, in particular, invites closer investigation.

Of the two playwrights, Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare, Jonson was the one whom Burton would have been more likely to have been indebted to, as regards the possible influence of literary precedent. In terms of number of quotations and source references used in both *Philosophaster* and the *Anatomy*, Burton’s application to Shakespeare’s work appears to be less than one might expect. Babb comments that Burton “knows some of Shakespeare’s stories from having read the sources”, but references to these “obviously do not mean that he has read the plays”. Babb continues:

---

…he [Burton] shows unquestionable knowledge of Shakespeare’s drama only twice: He refers to *Benedick* and *Beatrice* in the Comedy (3.117) and he quotes the final couplet of *Romeo and Juliet* (3.216).65

For a scholar who recommended play-going as a recreation for the cure of melancholy66, and whose own library included a comprehensive range of classical and contemporary play texts, it seems curious that the allusion to Shakespeare in Burton’s work should be so minimal; perhaps he was influenced by university sentiment at the time.67 On a more prosaic level, perhaps travel to London to attend performances was a course of action less favoured by Burton, the reading of play texts being simpler than journeying to see them performed. On the subject of Ben Jonson, Babb comments:

He [Burton] seems to consider Ben Jonson’s plays more respectable than the rest [of those written by the contemporary English playwrights]… for they have serious satiric purposes and follow classical precedents. Burton’s own Latin comedy… belongs like Jonson’s plays, in the Plautine-Terentian tradition. [In the Anatomy] Burton quotes from or refers to *Every Man out of His Humour*, *Volpone* and *Epicoene*. He quotes from two of Jonson’s translations of Catullus, one of which appears in *Volpone* and the other in *The Forest*.68

We know that Burton had in his personal library, copies of Jonson’s *Eastward Hoe*, *Epicoene*, *Every Man in His Humor*, *The fortunate isles and their union*, *Hymenaei: or the solemnities if masque…* and *The new inne*.69 Moreover, in a markedly obscure moment in his prologue to *Philosophaster*, Burton refers to speculation concerning the possibility of *Philosophaster* “being adapted from a recent play” [Note: originally *evulgari scena*, “a public play”].70 Given that Burton and Jonson had a shared interest in a range of topics, from astrology to alchemy, it is not surprising that some have

---

connected Burton’s play with Jonson’s *The Alchemist*. Certainly, the *Alchemist’s* sources suggest a real compatibility with some of Burton’s preferred sources (Plautus and Erasmus, for example). To my mind however, the latter connection is probably somewhat specious. Broadly speaking, a similar charge of intertextual exchange might just as easily be made concerning *Philosophaster* and Jonson’s *Volpone or Poetaster*, for instance, or for that matter, any number of academic plays which had been performed on the university stages prior to 1617. Conceptual and semantic interchange occurring at this time was rife: poets and playwrights alike borrowed and made commentary on one another’s works, the most extreme example of this being exponent in Jonson and Marston’s *Poetomachia* or “War of the Theatres”.

Both Burton and Jonson were fond of the idea of impersonating, of entertaining strategic notions of surrogacies or “dissembling”, something which no doubt was inherited with their appreciation of and indebtedness to, Roman New Comedy. This fact is evident in the pages of their respective texts. Ian Donaldson comments:

> The pronoun ‘I’ in Jonson’s writing has… at times an oddly plural or impersonal force. Even when he seems most vigorously and unquestionably himself, Jonson may be gathering to himself the attributes, or voicing the sentiments of other writers from other ages.  

This assessment of Jonson’s authorial voice echoes the measure of the humanist and contemporary stylistic standards to which he would have been subscribing; much the same might be said of Robert Burton.

Concerning the section *Ingeniorum discrimina* in the *Discoveries*, Donaldson advises that “Jonson’s movements here may themselves seem fox-like, for throughout…

---

he is in fact borrowing freely from Quintilian”. 73 Memorably, Dryden’s Crites says of Jonson in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy:

…he was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiary of all the others; you track him everywhere in their snow. 74

One of the “masks” Jonson assumed during the course of his professional career, was that of Horace. Jonson translated Horace’s Ars Poetica, and when the duodecimo edition came out in 1640, three years after his death, Jonson’s portrait appeared sketched in Horace’s likeness in William Marshall’s engraved title page. 75 Burton similarly had his features entered into a portrait of Democritus. 76 Burton went so far as to describe Jonson as “England’s arch poet”. 77 One wonders if he used the term “poet” as Jonson did – to describe the “professional role both in and out of the theatre of one whose work and actions met exacting standards.” 78 Both men had a strong and motivating interest in classical scholarship, Jonson becoming more embedded in such studies as life became more professionally rewarding for him; universities bestowed their honours on him, and time and finances were not so constrained. Both writers also had a love of collecting books; they established extensive private libraries, Burton perhaps more famously so. Jonson’s strong ties to Oxford may well have fuelled Burton’s interest in and appreciation of Jonson’s works. Burton was admitted Bachelor of Divinity in 1614; Jonson was made honorary Master of the Arts at Oxford in 1619. Anthony à Wood says of Ben Jonson:

…His own proper industry and addiction to books, especially to ancient poets and classical authors, made him a person of curious learning and judgement, and of singular excellence in the

73 Donaldson, Ben Jonson, p. xv.
74 Donaldson, Ben Jonson, p. xv.
77 Babb, Sanity in Bedlam, p. 48.
art of poetry. Which, with his accurate judgement and performance… having gained… an increasing admiration, Dr Richard Corbett of Ch. Ch. and other poets of this University did in reverence to his parts invite him to Oxon, where continuing for some time in Ch. Ch. in writing and composing plays, he was, as a member thereof, actually created M. of A. in 1619…

Ben Jonson and Robert Burton were vociferous in their objection to fawners at court, informers and mountebanks, and the falling standards of scholarship associated with the universities. In ‘An Epistle to a Friend to Persuade Him to the Wars’ Jonson comments on the dangers of “flatterers, spies/Informers, masters of both arts and lies/Lewd slanderers, soft whisperers that let blood…”. This comment may seem ironic when juxtaposed with the university honour awarded to Jonson, but Donaldson assures us that in 1619 the Oxford ceremony honouring Ben Jonson was “of a more dignified and appropriate nature” than that which Richard Corbett had witnessed at Cambridge during the King’s visit there in 1615.

In summary of Burton’s reference to speculation that Philosophaster was “adapted from a recent play” then, one might deduce that Jonson had significant influence on Burton as both a poet and a playwright, yet I would suggest that this influence was of a general rather than a specific nature. Both men believed, in true Erasmian and Democritian tradition, in satirizing “the follies and misdemeanours of the world”. Moreover, both Burton and Jonson obviously also believed in the efficacy of satire and the poet’s words as potential emollient, or at least, as “cleansing draught”.

In fact, in Burton’s Philosophaster, one can detect shades not only of Jonson, but of Greene, Gascoigne, Ruggle, The Parnassus Trilogy, even ranging as far as Tomkis’ Albumazar, if one investigates closely enough. This is the beauty of both Burton and

---

80 Donaldson, Ben Jonson: A Life, p. 351.
81 Donaldson, Ben Jonson: A Life, p. 351.
82 Donaldson, Ben Jonson: A Life, p. 156.
83 Adapted from Donaldson, Ben Jonson: A Life, p.158.
Jonson – they both reveal footprints in the snow, but they have made the shoes they wear, their own; perhaps Plautus “the flatfoot” might appreciate this particular irony.

**Classical Sources and the Humanist Tradition.**

Returning now to the list of masques, interludes, dialogues and plays recorded in Wiggins’ *British Drama* from the 1550’s onwards, one asks: what does this list mean in terms of determining the factors which might have influenced Burton in his composition of *Philosophaster* and perhaps even his later *Anatomy*? First, it vindicates the authority of the classical sources as being comprehensively instructive in informing many of the plots and characters in not only the plays (comedies and tragedies), but also in other forms of dramatic performance during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The classical sources as adopted by the humanists of the period were infinitely malleable. They could lend themselves to a conceptual exchange and engagement with Christianity; they could be mined for further hybrid pedagogy, and importantly, in terms of accessibility to a fast growing English audience, they could be translated into the vernacular. Given that Cicero was the most influential of the adopted classical scholar/orators of the period, and that he persuasively made the comparison between the art of the actor and the art of the orator, it is not surprising that his

---

85 In his assessment of the influence of classical sources on the work and ideology of Robert Burton, Lepenies refers to the role of Saturn in the Greek comedies. In his role as the “lord of Utopia”, Saturn was closely linked to melancholy. Lepenies suggests that Burton’s “specific description of melancholy and his notion of utopia as a counterbalance to the rule of melancholy” endorses the classical links which Burton explored and employed in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. This link strengthens my particular thesis concerning what I consider to be Burton’s comprehensive, although somewhat under-acknowledged use of classical theatrical sources in both *Philosophaster* and the *Anatomy*.
influence fed directly into the contemporary dramaturgical blossoming. Cicero himself invoked Terence’s *Andria* as an exemplary model for the demonstration of how speechmakers should lay out an argument in terms of structure, style and delivery. The moral lessons contained within *Andria* were also highly translatable to the early modern taste. Moreover, in terms of humanist philosophy, the two great intermediaries promoting Cicero during this time (Quintilian and Horace), were themselves intimately attuned to, and instructive of, the direction of the new pedagogy. Quintilian’s *vir bonus* informed the concept of decorum just as ably as Horace’s *Ars Poetica* pursued the cause of drama.\footnote{Smith, *Ancient Scripts*, p. 27. In fact, Smith reports that two-thirds of the *Ars Poetica* is devoted to the subject of drama.} Erasmus’ blueprint of curriculums and teaching methods (drawn up in 1509 for St. Paul’s School) advocated Terence as being the most suitable guide for imitation in contemporary teaching methods.\footnote{Smith, *Ancient Scripts*, p. 26.}

Humanism, then, effectively built upon Cicero’s interests in the theatre, for example, the rhetorical, moral and political strands, and through various literary avenues, codified them. Texts with extensive commentaries offered by famous scholars became the order of the day. An edition of Terence printed by Benedict Prevost in 1552 provides an extreme example of the extent to which erudite commentary became fashionable. In this particular text there were, amongst other inclusions:

1. Arguments for each play by Melanchthon;

2. Annotations on genre and diction by Erasmus;

3. Textual notes by Antonius Goveanus;

4. A treatise on the meters of comic verse by Julius Caesar Scaliger;

5. Prefatory matter and a running commentary by Donatus;
6. A commentary on difficult passages and rhetorical niceties by Adrianus Barlandus…

And the list goes on. Such examples help illustrate the degree of permeation of the humanist Neo-Classical enterprise. Yet why was the humanist ethic so successful in this permeation of educational philosophy? In partial response to this question, and addressing the impact of the classical dramatic investment, Kent Cartwright comments:

Humanism… takes men and women as creatures of “undetermined nature”… and focuses on the capacity of people to transform themselves by education. Here drama, like other forms of literature, offers images of virtue for neo-Platonic inspiration and likenesses of vice for rejection: “to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image”.

Thus, as Cartwright surmises, pedagogues “could quarry ethical philosophy and rhetorical examples by excavating Terence”, for example, as is ably demonstrated by the reference above.

As Cartwright points out, the great humanist proponent Desiderius Erasmus believed that “almost all of the philosophy of the Ancients was contained in the proverbs alone”. Erasmus’ Adages were drawn not only from “Homer, Virgil, Plutarch and Cicero” but also from playwrights “such as Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Seneca, Terence and Plautus”. Certainly The Praise of Folly, which has been cited as having considerable influence on Burton’s The Anatomy of Melancholy is significantly informed by the topoi of play acting and disguise, of the benefits of teaching via the

---

89 Adapted from the list in Smith, Ancient Scripts, pp. 30-1.
90 Cartwright, Theatre and Humanism, p. 13.
91 Cartwright, Theatre and Humanism, p. 13.
92 Cartwright, Theatre and Humanism, p. 13.
93 Cartwright, Theatre and Humanism, p. 13.
pleasantries of the *sottie* and *sermon joyeux* as opposed to the more heavily didactic vehicle of the standard sermonic oration or tragedy.

Erasmus states that “the whole life of mortal men, what is it but a sort of play?” He laments that “if someone should try to strip away the [players] costumes and make-up… to destroy the illusions in this fashion would spoil the whole play…” Some very pertinent parallels are set up between the pages of Erasmus’ *Folly* and the *Anatomy*, including strategic and ongoing allusions to the philosopher Democritus, the double-edged privileging of laughter as didactic technique and the penetrating and critical analysis of scholars, rhetoricians, theologians and Erasmian “foolosophers” (remarkably akin to Burton’s philosophasters). Whereas Burton applies to laughter, right company, purposive action and a measured moderation of life experience to drive away melancholy, Erasmus brings the persona of Folly onto the stage as a deterrent to troubles and sorrows. As early as in the first two paragraphs, the two texts respectively consider the attainment of joy (happiness) as opposed to suffering (melancholy) in terms of disguise and theatre as being instrumental to the successful delivery of the same. Indeed, in both cases, the successful interaction of reader/text as regards the potential palliative and pedagogical result relies on the inaugural ‘assumed persona’ being delivered (i.e. staged) effectively. The high incidence of theatrical allusion informing both Erasmus’ *Folly* and Burton’s *Anatomy* is hardly surprising given the humanist educational paradigm of the period. Cartwright comments:

> Playacting in particular, saturated humanist education because, as it occasioned learning in language, diction, gesture, attitude and sententia, it modelled the “[m]imetic assimilation… fundamental to all humanist pedagogy.”

---

95 Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, pp. 43-44.
Humanist philosophy is often said to have been inaugurated upon the words of Terence’s *Heauton Timorumenos (The Self-Tormentor)*, echoed by Erasmus’ *Folly*, that is: “In short, he considers nothing human foreign to him”.98 When one considers the importance of the Aristotelian donning of the mask, “mask and face were at one in their sufficiency… they declared the whole man”,99 one has some sense of how the mask informed not only humanist educational philosophy, but also, how it must have instructed Burton’s own didactic philosophy. The task of the actors must be essentially facilitative. As Jones says, “the task of the actors is to support the action by forming props on which it can be spread out for the audience to contemplate.”100 In adopting and presenting the *modus operandi* of the stage then, and more especially the university stage, Burton was pushing this idea to the limit. In critiquing a system which he found to be intrinsically flawed, he constructed his play in a way which might best facilitate the whole of his literary enterprise assuming the form of a grandly satirical ‘prop’. In a production which was not representative of the usual theatrical fare in Oxford at that time, Burton offered a critique doubly removed from its contemporary milieu. First, he wrote his play in Latin, an act which in itself may be said to be significant in terms of his underlying intentions as author, and secondly, he performed it at a time removed from the play’s original creative inception.

Writing a play in Latin, even in the period 1600-1620, said something about the status of the work. In a time when the English vernacular was increasing its range and usage, to offer a work in Latin was in many respects noteworthy. Latin was the language of the university educated; in 1600, it still remained the core language of scholarship. Burton’s *Philosophaster* was written for a university audience, and therefore the fact that it was written in Latin would have posed no barrier to its

98 Erasmus, *Folly*, p. 46.
accessibility as far as its target audience went. Moreover, Burton’s choice of Latin adhered to the pattern established by the greatest of the Oxford playwrights of the era, the immensely influential William Gager. *Philosophaster* was a product of university scholarship in every possible sense. It was written in the language of scholarship, it was set at a university institution (one which was also under royal patronage), and it was peopled with a whole range of those who would call themselves “scholars”. In adhering to the Plautine-Terentian tradition of play construction (prologue, epilogue, five acts) as well as employing the use of significant names, Burton was further complying with the markers of classical and Neo-Latin tradition. Effectively then, *Philosophaster* was a play tailor-made for university production, even to the extent that it endeavoured to comment on the very system it represented. However, *Philosophaster* made a very strident and fairly damning commentary on the system which apparently nurtured it, a fact which was later supported by Burton’s continuation of his critique of scholars and problems of scholarship generally, in the *Anatomy*. In fact such was Burton’s frustration with the state of scholarship in England during this period, that the famous passage in the “Of the Misery of Scholars” section in the *Anatomy* becomes unusually self-reflexive in its tone, in terms of Burton’s calculated action of alluding to his own earlier work. Incorporated here is Burton’s strategically re-visited acclamation:

> Philosophasters innocent of the Arts become Masters of Arts, and those are made wise by order who are endowed with no wisdom, and have no qualifications for a degree save a desire for it…  

Such facts as these serve to endorse the premise that *Philosophaster* was written with the cogent aim of critiquing and exposing a flawed educational system; moreover, its author would have wanted to prompt his audience to take more than a cursory glance at the socio-political policies that produced it.

---

101 AOM 1:327. Note: this is a modern translation from an extended passage originally given in Latin.
Burton’s play *Philosophaster* (1606, revised 1617) afforded its author a vehicle in which he could express his assessment of the system which both contained and to some extent, created him. Moreover, his critique of this system was skewed in favour of a certain pointed satire of specific aspects of the machinery of this system. In order to understand what might have motivated Burton to offer such a critique, the factors which might have contributed to his assessment of the politico-institutional practices of the era, and the various forces which exerted their influence upon them, should be examined. A succinct summary of these factors may be found in the following table:

### Annual Averages of Degrees Granted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>1511-1515</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1571-1575</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1617-1621</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In offering a context for the accurate reading of this table, I refer to Curtis:
Because the numbers taking degrees fluctuated from year to year, especially in those fields where few degrees were usually granted, they are quoted in the table as the annual averages for each of several five-year periods.102

The statistics are serially grouped in order to facilitate a greater clarity of interpretation with regard to the assessment of trends. Bearing in mind that Burton received his BA in 1602, his MA in 1605 and his BD in 1614, this table immediately tells us two very important things. Firstly, it tells us that Burton graduated BA and MA in a time of significant increase in the number of degrees being conferred at Oxford (and for that matter, at Cambridge as well).103 In fact, at this time the conferrals of the Bachelor of Divinity degree increased at the greatest rate, comparative to the other degree categories. Secondly, the table instructs us of the “declining importance of the higher faculties… in the last quinquennium, they were barely 10 per cent of the total”. Curtis continues:

The last figures for Oxford show that between the years 1571 and 1621 the proportion of degrees granted to students in the higher faculties, because of a rise in the number of men taking degrees in divinity, increased slightly.104

Despite a significant increase in numbers of students enrolled for degrees, comparatively fewer scholars stayed on for the reading of higher degrees (the notable exception being the degree of Doctor of Divinity). This situation again reflects two very significant trends. First, it verifies what Curtis asserts to be a “flood tide” of “young gentlemen and noblemen” coming into both Oxford and Cambridge during the period 1603-1640.105 Yet this thirst for undergraduate degrees did not translate into a proportionally similar demand for postgraduate degrees; in terms of political

---

103 For the larger version of the table denoting Cambridge degrees granted, see Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge*, p. 150.
commentary, this situation spoke volumes, and was bound up in the more pragmatic proclamation of the second (inferred) observation, which follows. This second observation provides the key to the intrinsic problem connecting the two scenarios. As Curtis concludes: “…Unquestionably, the students in the arts… by their numbers alone contributed to a fundamental change in the character of the universities”\textsuperscript{106} [italics mine]. The age of the Erasmian or the Coletian humanist scholar was effectively in transition and it was succumbing to a force rather more unyielding in nature than it had previously encountered - that of the corporate coercion of cultural, political and social factors, coinciding and pressing for imminent change. Curtis suggests:

…”not one, but a complex of factors lay behind this change [of scholastic focus]. New intellectual interests, a “cultural revolution” which flooded the university with young gentlemen and noblemen, shifting patterns of life and work which drastically altered the relations between the universities and the colleges within them, and other influences like improvements in the dissemination of knowledge which printing introduced, all had their effect on the curriculum and methods of instruction.\textsuperscript{107}

The evolution of the university in the sixteenth century, as Curtis suggests, tended to mirror the evolution of the Church. Both of these institutions became absorbed into the life of England, becoming irrevocably the Church and the scholarship of England, rather than the Church and the scholarship in England.\textsuperscript{108} This evolution was not without its problems however, reflected in the repeated revisions of university statutes, for instance, which occurred during the course of the sixteenth century, a product of monarchs “assiduously striving to advance the cause of good learning and letters, even as they anxiously strained for religious uniformity.”\textsuperscript{109} The new social relations which resulted from this more extensive social integration of the universities

\textsuperscript{106} Curtis, Oxford and Cambridge, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{107} Curtis, Oxford and Cambridge, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{108} From an idea in Curtis, Oxford and Cambridge, pp. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{109} Curtis, Oxford and Cambridge, p. 52.
brought certain benefits, including an increase in financial support and social prestige; with these benefits came the opportunity for certain abuses to occur. In fact corruption, especially in the guise of bribery and its various more subtle refinements became so rife at college elections during the course of the sixteenth century “that Parliament … passed an act with severe penalties to curb it”\(^\text{110}\). Curtis continues:

> Letters of mandate still carried men to degrees and places of profit and honour. In 1631 the secretary to the Chancellor of Cambridge, the Earl of Holland, apparently used his access to sources of influence to aid petitioners for university honours who could help him better his own fortune. Sir Simonds D’Ewes reported that certain unworthy doctors ‘had paid Mr. Sanderson large rates for the doctorships’.\(^\text{111}\)

Is it any wonder then, that Burton’s personal critique of contemporary practices, with cries of simony and corruption was entered so tenaciously, translated from the one text (*Philosophaster*) to the other (the *Anatomy*)?

Matters of dress also proved problematic in this new era of more exclusively ‘gentlemanly clientele’\(^\text{112}\) at the universities. Curtis reports:

> Scholars were wearing fancy hose, excessive ruffs, and swords and rapiers. Spurs jangled in the quadrangles once free of such worldly sounds. … In 1602, indeed, extravagance had gone so far that Sir Robert Cecil… listed among ‘disorders in the universities, contrary to the statutes, and tending to the decay of learning, and other dissolute behaviour’ a charge that ‘scholars now go in their silks and velvets, liker to courtiers than scholars.’\(^\text{113}\)

Again, it comes as no surprise to see that Burton (amongst others) felt compelled to comment on the changes that he was witnessing. What is of interest though, is the way the commentators of the time (writers; playwrights) sought to express their opinion of these changes. Satire was a useful and highly strategic weapon of expression, and in

\(^{10}\) Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge*, p. 53.
\(^{12}\) Curtis reports that the ratio of ‘sons of gentleman’ as opposed to *filios plebei* was in the proportion of six to five in 1603. *Oxford and Cambridge*, p. 59.
\(^{13}\) Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge*, p. 55
the case of some of the university plays at Oxford and Cambridge at this time it was, as we have seen, overtly employed as a tool of subversive discourse. Satire was effectively the cloak under which the dagger might be delivered, be it sharp or blunt; it provided a useful vehicle for narrating the process of change as well as an outlet for concerned commentary, as proved to be the case in Burton’s extensive narrative. The fact is, as Walker comments:

However elite and secluded they might be in their composition, performance, audience and objectives… academic plays actively engage[d] with urgent social, religious and political questions of the period. …The plays negotiate… [they] articulate points of contact between the academy and the wider English culture… the discourse they articulate is political, religious and economic just as it is intellectual and humanistic.114

This idea of the plays as vehicles for negotiation is significant, for the discourse the plays engaged in was a tricky one, the speakers at the debate being the Crown, the English aristocracy and the Universities (with their own incumbent hierarchies). Of course, the listening audience, for those thespian discourses occurring beyond the confines of the university theatre, was ultimately the general public, who, within their own theatrical space, delighted in the joys of a vibrant and often infamous theatrical commentary of their own, based on populist satirical versions of contemporary political narratives.

Burton, despite that fact that his studies were interrupted,115 found himself at Oxford at a time when the population of students reading for degrees was at an unprecedented historical high. In turn, the factors which both contributed to and which resulted from this increase were part of a larger and more insidious commentary on English society. This commentary extended to the role of the universities in regard to their relation not only to the crown which had traditionally sustained (and arguably

114 Walker, Early Modern Academic Drama, p. 4.
instructed) them, but also to the increasingly complex relationship between crown, university and a new breed of increasingly independent and motivated gentry. Additionally, innovations such as the printing press were providing access to information (and therefore potentially to increased scholarship) on a scale such as had never before been experienced. The juggernaut of change however, brought with it certain inherent problems which infiltrated a system already harbouring a degree of tacit and hereditary corruption. This lately-arrived “new corruption” was more overt in nature, and being more visible, it was easier to decry. The new breed of “scholars” looked different, acted differently, and in some cases, flaunted flagrant disregard for established practices, including the mandatory attendance of lectures and the requisite of residency.116

It is interesting to note that accompanying all of this change, was a burgeoning new undercurrent of philosophy which is best summed up by examining the words of two quite different although ostensibly related commentators, Desiderius Erasmus and Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (see below). It must be noted that Burton himself would have been well aware of the subtle but tangible shift of emphasis from the humanist idealism of the (first) Erasmian thesis to the more prosaically informed secularism of the second opinion, in this case epitomised by the words of Lord Herbert. Indeed, perhaps it is within the very parameters of this shift that we find the key to understanding more about Burton’s growing discomfort (as expressed firstly through Philosphaster, and then, more comprehensively in the pages of the Anatomy) concerning culture, religion, politics and their accumulating interchange with educational institutional policy in the contemporary “falling melancholic” state of his beloved England. In the first case, instituting the nature of the pedagogical paradigm, Erasmus states:

They err, therefore, who affirm that wisdom is won by handling affairs and by contact with life, without aid from the teaching of philosophy… Philosophy teaches us more in one year than our own individual experience can teach us in thirty, and its teaching carries none of the risks which the method of learning by experience of necessity brings with it.\textsuperscript{117}

In the second case, confirming the notional nature of the shift, Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury states:

\begin{quote}
I do not approve for older brothers that course of study which is ordinary [sic] used in the University, which is, if their parents perchance intend they shall stay there four or five years to employ the said time as if they meant to proceed master of arts and doctors of some science; for which purpose their tutors commonly spend much time in teaching them subtleties of logic, which, as it is usually practiced, enables them for little more than to be excellent wranglers, which art, though it may be tolerable in a mercenary lawyer, I can by no means commend in a sober and well-governed gentleman.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

“As if they meant to proceed master of arts and doctor of some science...” Surely this sums up the essential mood illustrated by the table above. The “flood of young noblemen” entering into the universities were there for purposes which were significantly different in nature from what they had been in the past. The binary strands of knowledge and learning were no longer there to exercise control over them as subjects (both figurative and literal) – they (the young gentlemen) were now demanding certain prioritised requirements of knowledge and learning, the first of which was that it become tangibly finite and purpose-driven. These young noblemen could no longer be assumed to linger indefinitely at the universities and their colleges, awaiting the call of court, or otherwise. They were now invested with a new ‘logick’ of their own (or indeed, of their parents) which dictated that there must be some imminently useful and tractable employment of this learning and knowledge which they were purchasing at a price. The universities, therefore, were expected to respond in kind. Ironically, this was

\textsuperscript{117} Curtis, Oxford and Cambridge, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{118} Curtis, Oxford and Cambridge, p. 128.
proving less and less to be the actual outcome of such demands; for in opening their doors to the influx, the universities would ultimately contribute to a significant sociological problem – that of oversupplying the contemporary market. This too, contributed to further problems aligned with the products of institutional scholarship. Effectively, the “flood” engendered a class of disaffected and alienated intellectuals, a group who proved politically problematic in more ways than one. Conceptually, with regard to the new university influx, this is where Burton’s humanism might be said to meet the pragmatism of a new breed of notional intellectual specification. The tangential ambitions of a new breed of gentleman scholars glanced off the greying borders of humanism’s erstwhile all-encompassing “art of knowledge”. Ultimately, with the progress of industry, expanding naval efforts and associated mercantile gain, the scholar would give way to the virtuoso, and the virtuoso in turn, would cede to the man of science, the prodigy of Bacon and of Sprat. In the meantime however, there was a span of some seventy years during which the vehement vehicle of transition would jolt and jostle its surveyors with the exigencies of change, forcing the wary commentator to sharpen his pen and amongst other things, to expound in tones of the recourse to the palliative (melancholy and its cure) and satire (humour and its more serious target) that the world needed a-mending. Indeed, this is exactly what Robert Burton, writer, scholar, divine, physic, polymath and political commentator, endeavoured to do.

A Critical Appraisal of *Philosophaster*

In this section, I offer a brief, critical appraisal of *Philosophaster* in terms of its expository function as a vehicle for the expression (implied or explicit) of socio-political and/or cultural commentary. Through his strategic characterisation and use of
plot devices and language, for example, Burton (not surprisingly, considering his social and scholarly status), emerges as a figure who is adamantly in discourse with the world around him. He is no less a commentator on world events and socio-cultural trends than the sources which he applies to in his writing. *Philosophaster* is increasingly defined as a didactic vehicle, invoking serious satirical purpose and following classical precedents.\(^{119}\)

In the Prologue to *Philosophaster*, Robert Burton states:

> There is no need to tell what the comedy is about;

> The name itself well teaches what that may be.\(^{120}\)

As the play opens then, yet before the action officially commences, we, as audience, are invited to consider and indeed participate in defining the nature of the term “Philosophaster”; in doing so, we simultaneously (it would seem) unravel the nature of Burton’s satirical comedy. Burton is deliberately obscure in his Prologue, making his audience work to secure the context in which his commentary is situated. He is also being deliberately provocative, gaining his audience’s attention by means of hidden gestures (“If anything in this story should seem well known”) and the use of dramatic, emotive language (“Condemned by its author to eternal darkness”).\(^{121}\) “Philosophaster” we assume is a coinage akin to Ben Jonson’s “poetaster” of 1600, and therefore denotes an inferior, meretricious or sham philosopher. The reading of the text supports the latter interpretation; indeed, as we shall see, Burton’s play centres strongly around the subject of philosophy. Equally intriguing, is Burton’s next statement which also concerns the subject matter of the play, following on from the exposition of the setting (being a newly established university in Osuna, Andalucía). Burton advises his audience:

\(^{119}\) See Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam*, note 133.  
\(^{120}\) Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 37.  
\(^{121}\) Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 37.
This play is not about true scholars;

The end of the tale teaches what pseudophilosophers do.122

These lines achieve two important things. First, they tell the academic audience in attendance at Christ Church that night in 1617 that the play is about scholars in particular (and therefore the subject of scholarship as it relates to the university environment); the possibility of the play being self-reflexive in some way must therefore be considered. Secondly, the lines confirm the idea suggested in the title, of the “sham”, meretricious or “pseudophilosopher”. Yet Burton then does a most interesting thing. Borrowing a line from Terence’s *Eunuchus*, he follows up with:

> By the way, I want to warn you: Philosophasters, if any such be here, Leave at once for we are full of chinks.123

These three short lines may be delivered in two different ways. They may be said completely tongue-in-cheek, or they may be delivered in a tone of *double-entendre* semi-seriousness. The audience’s understanding of the lines would have been very much dependent on the way in which the lines were delivered on the night of the performance of the play. Moreover, any hint of contemporary unrest about scholars or scholarship, or indeed any related inference concerning possible political overtones associated with institutional scholarship, would have been most effectively communicated via the tone and manner of the prologist’s delivery. Yet this in itself promotes a further problem with the text, and that is its delayed performance. Retrospective analysis is problematic at the best of times, but when the text itself is

elusive in terms of its strict chronological context, the work of the auditor becomes even more challenging.

Returning to Burton’s prologue, we see that the prologist is not yet finished. The last statement concerning the presence of philosophasters is qualified by the addition of two further lines:

But all is well, no one rises from his place.

No one is guilty, we are all worthy scholars.¹²⁴

This swiftly appended overstating of confidence in the fact that no one offers himself up before the audience as a ‘philosophaster’ achieves an ironic result. Again, the manner of the delivery of the lines, and the audience reaction at the time, would have been vitally important in assessing an accurate translation of Burton’s meaning. One suspects that the audience would have laughed heartily at the suggestion of volunteering oneself as being guilty of the crime of being a ‘philosophaster’. The hasty assurance of the line “no one is guilty, [therefore] we are all worthy scholars” only serves to cement the ironic fact that perhaps not all are indeed “worthy” scholars. The satirico-comedic situation into which the line is embedded enhances the irony. What was a “worthy” scholar in Burton’s era? By whose measurement, against what standards and by what process of assessment was the worthy scholar measured? These are very important questions in terms of achieving a clear and informed reading of Burton’s text and therefore his intention.

Burton himself was a scholar, both in his own terms and according to the measure of contemporary standards (if these two criteria may be said to be discrete). Yet one must consider the nature of the “standards” to which he subscribed, for they were the standards of Early Modern humanism. In the period preceding the writing and

the performing of Burton’s play, and indeed for some time after it, the official standard of university scholarship was that of humanism. To be a “scholar” in the academic world of Burton’s *Philosophaster* was to be specifically and primarily, a humanist scholar. This fact would seem to have great implications for Burton’s play.

If one considers that a worthy scholar is equated in terms of being a worthy *humanist* scholar, and conversely, that a failed, inferior or sham scholar (or philosopher, for that matter) is therefore one who did not subscribe or conform to the humanist standard, it follows that the privileged reading of Burton’s play must be that of a critique against those scholars and/or scholarship which failed to achieve the humanist standard. In defining the humanist standard, I will turn for a moment to Early Modern drama specialist, Christopher Gaggero.

In the humanist “narrative of learning” as Gaggero refers to the developing model of humanist pedagogy, learning became a function of the assimilation of rhetorical and moral codes via the pleasurable (as opposed to punishment-oriented) appraisal and review of texts. Gaggero states:

> According to Elyot, Ascham, Juan Luis Vives, and others, earlier schoolmasters had driven students “with feare of beating, from all love of learning”… Now they proposed that “learning should be taught, rather by love than feare,” and that students should be “sweetly allured to learning with praises and such pretty gifts as children delight in”.¹²⁵

This sort of pedagogic ethic is closely aligned with the greater humanist claim that “a rhetoric, a poetics or a pedagogy that worked through pleasure” could be a “potential means of salvation” or at least an “effective mode of (self-) government”¹²⁶. To this end,

---


Gaggero suggests, the humanists endeavoured to make linguistic skill for instance, a moral as well as a technical attainment.\textsuperscript{127} Gaggero continues:

In humanist texts, the man who possesses true rhetorical skill must also possess moral goodness; conversely, if he is not morally good, he cannot be truly skilful. These texts tent to posit a chiastic relationship between rhetorical skill and moral goodness: the process of becoming rhetorically skilful entails becoming morally good, and vice versa. Each term produces and signifies the other.\textsuperscript{128}

Following Gaggero’s reasoning, with regard to Burton’s essential commentary in \textit{Philosophaster}, Burton is equating failure to achieve the benchmark of true humanist scholarship with failure to achieve the related benchmark of being a morally good person. In humanist terms therefore, the so-called ‘philosophaster’ is emblematic of grand failure on both accounts. If one reads Burton’s text in this way, the whole play swiftly becomes a rather acerbic and tenacious critique of those persons and practices that would threaten or undermine the status of humanist scholarship. As Linda Shenk\textsuperscript{129} suggests, even royal personages are not immune to being included in this category. Humanist scholarship, if practised with rigour and integrity was implied to be integral to the proper management not just of the domain of the self and the university, but also of the realm. Humanism had staked its claim on this precept, borrowing Quintilian’s adage that “no man can be a complete orator unless he is a good man”.\textsuperscript{130} Ben Jonson said no less, when he asserted the “impossibility of any man’s being a good poet without first being a good man\textsuperscript{131}’, a statement which appears to assert the degree of Jonson’s conformance to contemporary ideals of scholarship and decorum. Of course, such sentiments are sourced from the early Greek moralists, especially Aristotle in his \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, where goodness (virtuousness) and happiness are equated with the

\textsuperscript{127} Gaggero, \textit{Pleasure Unreconciled}, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{128} Gaggero, \textit{Pleasure Unreconciled}, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{130} Gaggero, \textit{Pleasure Unreconciled}, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{131} Gaggero, \textit{Pleasure Unreconciled}, p. 172.
successful performance of rational activity. If we are living well (and for the early modern humanists this encompassed notions of decorum and self-expression), then our life is worthy of imitation and admiration; if not, then we have failed in our rational activity, and we are subject to the compromises of incontinence (*akrasia*) and vice (*kakia*). One can therefore understand the underlying logic in the Burtonian/Jonsonian humanist hypothesis as it is acted out in the plays; that is (for example): if one is a poetaster, then one is not a good scholar [a good man]. Similarly, if one is a philosophaster, then one is not a good or moral person; the latter is patently acted out during the course of Robert Burton’s *Philosophaster*. Burton clearly and effectively delivers the real subject matter of his play therefore, within the first lines of the prologue. It is now up to the reader to discover the nature of the practices or persons who were supposedly undermining the reign of humanist scholarship; those who were subverting the nobility and ‘pedigree’ as well as the continuing viability of Burton’s ostensible “heritage of scholarship”.

As we discovered earlier, Burton was (potentially at least), one of the over-supplied scholars whose future was somewhat at risk in the changing cultural and socio-political climate of his age; he was also a second son subject to the vagaries of preferment. It comes as no surprise then, that he might write a play which isolates, anatomises and works through his concerns about these subjects – certainly in a very contemporary sense, such concerns were close to home for him. Such a reading of *Philosophaster* aligns itself with a further investigation of similar intrinsic motivating factors which are apparent in the *Anatomy*. Scholarship, as he knew it, was Burton’s life-blood; he had invested in its heritage to far too great an extent to allow its pejorative evolution to pass without appending some form of commentary to it. In fact, what

---

Burton started artistically and conceptually on the university stage with *Philosophaster*, he continued to some considerable extent in his later *Anatomy*, as I will later illustrate. However, with the challenges of an increasing Puritan vigilance, the proliferation of eloquent malcontents acting in the capacity of advisors, and pseudo-students seemingly two-a-penny at the universities, the times proved to be testing rather than supportive of Burton’s energetic and rather ambitious campaign.

*Philosophaster*, as its title suggests, is essentially a play about dissembling. The cast list and *Argument* substantially confirm this assertion. In the *Argument* Burton clearly sets out the plot sequence, which is fairly straightforward, resolving itself neatly, if not somewhat too conveniently, over the standard five acts. Jordan-Smith’s translation of the Latin “Argumentum” carries us succinctly into the body of the plot:

> Desiderius, the Duke of Osuna, a small town of Andalusia, establisheth an University, bestowing thereupon sundry privileges and great estates, and proclaimeth it abroad, throughout all Europe, inviting students to the new university and offering them… salaries and such other things as might be needful. In response to this invitation philosophers came from all sides, and amongst them also philosophasters, bawds and whores. Thither also came two wandering scholars, Polumathes and Philobiblos, bent on questioning the wise men…

In the list of *Dramatis Personae*, Burton lists the sham-philosophers starting with their apparent ringmaster Polupragmaticus, a “Jesuit, politician, courtier, theologian and

---

133 Jordan-Smith, *Burton’s Philosophaster*, p. 5.
magician”. He is followed by Lodovicus Pantometer (a player at the “measuring of all things”), that is, a self-professed (sham) mathematician; Pantomagus (a “magician in every way”), a sham alchemist-physician; Simon Acutus (Simon the “sharp” – ironically in fact, Simon the dull), a sophist; Amphimacer (concerned with measuring metrical feet), a poetaster; Theanus, a theologaster; Pedanus (a pedant; again [Greek] acknowledging metrical feet), a grammarian; and finally Aequivocus (“with equal voice”), a man “skilled in the art of lying, deceiving everyone, and cozening both his master and the physician”. At this early stage, it is interesting to note how these names and their allied professions coincide with Burton’s theory of “ordinary students” applying themselves to Law, Physic and Divinity, whilst rejecting the lesser arts (for example, History or Philology) as “unprofitable” in every sense of the word. In fact the leader of the philosophasters, Polupragmaticus (which translates as “polupragmosune” or “busybody; meddling or involved in intrigue”) appears to contain within his range of “scholarship” almost all of those pre-requisites which Burton associates with consummate duplicity and exploitation. In the study of [Law and] Divinity for instance:

…the prospect of gain outweighs all studies and a heap of money is more attractive than all the stuff written by the Greek and Latin authors… from this class we draw the leaders of the state, the counsellors and the guides of Kings. What a world!

The arguably discrete roles of physic and magician seem to be collapsed into one, being so many “Mountebanks… quacksalvers, wizards, alchemists, poor vicars…” [Italics

---

134 Emily Anglin, “The Glass, the school, the book: The Anatomy of Melancholy and the Early Stuart University of Oxford” ESC 35.2-3 (June-September 2009), 71.
135 From the Greek “polupragmon” meaning officious, meddling; also “polupractos” : involved in meddling, intrigue. Mike Hughes [personal correspondence].
136 AOM. 1:310.
mine]. As courtier (subscribing to preferment or patronage perhaps), the relation is served no better, the implication being that the patron is at risk of being a “simonical contractor… fearing neither God nor devil….”; with the scholar being, reciprocally, a “fawning parasite”, likened to “so many dogs at their [the patrons’] tables”.

One assumes therefore, that right from the beginning, Burton’s characters appear to express the recognisable characteristics of his calculating ‘sham’ or quasi-scholars (“scholar-phasters?”), those who through intuitive nature or learned art are wise to the process of getting on in the world. Emily Anglin offers a pithy survey of how, in the later Anatomy Burton “sharpens the narrow efficiency of his [fellow] students’ studies into objects, strategies or instruments… precise tools applied [ironically rather] incongruously to vain, elevated goals of advancement rather than to learning”. Anglin speaks of Burton’s “metaphorical critique… of the reduction of broad fields such as “Arithmetick”, astrology or “Opticks” into counting money, predicting other’s errors or reflecting the favour of the great,” all examples to which testimony is found in the incessant plotting of Burton’s philosophasters. And who exactly, are these philosophasters plotting against? The Argument instructs us that their targets are certain noblemen (Polupistos, that is “gullible one”; Stephanio and his son Antonio) and sundry townsfolk, those whom they assess as being able to be fleeced, tricked by the processes of a highly manipulative practice of dissembling, along with promises of fantastic alchemical magic (common metals made into gold; weak-minded sons transmuted into scholars?); processes which nonetheless, are only made possible through the condition of greed which attends both sides. Ultimately, it is the timely and astute actions of the two wandering scholars, Polumathes (“learned in many things”) and Philobiblos (“lover of books”) which save the newly inaugurated university, along with the townspeople.

---

137 AOM, 1:310.
138 AOM, 1:315, 322.
139 Anglin, “The Glass, the school, the book”, p. 72.
140 Anglin, “The Glass, the school, the book”, p. 72.
and importantly (from the point of view of an embedded contextual political commentary), the reputation of the Duke.

In projecting the literary topos of the ‘grail quest’, a device which he was to return to in the pages of the *Anatomy*, perhaps Burton had finally (ostensibly?) located his wise man,\(^{141}\) or at least demonstrated the theoretical principle of how such a man/men might be recognised. Paradoxically, of course, the scholar Polumathes who is seeking the wise man in Burton’s play, fails to ‘find him’. This fact simply serves to demonstrate (in a didactic sense) the Socratic thesis that the wise man is a quantity who, either in terms of epistemic humility or in terms of epistemic accuracy\(^{142}\) (contrasting true philosophers with philosophasters), is not only problematic to identify, but is, in fact, non-existent. Alternatively, as far as the definition of the ‘wisdom act’ goes, perhaps the Duke (standing in for the person of King James?) might be said to be “wise” in his action of ultimately heeding the scholars’ advice. This theme is continued quite conspicuously in the *Anatomy*, where Burton again in the absence of locating the definitive “wise man” presents Democritus (or Democritus Junior?) at least as potentially fulfilling this role. Democritus would appear to fit the ‘wise man/epistemic humility’ role in particular quite conveniently, as he only “laughs” at the madness of the world, leaving further action or definition open to conjecture.

With regard to the nature of the actions of the philosophasters, one notes that in Burton’s play, it is not only the noblemen and townsfolk who are being deceived by the sham-academics, but also the Duke himself and his advisors. The Duke would appear, therefore, not to have control of his kingdom any more than the university (as embedded emblem of the Duke) has control of its domain, as least for as long as the philosophasters reign, and yet the status (glory (?)) of the one is intrinsically connected

\(^{141}\) In *Philosophaster*, Polumathes is absorbed in his search for a wise man (an activity which is echoed in Pontano, and from which Burton borrowed (Pontano, *Antonius Dialogus*). Polumathes: “…So that, like Supputius in Pontano, I might consult a wise man.” See: Burton, *Philosopher*, pp. 59,117.

to and reflected in, the other. This situation effectively places the monarchy and the university (or the monarchy through the university) in a condition of risk – the monarchy as regards its power and perhaps even its person and the university as regards the potential abuses of its systemic machinery; the one both exposes and renders vulnerable the other. The implications of such a state of affairs (and their analogous relation to Burton’s England) will also be treated later on in this chapter.

As a text, one cannot help but tend to locate *Philosophaster* in the sea of its surrounding evidence. Such evidence must necessarily come from not only the contemporary cultural context (political, social, religious) in which it was written, it must also be derived from the texts which surround it, both in terms of the further *oeuvre* of its author, and other comparable contemporaneous texts, notably the Neo-Latin University plays. Burton’s Latin nomenclature with regards to his characters is echoed in a number of late Tudor/early Jacobean plays, beyond the strictly academic corpus. Gascoigne’s *Glass of Government* is one, where the suggestion of tribe, race or phylum (Phylo) denotes the definition of the further (attached) character trait; the duality of the servant Ambidexter might also be said to reflect the comparable duality of Burton’s *Aequivocus.*

Ignoramus, Poetaster, Pedantius and of course the often compared *Parnassus* trilogy all offer titles and cast lists involving characters whose names are representative of the main personality traits or indeed flaws of that character, as is often the case. Within the domain of the title, *dramatis personae* and the merest sketch of a plot therefore, we are offered significant clues as to the genre of commentary into which Burton’s play is most likely to be incorporated. Of course, in the period in which Burton was writing, commentary on the scholastic practices at England’s universities was fairly commonplace, a fact which was largely due to the political climate at this time. In order to consider these practices and the climate which

---

143 In fact, there is a strong case for both textual and thematic comparison (i.e. incidences of intertextual similarity or interchange) between Burton’s *Philosophaster* and Gascoigne’s *Glass of Government.*
engendered them more closely, it is expedient to look forward for a moment to the potentially illuminating pages of the later *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

In the *Anatomy* in his section “Miseries of Scholars”, Burton was making a voluble, digressive, indeed at times vehemently heated attack (rather than objective commentary) on the various and prevailing ‘illnesses’ of his times. The early Stuart University was an institution facing disquieting troubles, financially, politically, sociologically and ethically. In terms of humanism specifically, the humanists’ prospects of acting as counsellors to the Church and state had been worsening for some time. There was also increasing competition amongst those leaving university; upon graduation, they were entering in a system where supply exceeded demand. Jacobean scholars looked on “as offices, titles, privileges and monopolies were often dispensed in an apparently corrupt manner on the basis of payment – itself part of the Crown’s drive to augment its finances in a period where other sources of revenue… were proving insufficient.”

Gowland speaks of the “dangerously disaffected individuals” who were the hapless end-product of such a system, an assertion which is neatly echoed in the words of Thomas Egerton, Lord Chancellor Ellesmere, who in 1611 observed:

> I think that we have more need of better livings for learned men than of more learned men for these livings, for learning without living doth but breed traitors, as common experience too well showeth.

> “He who does not know how to dissemble does not know how to live,”

Burton mused, on more than one occasion. In Burton’s view, these “dangerously disaffected individuals” may well have comprised the ranks of the potential ‘traitors’ to

---

the system, ‘dissemblers’ whose resort to concealment and disguise would see them assume the actor’s mask to achieve their duplicitous ambitions. These were the types for whom the Burtonian/Jonsonian suffix “−aster” might be appropriate, signifying a fraudulent or at least, an inferior status; they were also the stuff of didactic commentary, issuing from the pen of the disheartened and discursive (authentic) scholar, “interweaving political and personal concerns throughout his work”. As Burton says, quoting Chrysostom, “fraud and covetousness are two most violent thieves”. Perhaps these ‘false’ and grasping individuals are the very ingredients which, when left to ferment, are capable of robbing a university (Osuna/Oxford?) of its proper and most deserved reputation?

Burton’s play Philosophaster cannot be read in a vacuum, extracted from its larger and informing background; to do so would be to read the play without the vital and enriching commentary of its historical context. The fact that Robert Burton, in going on to write the Anatomy, took the opportunity to imbue the latter with quantities of his own opinion (thereby also offering his readers something more to go on, as regards glimpses of himself) must be regarded as a fortunate opportunity with regards to the reading and interpretation of the earlier Philosophaster. In other words, Burton’s response to his socio-political environment in Philosophaster might stand to be substantially reinforced through a comparative and synchronous reading of the larger Anatomy. In this study of Philosophaster therefore, it is my intention to offer the more comprehensive reading, an assisted reading, if you like, of the earlier play in the light of the larger and more insistent later work.

150 AOM 1:316.
Philosophaster was written by a former student of Christ Church and performed in the hall at Christ Church, with a cast assembled from the students of Christ Church, before a university audience. In the strongest sense, therefore, it was both derived from, and spoke to, the University culture. Yet this university culture was intrinsically linked to the Court culture of early seventeenth century England; indeed this was even more so the case at Oxford, that at Cambridge.152 Burton’s play spoke in a language which was evidently (and especially in 1617) in decline in both court and University circles, and perhaps in doing so, to some extent, it spoke to an aspect of a comparatively recent and warmly remembered past.153 If Philosophaster evoked the earlier humanism of Erasmus and other allied commentators, I believe it did so only to facilitate comparison. “What have we become?” Burton laments. “…The temple (the muse?) is for sale, and eke its god…”; “I say this is the fault of all of us and especially those of us who belong to a university”,154 and of course there is the supremely resonant “I was much moved to see that abuse which I could not amend”.155 Although these are the words of the Anatomy, they undoubtedly suggest a reverberant cry from the heart.

In an extended comparison of the two texts of Philosophaster and The Anatomy of Melancholy, one finds significant overlap in both the semantic content and the nature of the subjects treated in these two works; one also finds considerable evidence of the opinions and intrinsic view-points of the author. It seems unlikely that such findings are merely coincidental. Similarly, I do not believe that Burton “woke up” to the fact of certain socio-political and/or institutional abuses just in time to evoke and bewail them in the pages of the Anatomy – the comparative textual evidence instructs us otherwise. I believe Burton’s consideration of such matters first found their outlet in a more

153 Gowland suggests that in AOM, Burton’s writing “harked back to an Erasmian past where spiritual commitments could be reconciled… where political activity did not corrupt the philosopher, where scholarship was estimated as an accomplishment worthy of the highest rewards…” Gowland, The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy, p.294.
154 AOM 1:327.
155 Reference to AOM (1.5.30-1) in Gowland, The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy, p. 294.
youthful, contained and formulaic mode of expression in the play *Philosophaster*, an entertainment apparently written in the guise of “a Cantabrigian play imported into Oxford”,¹⁵⁶ yet harbouring perhaps a more entrained and resistant conceptual satire than it has hitherto been given credit for. Moreover, I also contend that in donning an antic mask (Democritus Junior) and speaking through the “assumed habits and names of others… acting a …part”,¹⁵⁷ Burton took not only his methodology of the employment of satiric humour as expository device,¹⁵⁸ but also much of the heritage of the Neo-Latin stage with him as he continued onwards on his ostensible journey, right into the heart of his *Anatomy*. Following a short history of the Neo-Latin plays at Oxford and Cambridge, a close examination of such a hypothesis follows.

¹⁵⁶ DF Sutton (personal correspondence).
¹⁵⁷ AOM 1: 121.
¹⁵⁸ In the case of the *Anatomy*, humour is also offered as part of a larger palliative schema. Mary-Ann Lund treats this thesis comprehensively in her book, incorporating the notion of the “illocutionary force” of Burton’s writing. See Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
Chapter 2

Rhetoric in *Philosophaster*

In this chapter, I investigate the methodology and practice of rhetoric with regard to Burton’s *Philosophaster*, and endeavour to relate it to historically derived contemporary dramaturgical traditions. Following this thread, we observe Burton’s endorsement of Melanchthon’s dictum that the primarily didactic ‘tool of comedy’ should “show examples of familiar manners and events by which we may be admonished and so the more prudently judge of human affairs… in recounting the argument of the plays, the chief care of the poet is to set forth counsel”. In *Philosophaster*, increasingly, we witness the evidence that Burton is considering ever more intimately, the practice of rhetoric, of eloquence as it applies to the *vir bonus*, or the *vir civilis*; of eloquence as it exists in relation to the state, and therefore its inherent potential for use (and abuse) as a political tool. Through Burton’s commentary, and taking into account the literary and dramaturgical conventions of the time, I examine the use of language in the service of satire. Through the lens of extant political commentaries, from writers as diverse as Alberico Gentili, Jovianus Pontano and Niccolò Machiavelli, the *persona* of the wise-man/philosopher as a pedagogic and socio-politically imbued entity is appraised; I also undertake a brief, ancillary survey of the ostensible signs and signifiers of the practice of “wisdom”. Finally, the problem of language in relation to acts of authentic versus ambiguous (ambivalent) rhetorical discourse is considered.
Any satisfactory discussion of Burton’s *Philosophaster* must include reference to the more general notions of comic theory and commentary emerging in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Europe. It is not within the scope of this thesis to offer a detailed analysis of such commentaries; however certain key influences concerning these intrinsic “rules of comedy” must be touched upon. The influence of the stage in the writing of Robert Burton was itself informed by a larger influence which pervaded nearly all of the literary and oratorical expression of the period; this larger informative influence was that of rhetoric and rhetorical practice.

The place of rhetoric within the arena of theatrical comedy may be swiftly and succinctly established through the examination of an edition of Terence’s plays which was published in Zurich in 1550 and thereafter issued for use in schools. This particular edition, which included within its pages an extensive and highly instructive commentary, was written by Iodochus Willichius Resellianus (Willichius 1501-1552), the German physician, scholar and polymath. In his analysis of Terence, Willichius largely adhered to the style of commentary which had been set out by the fourth century grammarian and rhetorician Aelius Donatus. As Marvin Herrick asserts, Willichius’ method of applying the rules of classical rhetoric to the Terentian corpus was more systematic than that of Donatus, nonetheless, Willichius was following a thoroughly sanctioned and “established” practice.\(^1\) Cicero, Quintilian, Hermogenes, Aristotle, Plato, Horace\(^2\) – all of these great names had paved the way in classifying poetry and oratory (along with the allied field of drama) within the overarching framework of rhetoric. Herrick explains Willichius’ approach in a little more detail:

---

Willichius thought of each scene in a play as an oration; the short scene was often a little oration, an *oratimcula*. When he could, he analysed the quantitative structure of the scenes according to the conventional rhetorical scheme of exordium, statement of facts (*narratio*), proof (*confirmatio*), disproof (*refutatio*) and peroration. He did not neglect the traditional dramatic analysis (itself rhetorical in origin) of *prologue, protasis, epitasis, catastrophe*, but showed how the rhetorical form and expression of individual scenes supported the dramatic action of the play.³

This statement effectively summarises much of what was considered mandatory, or indeed constitutional, within the field of comedic and general dramatic practice and theory during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Moreover, in one concise and convenient gesture, this small paragraph confirms the relation of oratory, poetry and drama as cognate arts. By inference, it also serves to acknowledge and highlight the work of scholars such as Cicero, Quintilian and Donatus, for example, thereby endorsing the notion of a germinal, connective framework of logic, grammar and rhetoric informing these arts. The rhetorical analysis of these plays was a commonly established practice;⁴ moreover, the fact of the discipline of rhetoric informing classical and Neo-Latin comedy has considerable implications for the reading of Robert Burton’s play, *Philosophaster*.

As we shall see, *Philosophaster* responds eloquently to a reading such as that promoted by Willichius, who, together with certain other key commentators of the period, was instrumental in constructing a burgeoning comic theory from the “rules” of comic practice.⁵ As regards *Philosophaster*, it almost seems that Burton constructed his play as an exercise in response to these very prescriptions for comedic rhetorical practice at the time, such is his apparent adherence to the inherent “rules”. It is this consistent subscription to the more generally prescribed (and distinctly embedded)

---

⁵ See Melanchthon, Robortellus, Chytraeus et al. in Herrick, *Comic Theory*, pp. 72-82.
framework of rhetorical dramatic structure of the period that I wish to discuss in the first section of this chapter.

A reading of Burton’s *Philosophaster* in the light of the classical rhetorical paradigm as described above, exposes the intricacies of construction apparent in Burton’s play in a way which no other reading may offer. Moreover, when read in this light, the style and construction apparent in *Philosophaster* access later rhetorical structures operating within the *Anatomy*. Rhetoric therefore, is the vital key which not only gives us entry into Burton’s writing for the stage in his early play(s), it also allows us conceptual and stylistic entry into his later great work, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Rhetoric becomes the vehicle essential to the understanding of Burton’s ongoing evolution as a writer. It is the element which links the early vociferous, didactic commentary of the stage with the later copious, highly stylised and rather more sophisticated commentary of Burton’s didactic prose. Moreover, analysing *Philosophaster* in terms of Burton’s utilisation of rhetorical structures inherited from the traditions of classical oration also offers a greater degree of authenticity in terms of the usual praxis of the period. Plett notes that an examination of Melanchthon’s and Iodicus Willichius’ commentaries on the comedies of Terence, for example, reveals that these are annotated in the structural terms of the classical *partes artis* and *partes orationis*. Given that Ben Jonson and others were actively constructing their stage works in the rubric of the classical formulae in their early works, it is not surprising that we find the same method of construction in Burton’s work.

To my knowledge, this is the first time that a rhetorically informed reading of this nature has been applied to Robert Burton’s *Philosophaster*. In assessing *Philosophaster* in terms of its espousal of the conventions of contemporary rhetorical dramatic practice, one is finally able to see the exact form of the line describing

---

Burton’s personal evolution from playwright to author of prose; the leitmotif of the theatre which so thoroughly influences Burton’s later work becomes more indelibly blended in the general portrait of Robert Burton as scholar, author, humanist and social commentator.

* * *

Numerous commentators, within the course of the sixteenth century, offered their respective discursive versions on the application of rhetorical structural paradigms to dramatic writing and theory. It should be noted that nearly all of these commentaries were based upon the earlier prescriptions of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and Donatus, to name the most significant of the historical sources. I shall be looking at one or two of the later commentators in this regard, mainly because we know that Burton had texts by these authors in his private library, but also because he refers to them in an ongoing and reiterative sense, in the pages of the *Anatomy*.

Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) was one such commentator to whom Burton made repeated reference in the *Anatomy*. Melanchthon was an eminent Terentian scholar (amongst other specialties of scholarship), who viewed comedy as being a primarily didactic tool. Melanchthon’s interest in the fields of logic and rhetoric was used to strategic effect when commenting on the intrinsic nature of comedic writing:

Authors of comedies wish to show examples of familiar manners and events by which we may be admonished and so the more prudently judge of human affairs and enrich our manner of speaking… In recounting the argument of the plays, the chief care of the poet should be to set forth counsel… The arguments of all plays, according to the ancient manner, are divided into

---

protasis, epitasis, catastrophe, so that the young folk may more readily understand the parts. Moreover, the plays generally contain some danger, for there is no occasion for counsel save in doubtful matters. Nor indeed, is comedy anything other than an image of human counsels and events.  

Clearly, Melanchthon is subscribing here to the Ciceronian dramatic paradigm, advanced as it was to most Renaissance commentators, through the translation of Donatus. Quoting Cicero, he writes that the definition of comedy is that vehicle which supplies “the imitation of life, the mirror of custom, the image of truth”.  

Melanchthon’s assertion of the central thesis of the Latin plays as providing a platform for didactic enterprise, teaching the anatomy of counsel as prompted by the incidence of danger, allies itself very well with Burton’s artistic schema in Philosophaster. In the broadest sense in the pages of Philosophaster, Burton is instructing his audience in the dangers of being duped by those who are not what they appear to be, spelling out the potential damage, to both person and state, in no uncertain terms. What is concerning from a more socially focussed point of view, is the possibility of Burton’s providing an “imitation of life, a mirror of custom” within the apparent mimetic “school house” of his play. If, within the scope of his artistic and imitative enterprise, Robert Burton is shining a mirror into the audience beyond, we have good reason to further investigate the cause of his motivation for doing so. If, via the searchlight of Philosophaster, Burton’s “counsel” works reflexively upon life as it was customarily lived at the universities, certain affiliated members of Burton’s audience might not have been so comfortable; but of course, given the nature of satirical commentary, this would have been his design.  

Returning for the moment to didacticism, and its place in Renaissance comedy, Melanchthon offers us a useful yardstick with which we might measure the privileging

---

9 Herrick, *Comic Theory*, p. 73.  
of the didactic. Melanchthon pursues the thesis of argument and counsel as being essential to the understanding and achievement of the specific purpose of comedy (“Nor indeed, is comedy anything other than an image of human counsels and events”). Melanchthon’s theory of comedy stands in curious relation to that of Aristotle, who states:

As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity, not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is sometimes ugly and distorted without causing pain.11

Robortellus, in his commentary on Aristotle (which was to form the bedrock thesis of comic “theory” in the sixteenth century), informs us:

Comedy has the same purpose that all other kinds of poems have, to imitate the characters and actions of men… it imitates the actions of the lower, meaner people… comedy imitates men who are, as it were, carrying on [their] business and acting… 12

Together, what these two theories tell us, is that we may not only laugh, but learn from viewing the more repugnant reflective image of ourselves as it parades upon the stage, ridiculous in form, and wearing whatever mask might momentarily reflect our own watchful and changeful visage. Opportunities for prescriptive arguments concerning dangers (“doubtful matters”) and counsel go hand in hand with the ongoing sequencing of human events, as we ‘act’ and carry on our business of life; this is what the Early Modern scholar believed. This fact is also what Burton as a writer, as a social commentator, as a practitioner of social comedy, would have been responding to in the

11 Herrick, Comic Theory, p. 62.
12 Herrick, Comic Theory, p. 227.
composition of his play. In a very contemporary sense, Burton is employing comedy as a strategic didactic tool, playing out what he would have considered to be the all-important lessons of counsel before his audience. As we shall later observe, this strategic alliance between the pedagogic “objective” of counsel, and the integral purpose of comedy also elicits the notion of “proofs” allied with rhetorical diction and sententia, a concept closely affiliated with didactic frameworks of rhetorical construction.

Slightly after Melancthon, in 1548, Robertellus published his famous essay On Comedy (Explicatio eorum omnium quae ad Comoediae artificium pertinent)\(^\text{13}\) where he advanced comic theory in predominantly Aristotelian terms, analysing plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle and music. Within the construct of “plot”, Robertellus discusses simple and complex plots, complication and ‘dénouement’, discovery and reversal of fortune, as well as applying to the traditional Aristotelian unities of action and time. References to the concepts of the Greek logos (equivalent, in terms of dramatic structure, to the Latin argumentum) along with the dispositio (exordium, narration, proofs and peroration or alternatively, prologue, protasis, epitasis and catastrophe), are implicit. In aligning contemporary interpretations of rhetorical formulae with, for example, Aristotle’s dicta on plot, character, thought and diction (to use Herrick’s words) Robertellus appears to be making an effort to “square” the rhetorical tradition\(^\text{14}\) with the recently “rediscovered” Aristotelian framework. The influence of Robertellus’ appropriation and reinterpretation of the Aristotelian schema was profound. Other scholars both within and beyond his era (Chytraeus, Trissino, Lope de Vega)\(^\text{15}\) modelled their respective commentaries on that of Robertellus. The German schoolmaster and poet Nathan Chytraeus, (brother of the theologian and historian David

\(^{13}\) Herrick, Comic Theory, p. 79.
\(^{14}\) Herrick, Comic Theory, p. 18.
\(^{15}\) Herrick, Comic Theory, p. 79.
Chytraeus in his edition of Terence’s *Brothers* in 1576 further refined Robortellus’ rules. The result was one of the clearest, most concise summaries of comic theory in the Renaissance. \(^{16}\) Burton was certainly reading both David and Nathan Chytraeus; we know this from the details of Kiessling’s inventory of Burton’s library. \(^{17}\) This fact, at least in part, might account for the coincidence of Burton’s adherence to Chytraeus’ numerically listed “Propositions on Comedy”, \(^{18}\) a work which, once again, makes reference to the place of protasis, epitasis and catastrophe in comedic structure. Given the more generalized nature of such a rubric however, in terms of its status within the contemporary comedic paradigm, one might argue that, in the construction of his play, Burton was simply following the fashion of the period.

Herrick offers a useful statement on the fundamental tripartite division of the dramatic plot (comic or tragic), when he says: “Generally the protasis extended through Acts 1 and 2; the epitasis through Acts 3 and 4, sometimes into Act 5; the catastrophe was Act 5, or the concluding scenes of Act 5.” \(^{19}\) Herrick also advises that Ben Jonson “used this arrangement in his comedies… In his summary of the action of the *New Inn*, he [Jonson] wrote: Act III. Here begins the Epitasis, or business of the play… Act V. is the catastrophe, or knitting up of all…” \(^{20}\) Jonson’s comments show us that these elements of rhetorical construction which had been recommended and indeed prescribed by the scholarly commentators of the time were not only quantifiably measurable, they obviously provided commonly acknowledged markers, or tools of navigation, within the process of comedic writing. Although not within the scope of this thesis, it would be an interesting exercise to see how Burton in fact put these devices to work in his play.

---

\(^{16}\) Herrick, *Comic Theory*, p. 80.  
\(^{17}\) Kiessling, *Library of Robert Burton*, p. 68. Note: one can only speculate upon Burton’s further reading of these sources concerning (specifically) the fields of rhetoric and literary theory.  
\(^{18}\) Herrick, *Comic Theory*, pp. 80-1.  
\(^{19}\) Herrick, *Comic Theory*, p. 109.  
Rhetoric, Philosophasters and the Infiltration of the Ethical State

If, as I am suggesting, *Philosophaster* is a play which adheres to the structural and conceptual traditions of the *partes orationis* or *partes artis* of rhetorical practice (within the parallel artistic space of the prologue, protasis, epistasis and catastrophe), one must ask initially, what then, is the thesis which Burton chooses to promote? The answer to this question is initially offered in the title Burton supplies to his play (“There is no need to tell what the comedy is about; the name itself well teaches what that may be…”).21 A “philosophaster” is a bad, inferior, counterfeit or sham philosopher, a “smatterer in Philosophie”.22 In terms of rhetoric, he is someone who practises the art of *simulatio* (an acting-as-if, or a feigning of that which is not present [*res absens*]);23 in short, he/she is not what he/she appears to be. In looking to form his *inventio* and *dispositio* for the demonstrative or epideictic showing forth of what constitutes a philosophaster (“this play is not about true scholars”),24 Burton must establish certain contextual parameters for his exposition. However, we might better understand the term “philosophaster” if, by way of contrast, we take a brief look at the predominant contemporary sources offering narrative on the inherent qualities of the ‘wise man’ or philosopher-scholar.

Much of what was said concerning eloquence (in the capacity of its relation to rhetoric)\textsuperscript{25} and wisdom came to the Early Modern and Renaissance periods through the translation and dissemination of texts by Marcus Tullius Cicero. Heinrich Plett states:

In the Renaissance rhetoric became a determining factor in the creation of a humanistic cultural consciousness. Its core was the Ciceronian belief that through eloquence (eloquentia) wisdom (sapientia) could be achieved.\textsuperscript{26}

As Plett reminds us, such a thesis was quite explicitly stated at the beginning of

Cicero’s \textit{De Inventione}. Thus we read:

For my own part, after long thought, I have been led by reason itself to hold this opinion first and foremost, that wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of states, but that eloquence without wisdom is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful. Therefore if anyone neglects the study of philosophy and moral conduct, which is the highest and most honourable of pursuits, and devotes his whole energy to the practice of oratory, his civic life is nurtured into something useless to himself and harmful to his country; but the man who equips himself with the weapons of eloquence, not to be able to attack the welfare of his country but to defend it, he, I think, will be a citizen most helpful and most devoted both to his own interests and those of his community.\textsuperscript{27}

Of course, this statement may be summarised in terms of Cicero’s \textit{vir bonus}, standing in close relation to the concept of the \textit{vir civilis}. Yet what is important here, in terms of the relation to Burton’s \textit{Philosophaster}, are two very apposite propositions. Firstly, there is the association of eloquence with wisdom, and secondly, there is the exposition of the link that is forged between eloquence and civic life, connecting Cicero’s \textit{eloquentia} (the enabling force of \textit{ratio} and \textit{sapientia}) with the \textit{scientia civilis}. Within these two distinct and interrelated associations, I believe we find a very useful key to Burton’s play.

\textsuperscript{26} Plett, \textit{Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture}, p. 73.
Cicero links wisdom with eloquence, but he also links these two qualities with philosophy ("the highest and most honourable of pursuits"), which in turn is linked with moral conduct. All the latter qualities are allied with potential outcomes in regards to the civic ‘health’ of the state. Burton’s *Philosophaster* similarly treats philosophy via the (satirical) assessment of rhetorical eloquence, and aligns it with assertions concerning moral conduct. The outcome of the interaction of these qualities (whether positive or negative) is aligned with the state, via the intermediary and hierarchical machinery of monarchy. Philosophy and moral conduct therefore, and their association with authentically derived rhetoric as opposed to a rhetoric of simulation, are pitted against the monarchical state (in *Philosophaster*, the latter is embodied in the *persona* of the Duke, Desiderius). Thus, an inauthentic rhetoric must be said to implicate an inauthentic philosophy (and therefore moral conduct becomes itself liable to infection), the result of which effectively leads to an attack on the estate of monarchy: ergo, an attack on the state. Such a thesis potentially places Burton in an interesting dialogue (in England) with names such as Thomas Hobbes and Francis Bacon; in France with Montaigne, and in Italy, with Baldassare Castiglione and Niccolò Machiavelli.

Regarding Thomas Hobbes and his particular philosophical construction of rhetoric, Heinrich Plett makes the observation:

…in his early years, Hobbes was conscious of the socio-political significance of rhetoric. In writings like *De Cive*…he sharply distinguished between the ends of logic and of rhetoric and defines the first as truth, and the other as victory; in the former he sees a connection with wisdom, in the latter almost none. He therefore arrives at the sceptical conclusion that eloquence and civil disorder are almost causally related… The same scepticism is to be observed in Hobbes’ main work *Leviathan*, in which he states that, since “eloquence is power” orators can be dangerous in assemblies…28

In a contemporary sense then, the case for the relation between oratory, eloquence and rhetoric and processes of dissembling, simulation and dissimulation, would appear to be substantial. Eloquence or rhetoric appears to enjoy a vulnerable, if not intrinsically manipulative association with the qualities of truth and wisdom, the latter, moreover being deeply associated with philosophy and moral conduct. As Cicero states, “wisdom in itself is silent and powerless to speak.”

Similarly, “reason lacks any inherent capacity to persuade us of the truths it brings to light”. With respect to the cultivation of wisdom and reason within the framework of the *scientia civilis*, Cicero implies (as Skinner suggests):

A large and crucial part of *scientia civilis* must therefore be occupied by ‘that form of artistic eloquence which is generally known as rhetoric, the function of which is that of speaking in a manner calculated to persuade, and the goal of which is that of persuading by speech.’

If therefore, as Burton postulates, the philosophaster should arrive and succeed in his ambition (via the simulation of rhetorical eloquence) to infiltrate philosophy (*ratio*; *sapientia*), nominally, at least, then by virtue of that infiltration, he also similarly infiltrates truth, wisdom and moral conduct; ultimately, he infiltrates the state. This, to some considerable extent, is what Burton examines in *Philosophaster*. In this regard, I note also the relevance of writers like Hobbes, for example, particularly his translation of Thucydides *Eight bookes of the Peloponnesian warre…*, a work which offered further commentary on the association between ethics, philosophy, rhetoric and civil corruption (“…the corruption of ethical language starts as a symptom of corrupt practices, but may also [ultimately] become a contributing cause of civil disasters…”).

It is significant that a cautiously deployed “anti-rhetorical” stance was gaining status in some areas of contemporary scholarship; the notion of Burton’s employing the “signs”

---

of rhetoric in an attempt at conveying a concurrent, if not somewhat submerged political narrative, is therefore not so remarkable. Indeed, as we shall see with reference to *Philosophaster*, Burton used this early work as an exercise (in part) in exemplifying the currency of paradiastolic redescription, a rhetorical *figura* which in Renaissance England, was often used “to mitigate and excuse”.\(^{33}\) This practice of distorting vices so that they might be “given the names of virtues”\(^{34}\) was certainly prevalent at the time at which Burton was writing. Commentary on its evolution is offered by writers as wide-ranging as Castiglione, Bacon, Sidney, Nashe and Spenser, in addition to the classical sources.\(^{35}\) As Skinner points out, Burton’s invocation of this *figura* is apparent in the first few pages of the *Anatomy*, where he “denounces the abuses of the age”.\(^{36}\) Burton states:

> The public morality of our times is such that knavery is commonly redescribed as policy, while the private conduct of the rich is no better, their vaunted liberality being such that ‘many times that word is mistaken’, so that ‘under the name of Bounty and Hospitality, is shrouded Riot and Prodigality’.\(^{37}\)

In *Philosophaster*, the symptoms of paradiastole are more covertly on display, yet they are nonetheless, present. In Act IV Sc vii for example, Polupragmaticus, fearing that the pseudo-philosophers’ ongoing acts of deception might be in danger of being revealed, urges: “We need wise deliberation, for as they say, good fortune doesn’t last forever”.\(^{38}\) Of course, in the context of Polupragmaticus and his company, “wise deliberation” becomes a paradoxical statement. The philosophasters are patently not wise, true wisdom eludes them; moreover, they have no real interest in, nor ability, to discern true wisdom. They have only the morally vacuous and short-lived occupational

---


accessories of stealth and cunning and the accompanying actio of poor mimesis at their disposal. Therefore, from their lips, the term “wise deliberation” might more properly be construed to mean “ill-bred and ill-informed conniving”, surely a case of Susenbrotus’ “calling yourself wise rather than cunning”.  

In examples such as the above, we touch upon a theme which appears, after closer investigation, to go much deeper within the pages of Burton’s Philosophaster. In essence, we move from what has often been assessed as being a simple commentary on “the experiences of scholastic life” to its being a commentary on something much more socially and politically engaging, given the preoccupations of the age. In Philosophaster, increasingly, we witness the evidence that Burton is considering ever more intimately, the practice of rhetoric, of eloquence as it applies to the vir bonus, or the vir civilis; of eloquence as it exists in relation to the state. The notion of eloquence and its potential pairing with sedition (via the actions of simulatio and dissimulatio) returns us to Cicero’s assessment of eloquence as a moving force (incorporated in his docere, delectare, movere). Yet, when one encounters the repeated use of “knowledge” as a highly mutable and therefore essentially unstable commodity (as regards its alignment with veritas), especially as it occurs in the ill-wrought and hastily conceived commonplaces and quotations of the philosophasters, one wonders if Burton isn’t himself pursuing an element in the equation of the betrayal of recta ratio. Hobbes discoursed on this subject early on in his career, in De Cive. I believe that Robert Burton expresses these same concerns via the vehicle of the stage, through the mouths of his pseudo-philosophers. In putting forward their opinions merely by the exercise of a “violent impetus of the mind” (motivated in this case, by the requirements of simulatio), Burton’s quack “philosophers” provide numerous and ongoing examples of

---

40 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 2.
41 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p. 265.
42 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p. 265.
the folly of taking “the habitual discourse of the tongue for ratiocination”. Burton is drawing our attention to the fact that just because words are uttered in a certain habitual or established sequence by no means guarantees either their inherent truth, or the truthful motivation or authenticity of those persons who issue such phrases. A discourse may “happen to furnish evidence of truth in the form of words correctly used and correctly linked” (and in the case of Burton’s philosophasters, such an outcome is very much “by chance”) but this does not imply that these words contain genuine scientia or knowledge. What Burton is in fact demonstrating here, is that such discourse may well implicate the opposite: that is, it may rather inform scenarios of vice, confusion, vulnerability and sedition, advocating neither truth, nor knowledge, but uncertainty. Such uncertainty promotes folly, both in the case of the listener and the speaker, and makes the scene ripe for scenarios of manipulation.

The vehicle of rhetoric then, provided Burton with a means of theatrically aligned socio-political commentary. In this regard, it is notable that Burton had in his library a number of texts by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), one of which suggests that ‘Rhetorike’ is:

…neither Arte, neither Science, but a certain subtiltie and sharpnesse of witte, and that it is neyther commendable, nor honest, but rather a dishonest and seruile flatterie… Rhetoritians striue unto thys houre what the ende thereof is, whether to persuade, or to speake well, and not contente with the true causes, do devise new and fayned. They have bedside this found out so many Theses, Hypotheses, figures, colours, guidinges, caracters, persuasions, controuersies, declamations, prohems, insinuations, gettings of good wyll, and moste artificiall narrations, that

---

44 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p. 266.
45 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p. 266.
46 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p. 266.
47 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p. 266.
Surely we see in this mirror, the reflection of some of Burton’s company of would-be “philosophers”, those who would attempt to take the tools of knowledge and in an act of strategic and ongoing dissembling, use them against the people and the monarchy (the “state”), in pursuit of their own advantage. Burton is suggesting therefore, like Cicero, Hobbes and Agrippa von Nettlesheim (to name but a few of his fellow commentators), that in the wrong hands, and for the wrong purposes (that is, those lacking virtuous motivation), rhetoric has the potential to become a liability, something dangerous to the integrity, and therefore ultimately, to the corporeal health, of the [monarchic] state.

Burton’s covert private and ultimately highly political concerns evidently found a means of exposition early on, in Philosophaster. Later, in the Anatomy, we see Burton take up his cause again, but in a much more grandiose, and in some ways more intrinsically ‘flawed’ fashion, an outcome not wholly unanticipated, given the nature and physical size of the treatise which he undertook. We see Burton’s essentially humanist-Ciceronian concerns assume full expression in an exhaustive examination of the general ‘social disease or ‘malaise’ of the times (melancholy). This expression is viewed in both a microcosmic form (through the inserted vision of his “Utopia”), and a macrocosmic form (within the scope of the greater work), through the vehicle of the ‘body as metaphor’. Moreover, the psychagogic implications of constructing a text which utilises rhetoric in such a way as the project of the Anatomy endeavours to do, brings to mind certain aspects of Socratic and Platonic maieutic exercises, wherein the seeker or student is encouraged along a path of personal revelation and betterment under

---

the guidance of an endorsed master or ‘mentor’; this path of enquiry will be further
investigated in chapters four and five of this thesis. Of special interest at this stage,
however, is the relation the current examination bears to Burton’s earlier work for the
stage, in *Philosophaster*. I will now revisit this concept in terms of the rhetorical (and
the associated subjective/situational) context of *Philosophaster*.

Locating the “Philosopher” in *Philosophaster*.

The idea of the philosopher-wise-man or philosopher-scholar in *Philosophaster* is an
intriguing one. Its definition falls both within the title of the play (via the device of a
negative appraisal and comparative/inferred reference) and within the Prologue (via the
advice that “the end of the tale teaches what pseudophilosphers do”). It is also
pursued via the body of the text, where plot, characters and dialogue as promised, reveal
what pseudophilosphers do (how they act), and therefore how they may be defined.
Yet Burton’s play is also one of ongoing negative appraisals. The philosopher in his true
form is never an entity which is tangibly present; he enjoys no *res praeasens* in this
*theatrum rhetoricum*, and continues to be defined by reference to that which he is not.
For example, a philosopher is he who is not a “philosophaster”; he is also he who is
“not a true scholar”, and continuing on this theme, it is noteworthy that in all of their
peripatetic wandering around the world, the two would-be ‘wise-men’ in Burton’s
*Philosophaster* declare that they have yet to meet a true wise man (philosopher).
Therefore, ostensibly, Burton’s play purports to be about a subject which is never
actually given definition in the positive, only reflexively referred to by means of a
comparative definition in the negative. This act in itself, on behalf of the playwright,

---

49 *Burton, Philosophaster*, p. 37.
introduces us to the concept of *celare artem*, or the active concealment of art, implying the fact of the delivery of a sign within a covert act, something which is concealed or hidden. The philosopher in his true form is concealed, or hidden. Indeed, during the course of Burton’s play, he never actually appears; he exists only as a reflexive shadow of the simulation which purports to illustrate his kind.

The closest we get to actually locating a true philosopher in Burton’s play occurs when we meet the two wandering scholars who arrive at Osuna; the scholar Polumathes in particular engages our interest. Polumathes is the only person in the play who admits that he is unable to locate a true philosopher, or who, in fact, can even articulate his awareness of the requisite qualities of the true philosopher; this act tells the audience that he, therefore, must be something like a wise man himself. Only a wise man would be capable of truly recognising the lamentable *res absens* of a wise man. This situation reminds us of Socrates who, through his own evasion of professing to possess the requirements of the ‘wise condition’ is, in fact, conversely implying that perhaps he is wise.50 Indeed, only the wise man might himself be able to judge these qualities of wisdom in another. Yet Polumathes, as he himself tells us, has been far and wide, through the universities of Europe, and failed to locate the object of his search.51 The Duke of Osuna, Desiderius, whose name ironically denotes a “wish or longing for that which cannot be had”,52 desires to establish a university tenanted by wise-men (as teachers), whose wisdom might subsequently be seen to reflect upon himself. In his position as ruler, he may be said to be wise in attempting to establish such an institution, but his wisdom is reliant upon firstly, his two counsellors (Eubulus and Cratinus),53 and secondly, upon the calibre of the ‘wise-men’ whom he appoints as teachers in his

50 Plato, *Apology*, 20e-23c
52 Mike Hughes [personal correspondence]
53 Ironically, Eubulus may be translated as “good counsel”. Cratinus, along with Eupolis and Aristophanes is recognised as one of the great poets of Old Comedy. He has been variously described as having the poetic persona of an “intoxicated genius”, flowing in satirical wit and invective, although bearing the ability to be elusive.
university. Obviously then, at least initially, Desiderius would seem to be at a disadvantage. In fact, the Duke, upon learning of how he and his subjects have been duped (at the close of the play), decides, in anger, to close the university and to return the funds to the treasury of war. It is only upon the timely advice of Polumathes that the Duke is reinstated as a persona capable of making wise choices; that is, he is returned to a position of wisdom via the enabling ‘ruling’ of the ‘wise man’. It is noteworthy here, that the overtones in this outcome are strongly Platonic. The university will be continued in the spirit in which it was inaugurated, and the company of vagrant pseudophilosophical deceivers will be punished and exiled.

Throughout the course of the play then, the concept of the actuated and corporeally present “wise man” remains both nominally and physically, elusive. Intriguingly, we see “wise men badly held with chains”\(^54\) at Oxford, yet the sad irony is that even these wise men contained within the boards of books must be chained, for fear of their being violated, or removed. Moreover, if these ostensible wise men are ‘badly held’, is there the possibility that some have ‘escaped’ or left the precincts of the university already? Perhaps ongoing issues at the university have seen such literary wisdom already slip through the careless fingers of their caretakers; such a thought sees knowledge, in the wrong kind of hands, as an unstable or deteriorating commodity. This sort of ongoing textual commentary, where Burton repeatedly prompts his audience to consider the qualities and virtues of the wise man as opposed to the sham qualities (which instead harbour only vices) of his antithesis, or conceptual shadow, makes for a persuasive play of argument on the part of Burton the playwright. In Burton’s *Philosophaster*, the wise man inhabits a world of potential repression or silence, a world in which his own authentic art may be too easily occluded by the practice of an

\(^{54}\) Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 61.
inauthentic rhetoric, emanating from an inauthentic persona. The wise man is therefore both an elusive, and a vulnerable quantity.

The ‘condition’ of silence may offer an entry into Burton’s reading of Cicero, that is: “wisdom in itself is silent and powerless to speak.”\(^{55}\) Wisdom requires the enabling voice of eloquence. However, as Cicero advises, eloquence is dangerous without the accompanying requisite virtues of philosophy and moral conduct; all three must be in operation in order to achieve (and thereby enable) the mind of wisdom. This mantra might be said to represent the core counsel at the heart of Burton’s \textit{Philosophaster}; nonetheless, such a message must be investigated in its full and accompanying context.

In Act V Scene v, at the resolution of the play, Eubulus (“good counsel”) advises the Duke: “Don’t trust appearances”. His fellow counsellor, Cratinus, quickly adjoins this advice with: “Don’t trust anyone”.\(^{56}\) Later, when the Duke threatens to dismantle the university and return the funds to “soldiers and courtiers for warlike uses”, Eubulus responds:

\begin{quote}
I highly praise and approve of your decision. (Aside) \textit{For this may profit me.}
\end{quote}

Cratinus similarly replies:

\begin{quote}
(aside) \textit{Unless I’m mistaken, also me.}\(^{57}\)
\end{quote}

This particular exchange of dialogue offers a crucial entry into the larger schema of Burton’s play. It opens the way for the wise man to save the situation, thereby concurrently ‘saving’ scholarship (the study of true philosophy and moral conduct), along with monarch and state, all in one strategic move. Moreover, attention is drawn back into considering what this play is all about - indeed, it exposes one of the key

arguments which it turns upon. “Don’t trust appearances”, alternatively offered as “He
who doesn’t know how to dissimulate, doesn’t know how to live [how to succeed]”, is
alternatively presented, by none other than Machiavelli as:

…in general, men judge more with their eyes than with their hands, since everybody can see, but
few can perceive. Everybody sees what you appear to be; few perceive what you are, and those
few dare not contradict the belief of the many… the mob is always fascinated by
appearances…

Two potentially rich seams of inquiry are inaugurated here. First, as regards the elusive
figure of the “wise man”, there is the explicit reference to the works of the Italian
humanist Giovanni Pontano (in particular his Charon Dialogus from which Burton
borrows heavily, although it is Pontano’s Antonius Dialogus which supplies him with a
large part of his commentary on the wise man). Evidence of this link is well
established. A subject that is less examined, however, (especially with reference to
Pontano) is the ambiguous nature of both rhetoric and prudence (in humanist terms) and
the complex relationship the latter enjoy with the morally right and expedient, aligned
with the potentially amoral nature of the technical skills which facilitate their delivery.
Victoria Kahn offers a comprehensive discourse on the way in which prudence and
rhetoric may be manipulated in the service of presenting a “practical truth”. This
practical truth, as Giovanni Pontano expresses it, is not so far removed from
Machiavelli’s presentation of the expediency of truthful appearances. Kahn states:

…Pontano argues, there is another way of looking at things, another system of values that is not
concerned with correspondence to some fixed theoretical truth or ethics, but with the creation

58 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 83; also AOM 1:316.
60 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 4.
61 See Jordan-Smith, p. xiii and Burton, Philosophaster, pp. 59,117.
62 Adapted from Victoria Kahn “Giovanni Pontano’s Rhetoric of Prudence,” Philosophy and Rhetoric,
and maintenance of a social and political community, and thus with compromise and consensus. The agent within this community does not seek pre-established first principles, but rather a practical truth…

A “practical truth” where a doctor, a ruler or a priest may lie, in order to ‘aid’ their interlocutors is not so far removed from the Machiavellian notion of converting the means to achieve the desirable end. The problematic nature of rhetoric and its relationship to qualities of truth and prudence or the Aristotelian/Ciceronian “good orator/prudent man” is highlighted, foregrounding the possibility of a rhetoric which potentially nurtures an ambivalent moral status. Once again, this fact refers us to Burton’s implicit exposition of the same, and offers a cogent lead in the investigation of the ideological processes informing *Philosophaster*. This fact also brings me to my second point (as regards the seams of inquiry which are inaugurated in the quotations above), and that is, the implied reference to the philosophy of Machiavelli.

Robert Burton certainly had one or two of the core Machiavellian texts in his personal library at Oxford, and at the stage he was most probably introduced to him (that is, from his election to a studentship at Christ Church in 1599) through to his earliest efforts as a writer, including *Philosophaster*, it must be remembered that Machiavelli was regularly espoused by Burton’s contemporaries as a “philosopher” of moral and political significance, even virtue. In his early years, Francis Bacon, for one, assessed Machiavelli as an exemplary philosophical “politician and moral thinker” who showed that policy was “a great part of philosophy” and vice versa. At Oxford, during the years in which Burton was a student, the incumbent Professor of Jurisprudence was the celebrated Protestant Italian exile, Alberico Gentili. Gentili’s assessment of Machiavelli, and one which might be said to be largely representative of

opinion in England at that time, is amply illustrated by the following quotation from his 
*de Legationibus* [III.ix] in 1594:

> It is necessary that we add to the knowledge of history that branch of philosophy which deals with morals and politics… Nor in this connection do I hesitate to speak of the most distinguished of his class, and to set up as a model for imitation Machiavelli and his precious Observations on Livy… I do not defend his impiety or his lack of integrity, if he actually had such faults. And yet… if I give a just estimate of his purpose in writing, and if I choose to reinforce his words by a sounder interpretation, I do not see why I cannot free from such charges the reputation of this man who has now passed away… If our plan is to interpret authors favourably, we shall palliate many faults in this man also, or we shall at least tolerate in him those that we tolerate in Plato, Aristotle, and others who have committed offenses not unlike his.\(^68\)

In this passage, Gentili is actually intimating that Machiavelli might share the same stage with the great names of Plato and Aristotle. This opinion gives us some idea of how, at least initially during Burton’s era at Oxford, the writing of Machiavelli was received. In the dialogue quoted above, Cratinus, echoing Eubulus, instructs: “Don’t trust anybody”. This particular utterance, like certain others occurring in Burton’s *Philosophaster*, is reminiscent of some of the more pronounced political statements of Machiavelli – not surprising, perhaps, given Machiavelli’s prominence at this time. In *Il Principe* Machiavelli actually states: “There will always be in doubtful times, a scarcity of men whom he can trust”;\(^69\) “…You cannot trust them, because they always aspire to their own greatness”.\(^70\)

For Machiavelli, as we are aware, appearances are everything:

> A wise prince, then, is very careful never to let out of his mouth a single word not weighty with the above-mentioned five qualities; he appears to those who see him and hear him talk, all mercy, all faith, all integrity, all humanity, all religion. No quality does a prince more need to

---


\(^{69}\) Gilbert, *Machiavelli*, p. 52.

possess – in appearance – than this last one, because in general men judge more with their eyes
than with their hands…

Of course, the irony in this scene turns upon the fact that we have individuals who are themselves practicing dissimulators (Cratinus and Eubulus), offering advice about who to trust! The “truth” such as it is, is at this moment naked, in the open; the didactic lesson is effectively offered at the height of its ironic exposition. Burton’s satirical comedy is all about appearances and trust, personal profit, fortune and greed, and the subversion, distortion, manipulation and compromise which may be practiced upon these iconic ‘Machiavellian’ quantities. It is entirely possible that these themes which Burton chose to expatiate upon were informed by his acknowledgment of (though not necessarily his agreement with) contemporary assimilation and opinion concerning the policies of the Italian humanist, Machiavelli.

References to ideas of “profit” and “fortune” within the pages of Philosophaster are also of interest in this regard, not the least because of the exposition of the power relationships which are explored in the play. One such relationship occurs in Act V, Scene V. In this scene, the Duke’s counsellors are momentarily and quite explicitly replaced by the two authentic scholars, Polumathes and Philobiblos. The true scholars thus become the corporate voice which facilitates authentic power; the wise-man-scholar effectively fills the shoes of the true philosopher, advisor to Princes (or Dukes, in this case) and accordingly, the true scholar also represents virtue. The two incumbent courtiers/counsellors are seen in their true character, that is, they are seen to be no more free of vice and self-serving duplicity than the philosophasters themselves. Yet ironically, whereas the philosophasters are discovered and exposed as being fraudulent and seditious and ultimately exiled, the two counsellors remain (in terms of their relation to the other characters in the play) undiscovered – only the audience is truly

---

71 Gilbert, Machiavelli, pp. 66-7.
aware of their real motivations and pretentions. Again, this turn of events has considerable implications for the reading of Burton’s play. *Simulatio* and *dissimulatio* (that is, the nature of appearance) appears to be intimately connected with the practice of rhetorical eloquence (or an aspiration to rhetorical eloquence), which in turn, is connected to certain assumptions concerning the health and integrity of the monarchical state (and by implication), its institutions. The state is only returned to health when the “faithful ministers”\(^{72}\) of true philosophical and rhetorical practice step in to set things right. A new contract between monarch and true scholar-philosopher then ensues:

Duke: Hereafter, I want placed in authority two men, noted for their virtue and moral probity, elected annually by public vote. Walking along the streets by night or day, they may of their own authority punish and oversee that these things be done. Moreover, you two shall take the first turn in this office and have this apparel as a mark of dignity.

Eubulus: I approve of this decision.

Cratinus: The edict pleases me.

Polumathes: Serene prince, we, most obedient to your commands, accept this task. We will work to the best of our ability to see that the University of Osuna flourishes for a long time.

Duke: I praise your ready mind, and if anything be left to put right, I entrust it to your faith.\(^{73}\)

These last lines of dialogue are interesting because they concern the attribution and allocation of power. Power is apparently transferred from the monarch, to the philosopher-scholar (the ‘wise-man’). The lines of dialogue adhere to the nature of a contract, the latter being offered by the Duke and duly accepted by the scholars, in the presence of two witnesses (the two counsellors). Power is definitively located therefore, within the context of philosophy, scholarship and politics – indeed, Burton is here aligning power with the Socratic tradition of philosophical politics, something which


Machiavelli likewise delineated in his work. Both Burton and Machiavelli (among others) were significantly influenced by Plutarch, whose observation that “being a statesman is like being a philosopher” implies that the correct study of philosophy incorporates a “high degree of ethical reflectiveness about political activity”. Thus, although no doubt somewhat utopian in its ambition, within the constraints of his play, Burton manages to portray the marriage of philosophy and politics (power), an effort not entirely lacking in courage, especially given that James himself (notwithstanding the unexpected event of a late change in the royal programme) might in fact have attended the February 1617 performance of Philosophaster.

In Burton’s particular “marriage”, power (nominally, at least) is ostensibly handed over to “philosophy”, to the ready minds and moral probity of the wise men. This transfer of power is also attended by visual ‘proofs’ (the apparel offered as a “mark of dignity”). This act of employing outward proof, both visually (artistically) and in terms of denotation (as signifier) neatly contrasts with the corresponding ‘signs’ imposed upon the fake scholars (branding in the shape of a wolf or an ape, and beards “publicly shaven”). Yet for all of this very public display of the rewarding of virtue and the punishing of vice, along with the apparent allocation of power, Burton is actually offering us an insight into how power may yet be undermined by the process of celare artem. The two witnesses who “approve” the inauguration of Polumathes and Philobiblos as the authoritative overseers of university practice are known to the audience as being consummate dissemblers. The contract is thus imperilled; it stands already compromised and therefore vulnerable to further degradation. Yet the Duke, who is either unaware of the morally ambiguous status of his two counsellors or, perhaps even knowing them to be less than virtuous, plays on. In either condition, this

74 Benner, Ethics, pp. 40; 50-3.
75 Benner, Ethics, p. 50.
76 Murphy, “Jesuits and Philosophasters,” p. 119.
state of affairs, as Burton pronounces it, plays straight into the Early Modern philosophical model of Machiavelli. In the *Anatomy*, Burton pursues the Machiavellian/Plutarchan philosophical paradigm in a more conspicuous sense, when he takes up the premise that “philosophers are like doctors who treat political disorders as if they were diseases”\(^\text{77}\), wearing his philosopher’s mask (in the persona of Democritus Junior) to treat the socio-political disease of “melancholy”. I shall be revisiting this proposition intermittently, and will give it full consideration in later chapters of this thesis.

With regard to the status of the philosopher in text of *Philosophaster*, the following observations are pertinent:

1. A philosopher is an educated man; therefore, he might well be found in the socio-cultural context of a university (Osuna/Oxford).

2. A philosopher must be generally acknowledged to be highly educated according to the context of his times; that is, a philosopher must have the potential to be erudite or wise. According to Cicero, the philosopher may well be a *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, that is, a morally good man, capable of speaking well, someone who is of value to the state.

3. The philosopher, therefore, must be eloquent in his expression, irreproachable in his decorum and irrefutable in his esoteric or specialist knowledge. In short, according to the standards of Burton’s time, the philosopher would be a man who was, in all likelihood, skilled in geometry, physic, astronomy, law, religion – as well as any and even all of the combinations of the *studia humanitatis* – but most of all, he would be a man who could express himself with rigorous rhetorical fluency, most probably in a manner commensurate with the greater pedagogical scheme of the humanistic enterprise.

In effect then, Burton’s philosopher (insofar as he stands defined by the antithetical term “philosophaster”) is a noble, upright, honest, erudite and wise individual whose integrity of persona could be announced solely (if necessary) by the signifier of rhetoric. As Plett observes, rhetoric was the signifier of education, and Early Modern and Renaissance men were shaped by their education. Therefore, the measure of the philosopher’s abilities might be said to be shaped by the demonstration of his rhetorical brilliance, the overt epideictic expression of his inner and presumably virtuous qualities. Yet this is where things begin to get rather more complex, as far as Philosophaster is concerned. With the arrival of Burton’s ‘sham philosophers’ the audience sees the apparent departure of humanistic rhetoric as a reliable indicator of the vir bonus, and also, by extension therefore, of the ‘good’ state. Burton leads us into the liminal and rather uncomfortable territory of deception, of simulatio and dissimulatio, and the allied linguistic and socio-moral domain of celare artem. The word as a semantic marker is not what is appears to be; like the philosopher/erudite from whom it issues, it can no longer be taken at face value. What evolves from this scenario is a situation in which the domain of the ‘comic’, laughing at the established gap between reality and appearance, may no longer feel quite so comfortable with itself. Realm, state, virtue, rhetoric, scholarship, ‘wise men’ - the very notions of truth itself - are all on display here (epideixis/genus demonstrativum) within the machinations of Burton’s highly strategic satirical art. Epideictic rhetoric, the very same tool which Burton utilises in the Anatomy, is seen here turning on itself, in an uncanny operation of notional dismantling: the philosopher, the stage, the topoi, the art, the rhetoric… as the play progresses, none of these are what they appear to be, and this is what lies at the heart of Burton’s own coruscating and didactic, super-imposed rhetoric. In the hands of

78 Plett, Rhetoric in Renaissance Culture, p. 49. Skinner states that rhetorical education in Renaissance England was aligned with a “more inclusive approach to citizenship and civic involvement”. Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, p.10.
opportunist peripatetics and under the guise of an inauthentic and distorted philosophy, good names are “used to colour indecent deeds”; contrived ‘sophistical’ teachings become “tools to campaign effectively for [money] and power”, and philosophy is reduced to a “mere technical knowledge (technē) needed to make students (philosophasters?) appear knowledgeable”, not the “reflective knowledge (episteme) that is the proper aim of philosophy.” Rhetoric enters into the service of Burton’s tenacious deconstruction and exposé of what he views as an unviable and bastardised version of philosophy, one which is hinged upon the slippery nature of a language which is inadequately tested and secured, and the similarly problematic nature of appearances.

**The Problem of Language**

The concept of the notional gap which must occur between reality and fiction, in order for the comical (or satirical) to be brought into existence, presents the opportunity for a highly provocative commentary in Robert Burton’s *Philosophaster*. In this play of simulation and *sprezzatura*, the audience must be given clear markers as to what separates authenticity from inauthenticity; the strongest marker of such a demarcation occurs if we look to the use of language.

*Philosophaster* can only work as a satire, if those elements which are anomalous and therefore potentially comical, are clearly brought to the audience’s attention. In some ways, Burton’s play becomes a commentary on the process of rhetoric itself, when we recognise that what we are enjoined to laugh at, is the patent (and strategically

---

82 Adapted from Benner, *Ethics*, p. 65.
planned) failure of the rhetorical method *qua* vehicle of authentic linguistic persuasion. Or is this in fact, the case? One might be persuaded that perhaps in its very ‘failure’, rhetoric succeeds in its mission to persuade us of exactly that which we are ultimately directed to believe—that is, that the rhetoric of philosophy is mutable and therefore vulnerable, subject to abuse. In the venerable Renaissance tradition of espousing an argument *in utramque partem*, Burton offers a counsel clothed within a counsel (rhetoric may simultaneously be seen to “fail” and yet succeed within that “failure”). Burton effectively construes a play of rhetoric to the teleological end of demonstrating the architectural and semantic components of that rhetoric, within the framework of a negative, and therefore vulnerable, paradigm. In other words, he holds up a satirical mimesis of the rhetorical art (making clear its deviation from the artistic standard of the same), and asks us, his audience, to laugh. In essence, what he is saying is that philosophasters, being barren of true philosophy, appropriate its tools, its vocabulary, its language, and in attempting to re-create these elements, fail to do so—with laughable results. The language of rhetoric is on display, but it holds within itself its own *celare artem*, and these “apes”, as Burton calls them, these mere “asses”83 may only fumble with its true art, making exhibitions of themselves, their bumbling errors and cynical, superficial appraisals, being always motivated by financial reward rather than any true appreciation of what scholarship and wisdom actually represent. These philosophasters are holding up the distorted and misappropriated language of rhetoric almost as public placards to the applauding claque (those in the academic ‘know’), and the signs are saying “laugh now” – yet is this not rather symptomatic of something else? Burton may well be suggesting that the tools of scholarship, the vocabulary and language of scholarship are vulnerable to abuse, especially in areas where they are not under the supervision of the wise man. In the wrong hands (or mouths) such tools become

cheapened and liable to corruption, provoking discontent, confusion and insurrection. The signage of rhetoric therefore, inappropriately used, becomes a weapon (potentially) to be used against the people, the monarchy and the state. This latter eventuality seems particularly mordant, given that Renaissance humanists promoted the study of rhetoric as an integral part of training for public life. Not only does an unstable rhetoric become a liability, bringing with it the potential to damage that which it is (ironically) supposed to give structure to and uphold; it also reflects poorly on the system which perpetrates it (in this case, humanism).

An examination of how Burton employs language, and specifically rhetorical language as an indicator of a more coercive, if not somewhat submerged, political commentary is best instituted with reference to humanistic and courtly concepts of *elocutio poetica*, a subject to which Plett devotes some time in his *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*. In the latter work, Plett distinguishes between two basic kinds of style with regard to *elocutia poetica*, the first he associates with humanistic treatises, the second he aligns with those of the Renaissance court. Plett suggests that a definitive exponent of the humanistic style is Julius Caesar Scaliger, an author whom Burton was very familiar with. Plett states:

> Scaliger’s *Poetices libri septem* represents a scholarly approach to the subject. Its main features are the use of Latin, a retrospective interest in classical literature, a learned display of the arts, and a primarily ontological interpretation of style that manifests itself on the heavy emphasis laid on the tropes.

On the courtly style, Plett has this to say:

> The courtly idea of style can be exemplified by the third book of Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie*. It is different from the humanistic one in that both its language and its literary examples

---

85 Plett, *Rhetoric in Renaissance Culture*, p. 197.
are vernacular, its intention not a demonstration of art but rather its concealment and its conception of the figures more pragmatic than semantic.\textsuperscript{86}

Plett continues:

…the humanistic style concept is primarily addressed to the learned \textit{respublica literaria} and that it implies a pedagogical ethos that ascribes to the language of poetry a civilising power of immense effect… the aims of the courtly poet are much more modest. His principal objective is not social reform but to “retain the credit of his place, and profession of a very Courtier, which is in plaine terms, cunningly to be able to dissemble.”\textsuperscript{87}

In \textit{Philosophaster}, Burton very skilfully connects these two styles of \textit{elocutio}, enabling the one to both interact with and succinctly highlight the other. In a pluralistic and convoluted act of artistic interchange, the language of the (poet) scholar and (poet) courtier are interlaced, the scholastic enterprise (\textit{demonstrare artem}) becomes the \textit{sprezzatura} (\textit{celare artem}). The figures and tropes of the semantic categories become converted to those relating to sensorial or mental perception. The corresponding description of the figures moves from the primarily semantic or ontological, to the primarily pragmatic, via dissimulation or social roles.\textsuperscript{88} Burton in fact bridges the gap between these two discrete areas of structural and functional style in what is, in rhetorical terms at least, a dazzling display of the deployment of language (through characterisation) in the interests of epideictic determinism. Both sides of the coin of rhetorical style are on display; furthermore, they are constrained to exhibit exactly that which Burton wishes to pursue, in terms of his socio-political agenda. As Plett suggests, “…the contrast between ‘humanistic’ and ‘courtly’ stylistics is not primarily one of \textit{ars}, but of its adaptation to heterogeneous social circumstances”.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} Plett, \textit{Rhetoric in Renaissance Culture}, p. 197.  
\textsuperscript{87} Plett, \textit{Rhetoric in Renaissance Culture}, p. 199.  
\textsuperscript{88} Deduced from Plett, \textit{Rhetoric in Renaissance Culture}, p. 198.  
\textsuperscript{89} Plett, \textit{Rhetoric in Renaissance Culture}, p. 200.
not only confirms this thesis, but in doing so it forwards a very pertinent and highly contemporary social commentary.

In terms of decorum, within the framework of *Philosophaster*, Burton adheres to the usual rhetorical model of the exordium⁹⁰ (in the Prologue/protasis), where he works to:

1. Convey information.
2. Procure the audience’s attentiveness, and
3. Engender a favourable disposition.

As in his approach to the apparent subject of his play however, Burton acquiesces to these rules of rhetorical practice in a rather obtuse fashion. For instance, with regard to requirement (1), information is given out, but this information appears to be somewhat unsecured and unreliable in its nature. “If anyone should think this adapted from a recent play” says Burton somewhat uncomfortably, albeit in the Terentian manner of endeavouring to defend his art before his audience, “let him know that it was written eleven years ago… condemned by its author to eternal darkness…”⁹¹ Already, there is the idea of a rather surprising chronological anomaly, of an entity that was to have remained hidden amongst “roaches and moths” being summoned to life, as it were, coming out of unknown circumstances of darkness, into light. Moreover, it is at the “urging of others” that this event occurs (discounting, for the moment, that this statement might simply be a rhetorical ploy). We are not told exactly who these “others” are, although we may guess at their identity (politically-minded or motivated acquaintances? Fellow scholars? Members of the audience, perhaps?). Or is the reference to “the others” in fact a ruse, the “others” being, rather, voices emanating from the author’s own social or political conscience? Next, we are given an indication of what the play is about, but only in terms of a negative appraisal; that is, Burton

---

specifically states what *Philosophaster is not* about (“this play is not about true scholars”). This oddly surreptitious, covert game Burton plays with the subject matter of his satirical drama continues with the words: “…The end of the tale teaches what pseudophilosophers do.”92 Again, we are given information in such a way that the integrity of the information is compromised; in fact, we are given very little clear information as to exactly what is going on, in the arena of Burton’s stage. This rather obfuscated state of affairs is continued with Burton’s warning: “Philosophasters, if any such be here, leave at once for we are full of chinks”. In effect, a judgement follows the warning: “No one is guilty, all are worthy scholars”.93

A strange arbitration of both the information divulged and the judgement (such as it is delivered) is what Burton offers therefore, in response to the first observed requirement of his exordium. Yet this strategy works very well with regard to requirement number 2 (procuring the audience’s attention). The combined mystery of information withheld and the invitation to audience participation (“are you a philosophaster?” allied with the imperative “…leave at once”), along with the subsequent authorial act of ‘judgement’ all contribute to securing the attention of the audience. In an intriguing artistic ploy, Burton in fact implicates his audience in a crime that has yet to be adequately named, exposed or played out. In undertaking the latter, Burton neatly sets himself up as judge or arbitrator of some as yet undisclosed scenario. In a moral sense, Burton positions himself above his audience; he takes up the reins of a primarily deistic prerogative: he wields power. It is almost as if he is inferring “I wrote this potential exposé some time ago, but for certain reasons (which shall as yet remain undisclosed), the circumstances of this present moment in time [cumulatively] conspire to necessitate my airing of this piece.” Is Burton stating this as a warning? As a covert commentary, perhaps? As a judgment? The latter possibility brings us to the third

---

requirement of the exordium, where the playwright is urged to engender a favourable disposition amongst the members of the audience; he must work to establish his ethos, and thereby win the audience’s attention with regards to his proposed oratorical or discursive agenda. Burton wields a certain tangible power as regards the entry into the domain of esoteric knowledge (he knows something his audience does not; he is the keeper of this knowledge), yet he appears to have made a judgement, at least for the time being, in favour of his audience. He has therefore deemed his audience worthy of sharing this knowledge with. This action establishes our playwright as being both empowered and forgiving, or at the very least, magnanimous. Something is wrong in the world, but never fear – the playwright is on to it. A deal is struck; in the tradition of humanist (and indeed later medieval) scholarship, the virtuous will be further enlightened.

Burton ends his Prologue by requesting that his audience kindly grant him the honour of hearing him out. In a return to the words used by William Gager in the Prologue to his rendition of Seneca’s Tragedy *Hippolytus*, Burton invokes the intertextual scenario of a hereditary precedent, an artistic avatar, if you like. One may ask, what is his purpose in doing so? Burton may have quoted Gager’s text, simply as a laudatory nod to the great Oxonian Laureate. Certainly, such a suggestion gives value to the notion of the employment of the lines as part of a possible framing device. Note however, that Burton borrows again from Gager, in his Epilogue, where he states:

Asperius in quem si quis hic putet inuehi,

Is demum impudentes, non bonus carpi sciat.

[If any here thinks himself too harshly inveighed

---

Let him know that the wicked, not the good, are attacked[^95]

Gager’s actual words from the Prologue to Hippolytus are:

> Asperius in quas si quis hic putet invehi,

Primum impudicas non bonas carpi sciat

[If someone should think they are being too harshly inveighed,

Let him first know that wantons (the wicked?) are being criticized [attacked], not [the] good 
[women…][^96]

Is Burton drawing a specific parallel to Gager’s text, or is he simply hinting at a loose artistic connection? If he is hinting at a strategic parallel, is it in reference to Hippolytus, the man of extreme principle, or does he implicate Momus, Gager’s infamous carping critic?

If perhaps we have been rather bothersome, the fault is not ours; it belongs to those

Whose ill will invited us to the stage…[^97]

Within the code of Burton’s *celare artem*, the ‘invitation to the stage’ might well be in the form of the exposé he wishes to evoke, given that the “ill will” (unethical behaviour?) of certain persons presses him to uncover their malicious or self-serving practices. If his art is “bothersome” – to whom is it bothersome? To those whose conscience he wishes to prompt?

“If anything was unpleasant in writing or subject, the poet *emeritus* begs forgiveness,” [italics mine] says Burton, in a pointed reference to the eleven year gap existing between the actual writing of the play and its performance. Yet he goes on to say:

If anything was wrong in voice or gesture

Be lenient: we are not stage players.\textsuperscript{98}

This return to the fact of the stage and the notion of the staging of a performance draws us back to the implication that what we are witnessing is a self-conscious reference to or indeed simulation of, a potentially real situation. This sort of literary reflexivity or metatheatricality is typical of the classical comedic tradition from which these university plays were drawn. Yet Burton is also pressing the point of academic drama as being discrete from professional theatre. As we examined earlier, he is entering into a contentious and ongoing argument here, yet something further is also suggested. In saying “be lenient: we are not stage players”, he is also, to some extent, abdicating responsibility for his actions. Once again, in a humorous gesture, shrewdly undercutting any more covert agenda of finger-pointing or blame, Burton employs the tactic of double entendre to get his audience’s attention.

As was mentioned earlier, comedy or satire may only achieve its goal when the audience is able to appreciate the gap that exists between what is said or shown, and the real qualities obliquely exposed.\textsuperscript{99} In other words, as Benner suggests, the audience must have a fairly clear notion of what the truth is, in order to understand the irony. In its simplest form in Philosophaster, much as in the medieval morality plays, Burton’s truth exists in relation to concepts of virtue and the antithetical vice. The true philosopher represents virtue, whereas the pseudophilosopher may be said to represent vice, or folly. Virtue is being established as a worthy winner, at the expense of a highly calculated and eloquently articulated vice: so much for the conjectured parallel with Hippolytus. Yet are we not, in Burton’s play, being rather drawn into the world of

\textsuperscript{98} Burton, Philosophaster, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{99} Benner, Ethics, p. 65.
Gager’s Momus? This highly provocative critic (as it turns out), appearing at the end of an apparently standard epilogue, asserts before the audience:

Silence! What’s the meaning of this stupid noise? What’s this applause of yours, your empty favour? Well, its proof of your bad judgement and corrupt morals, not evidence that something’s been done well… for what does the stage possess that is modest and not impudent? It is an exercise in scurrility and wantonness, a factory for turning out shameful jests, an academy of licentiousness. What decent man capers or acts on the stage?100

Such an intertextual evocation of the critic Momus connects Burton’s play through to a larger systemic appreciation of the domain of metatheatre of which his audience is necessarily an integral part. The question might legitimately be entertained: If *Philosophaster* implicates a simulation of the problems of authentic scholarship (as it is projected on the stage), then how fares Oxford, in a cogent review of the same? If *Philosophaster’s* ‘play within the play’ sustains a critique such as might be practiced by someone like Momus (“do you mome us?”),101 then how might the real university (Oxford) sustain a similar critique? In terms of scholarship and authenticity, how might Oxford be assessed? Does it imitate the simulation it potentially (and ironically) provides fodder for, allowing ‘acting’ to sneak in as “the eighth liberal art” (in the words of Momus!)? And if it does, what are the circumstances that allow such “acting”, such a donning of the mask (in the condition of *res absens*) of authentic philosophers? Has the process something to do with the process of the entry and appraisal of scholarship, as was suggested in chapter one? If so, what are the prognosticated results of such a process? Might such results be summed up in the term “philosophaster”?

Offered up in loose terms then, this is one possible reading of Burton’s discrete use of

---

100 William Gager, *Hippolytus* (1592); Epilogue, Momus; adapted from Seneca. [http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/gager/plays/panniculus/trans.html](http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/gager/plays/panniculus/trans.html) (accessed 14/06/2012)

101 Gager, *Hippolytus* (1592); Epilogue, Momus; adapted from Seneca [http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/gager/plays/panniculus/trans.html](http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/gager/plays/panniculus/trans.html) (accessed 14/06/2012)
Gager’s earlier, more notorious dramatic text as a framing device. I will leave this line of argument here, due to constraints of space, but I believe it offers an intriguing line of thought with reference to Burton’s borrowing from one of the most conspicuous and contentious works of the era.
Chapter 3

Celare Artem, Political Histories and the Phenomenon of the Philosopher-King

The atmosphere of *celare artem*, (“to conceal the art”), of stealth or surreptitiousness, which sustains the mood of the Prologue in Burton’s *Philosophaster* continues as we venture into the body of the play. Significantly, the reader fast gets the impression that what is on show, may not be that which in fact appears to be on show. The audience is quickly led to understand that there is more than an element of the apparatus of *dissimulatio* apparent in the substance of this play, and in this tradition, the various ‘hints’ which Burton lets fall, have led scholars reviewing *Philosophaster* to conjecture variously on the subject locus. Most commentators have viewed *Philosophaster* as being a variation on the more generic contemporary narratives expressing Oxbridgian dissatisfactions concerning post-student life in England at this time.¹ In this chapter, *Philosophaster* is explored through the focus of the rhetorical paradigm of *celare artem* as it is contained within the greater structure of the tradition of the *theatrum rhetoricum*. Additionally, paradiastolic redescription (in terms of the latter’s possible ‘genealogical’ links to Burton’s work) is investigated. The notion of the *vir civilis* and the connection between ethical and physical illness is considered; with regard to the pedagogic possibilities of the theatre of rhetoric, we are returned, perhaps, to the implications of Socratic/Platonic psychagogic therapy or education.² Questions concerning the implications of the physical (geographical) location of *Philosophaster* are also

---

¹ For example, see Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 2. Note Murphy’s exception to this interpretation; refer Chapter 2.
² See chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.
considered: I formally connect the Osuna/Oxford coincidence with contemporary practices and attitudes towards rhetoric. After considering Burton’s reiterated ‘catch-cry’ of *nescit regnare qui nescit dissimulare* (occurring in both *Philosophaster* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*), I finish my survey of Early Modern rhetorical practice as it applies to the writing of Robert Burton, with a brief examination of constructions of power. Finally, I return to the question of the normative ordering of the soul, appraising the Platonic proposition of the Philosopher-King.

In 107C.E. the Roman Consul Herodus Atticus, upon seeing a man attempting to appear to be what he was not, commented: “…video barbam et pallium; philosophum nondum video…” This assertion would seem to encapsulate the essence of Robert Burton’s *Philosophaster*, more especially so, when we take into account the maxim which Burton recounts in Act II, Scene IV of *Philosophaster* (later reiterated in the *Anatomy*), that is: *Qui nescit dissimulare nescit vivere.* Burton’s *protasis* commences with none other than his chief protagonist and perpetrator of vice, the philosophaster named Polupragmaticus, advising his fellow pseudophilosophers to “Come, get ready quickly I say. Bring the tunics, togas, beards, clothes and habits”. In other words, Polupragmaticus is telling his fellow ‘actors’ to get their props, for their ‘play’ is due imminently to begin. “You will pretend to mathematics…” he says to the malefactor who is to play the “mathematician” (Ludovicus Pantometer). Immediately as the play opens then, Polupragmaticus is suggesting an act of *simulatio*, of feigning that which is not present (*res absens*), the purported matter of this absence being the state of the possession of true knowledge. In reply to his fellow con-man’s call to “pretend” to

---

“knowledge in general”, using “sesquipedalian” words, Ludovicus Pantometer complains: “But how will I be able to use these words or this art?” [Italics mine].

In the tradition of humanist scholarship, in the tradition of Erasmus, Melanchthon, Sidney and Puttenham (to name but a few of the period’s more prominent literary commentators), words are quite definitively equated here with art. Because Pantometer is to play the mathematician, Polupragmaticus answers him at this juncture with the rhetorical vocabulary expository of contemporary mathematical terms. Already, within the first few lines of Act I (the bustling, inductive protasis), the scenario of a play within a play, or a simulation within a simulation, is fast becoming established. Con-men or ‘mountebanks’ are scheming to rob the University [of Osuna/Oxford?] of both its prestige and in a more urgent and practical sense, of its funds. Moreover, these itinerant con-men are planning to commit this robbery through the stolen or plagiarised use of the tools of trade of real philosophers – that is to say, they plan to steal their rhetoric, their words, their signs and signifiers. In a grandly deceptive scheme of simulation, Polupragmaticus and his company plan to deceive not only their royal patron (the Duke, Desiderius [Latin: to wish for/to suffer a grief or loss; to long for something which you haven’t got]), but a whole town. In a word, as Polupragmaticus says, these pseudophilosophers plan to lie. Aequivocus says to Polupragmaticus:

Don’t worry, sir, about my sedulity… when I speak, I dissemble. I learned to equivocate long ago from both parents.8

---

7 The question of what this circumstance potentially says about James I of England will be treated later. In the final scene however, Aequivocus is discovered to have a mirror in his satchel (amongst other items). Does this fact infer that Burton was making a commentary on, or in the form of, a “mirror for princes”?
8 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 45.
The emphasis is on the relation between the potency and eloquence of words, of rhetoric, and the potential for sustained dissimulation, or deception. It is what Aequivocus says next however, that is markedly telling:

My mother Amphibologia was both a whore and a bawd, my father Agyrta, a magician and unparalleled imposter. I am all yours, as much as I am and what sort I am.⁹

In rhetorical discourse, an amphibologia may occur as an ambiguous grammatical structure arising from distorted grammatical form in a short discourse or sentence, leading to a lack of semantic transparency. Alternatively, it may be associated with the act of equivocation (and the conceptually cognate “Doctrine of Equivocation”), and the intention to deceive. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the latter topic (in conjunction with its possible use in *Philosophaster*) has been amply treated by Kathryn Murphy. Yet “amphibologia” is itself a rhetorical term, defined within various contemporary lists of the figures of rhetoric. Burton may well have his eyes firmly fixed on the relation between rhetorical discourse *per se* and the associated potential that such a discourse nurtures, for dissimulation. When one considers the considerable impact of books such as Castiglione’s *Libro del Cortegiano* (1528) and Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (1532), the choice of such a *topos* for artistic discourse during this period is hardly surprising. Burton owned texts by both Castiglione and Machiavelli, and inscribed them with annotations and notes; he was obviously very interested in what they had to say.

How does Burton’s own *Theatrum Rhetoricum* fit into the framework of rhetorical conceptualizations of the theatrical during this period? A closer examination of the principles of simulatio and dissimulatio might help cast some light on this topic, in relation to the structures inherent in *Philosophaster*. Heinrich Plett offers a very succinct thesis on the relation between simulation and dissimulation and the place of the artist/writer within the *Theatrum Rhetoricum*. Plett states:

Simulation in the rhetorical sense refers to the acting-as-if, or a feigning of that which is not present \((\text{res absens})\), dissimulation on the other hand to the acting-as-if-not, or a concealing of that which is present \((\text{res praesens})\). Common to both are the characteristics of fictive, artificial, and affective. For neither simulation nor dissimulation creates a reality, but merely the semblance of such; the orator who dissembles is therefore an actor. In addition, neither form of rhetorical illusion originates in naturalness, but exclusively in the \(\text{ars rhetorica}\); the orator who stages a drama is therefore an artist in the literal sense of the word. This means that simulation and dissimulation are not an end in themselves but always serve goal-oriented, affective persuasion.\(^{10}\)

We return, in a very contemporary sense then in this case, to the idea of the playwright investing in his work the rhetoric of the Ciceronian triad, \(\text{docere, delectare, movere}\). That is, the playwright instructs, or offers counsel, through involving the audience in the affective processes of ethos and pathos. The rhetorical ‘dissembling’ that is practised in such situations, both borrows from and enters into the staging of language \((\text{elocutio})\) and the staging of the body \((\text{actio})\).\(^{11}\) Plett suggests that such scenarios tend to foster sequences of social and political action, especially with regard to the province of \(\text{dissimulatio}\), where the \(\text{res praesens}\) is often concealed in a psychagogic attempt (on behalf of the particular perpetrator concerned) at eliciting pathos.\(^{12}\) Rhetorically speaking, this notion illustrates how Burton’s \(\text{Philosophaster}\) enters theoretically and schematically into the arena of didacticism which was so prevalent during the period in which he wrote; we return to Melanchthon’s thesis of the purpose of comedy being didactic counsel. Burton, as an orator/artist, is participating in a grander theatre of ongoing and interconnected humanist counsel and rhetorical practice. The specific social or political “action” which Burton may be promoting through the protagonists of his comedy obviously remains a moot point at this stage, subject to further determination. However, of one particular overriding factor, we may be sure. Here,

\(^{10}\) Plett, \(\text{Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture}\), p. 252.

\(^{11}\) Plett, \(\text{Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture}\), p. 252.

\(^{12}\) Plett, \(\text{Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture}\), p. 252.
within the burgeoning protasis of Philosophaster, Burton allows the language of scholarship itself to be rented like a mere meretrix to imposters and ‘magicians’, bought with a few shabby props. Yet the question is – who is selling and to what didactic purpose?

If we apply the principles of the theatrum rhetoricum to Burton’s The Anatomy of Melancholy, a similar process is evident. However, the actio becomes the elocutio; to borrow a conceptual paradigm from Plett, the drama of words takes the place of the drama of gestures.\(^{13}\) How does this come about? In the Anatomy, if we look at the section “Democritus Junior to the Reader,” (essentially a manner of propaedeutic framing device), we may assess this piece as being analogous to the prologue/protasis of a stage play. The prologist, ostensibly the author, is donning a mask of simulation – he is quite openly confessing to appropriating the name of the philosopher Democritus. Moreover, in acting out this simulation, Burton is fulfilling Plett’s assessment of the projected role outcome, that is, “the orator who dissembles is an actor”. What better way to confirm this thesis, than by referring to the words of Burton himself:

Gentle reader, I presume thou wilt be very inquisitive to know what antic or personate actor this is, that so insolently intrudes upon this common theatre to the world’s view, arrogating another man’s name; whence he is, why he doth it, and what he hath to say…\(^{14}\)

Burton’s ‘rhetorical illusion’ as initiated in these opening pages of the Anatomy does not “originate in naturalness”, neither does his treatise attempt to testify to any rubric of the ‘natural’: the theatre of the Anatomy is quite specifically the theatre of the ars rhetorica.\(^{15}\) Burton is the artist who offers an illocutionary therapy\(^{16}\) via goal-oriented, affective persuasion. Read in this way, the whole of the Anatomy becomes the vehicle

\(^{13}\) Plett, Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture, p. 278.

\(^{14}\) AOM 1:15.

\(^{15}\) For endorsements of this assertion, see for example, Angus Gowland, “Rhetorical Structure and Function in The Anatomy of Melancholy”, Rhetorica XIX, N. 1 (Winter2001), 1-48.

\(^{16}\) Lund, Melancholy, Medicine and Religion, p. 13.
for the ‘drama of words’ encapsulated within the confines of what is effectively a highly complex stage set, dominated by a strong oratory presence (Democritus Junior) as motivating *persona*. The simulation of the *res praesens* of a philosopher-physis facilitates the psychagogic eliciting of *pathos*. In his exordium, Burton as prologist moves to fulfil the requirements of the *attentum parare*, the *benevolum parare* and the *docilem parere*\(^ {17} \) ranging far and wide, both *a sua persona* and from behind his appropriated mask. This endeavour to fulfil the requirements of the prologue/prostasis takes Burton some one hundred pages, during which time he consistently returns to the language and furniture of the theatre,\(^ {18} \) finally concluding the prologue with a bow to his audience and their apparent “good favour”\(^ {19} \). The prologue is finished, the stage is set: “I will begin”, says Burton.\(^ {20} \) This framing of the *Anatomy* appears to constitute a *sphragis*, where Burton fluctuates in the communicative space between himself and his reader/audience, working within the strictures of the *persona* of “himself” as authorial voice and the masks he chooses to wear, oscillating between the ostensible roles of the oral, the aural and the strictly prose.\(^ {21} \) Burton’s ‘prologue’ takes its clear precedent from the stage (“I put myself upon the stage”;\(^ {22} \) “we have a new theatre, a new scene…”);\(^ {23} \) he is the orator who “prefers sense without eloquence, to folly with it”.\(^ {24} \)

In a bid to highlight the role of the monarch as providing a moral exemplar for his subjects, Burton brings the classical commonplace from Cicero\(^ {25} \) to his stage:

\(^ {17} \) Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, p. 461.
\(^ {19} \) AOM, 1:123.
\(^ {20} \) AOM, 1:123.
\(^ {22} \) AOM, 1:27.
\(^ {23} \) AOM, 1:52.
\(^ {24} \) AOM, 1:112.
\(^ {25} \) Cicero, *De legibus*, 3.14.31
For as the princes are, so are the people… he that teacheth the King of Macedon, teacheth all his subjects, is a true saying still:

For princes are the glass, the school, the book,
Where subjects’ eyes do learn, do read, do look. [Italics mine]²⁶

Indeed, it would seem that princes are never far from the stage in Burton’s array of literary worlds, and this is not surprising given the politics of the time. However, it is Burton’s relationship with the monarchs who people his works that is of interest. The glass he endeavours to hold up before the Duke, Desiderius (albeit briefly) finds a place in Philosophaster,²⁷ but even there, the glass itself is the subject of semantic ambivalence. “One may speak in jest and yet speak truth”²⁸ counsels Burton in his artistic prologue to the Anatomy. One wonders then, if somewhere between the masks and the processes and personae of simulation and dissimulation, between the worlds of the liminal lines, there isn’t yet another Burtonian persona whose voice is more authentic than the rest (Burton the “true philosopher”), one who would offer words of advice not only to the pauper, the melancholic, or the scholar, but to the King himself. I will be returning to this thesis later in this work.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, words were the eloquent indicator not only of social status, but they were also the effective means to participate in the rigorous social métier of advancement. With events such as the translation of Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano in 1561 and the arrival on English shores of Machiavelli’s Il Principe (1532), the status of the word, or the res verba via the vehicle of rhetoric was given increased potency as a both a currency and indicator of personal and public ambition. Yet there was one important difference in the way in which the word as both sign and signifier might be both employed and displayed to this end. What had previously been

²⁶ AOM, 1:82.
²⁷ Burton, Philosophaster, p. 193.
²⁸ AOM, 1:122.
fashionable to overtly demonstrate, in terms of personal exhibition via rhetorical discourse, with the approach of a new era, now became mandatory to disguise. Words, or more specifically, rhetoric, still turned on the dynamic fluidity of eloquence, but that eloquence had now imprinted upon it a new code. Words now represented a tangible duality within the context of social discourse, rendered conspicuous by the artful expression of ludic play. The notion of the _celare artem_, the art of concealing or hiding, became the order of the day in court circles\(^\text{29}\) and of course, this whole concept filtered down into the province of the vernacular, viewed and imitated most clearly perhaps, on the province of the public stage. Plays by Jonson, Marlowe and Shakespeare for example, offered numerous and highly instructive examples of the art of _celare artem_. The _actio_ of the characters concerned and the relevance of behaviour to the constituents of rhetorical action, has been ably investigated by commentators such as Plett.\(^\text{30}\) When examined in this way, the dramatic dissimulation evident in Iago’s rhetoric of _celare artem_, for instance, offers a master class in the exposition of that art.

_Dissimulatio_ (akin to the Greek _eironeia_) elicited an almost irresistible tide of fashionable change. Machiavelli’s writing in particular was seen by many prominent English scholars and politicians as espousing a new moral and political philosophy.\(^\text{31}\) At Oxford, the Italian Protestant exile, Alberico Gentili (who was installed as Professor of Jurisprudence) saw Machiavelli’s writing as “excelling in that branch of philosophy which deals with morals and politics [moribus et civitate].”\(^\text{32}\) With the influential Francis Bacon’s 1605 affirmation of Gentili’s assertion concerning Machiavelli\(^\text{33}\) entering into the mix, one must deduce that the thesis of dissimulation (as part of a

---

\(^{29}\) Plett comments that within the conceptual framework of courtly culture, the courtier was “the perfect _eiron_… his behaviour was modelled on the rules of dissimulation”. Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, pp. 456-7.

\(^{30}\) Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, pp. 455-68.


\(^{33}\) This assertion in fact pre-dates Burton’s writing of _Philosophaster_. One wonders therefore about its possible influence on the ideological _thema_ Burton presents in his play.
larger schema of rhetorically informed socio-political figura) had a considerable effect at all levels of the social stratum, not the least of which was fielded at the nation’s universities. When one takes into account Burton’s reiterated (albeit satirical) maxim “He who does not know how to dissemble, does not know how to live”, along with the fact that we know he was reading Bacon, Machiavelli, Gentili and Castiglione, the notion of his finding a locus for a statement employing celare artem within the confines of his own work – especially if such a vehicle provided a platform from which he might voice concerns of his own – becomes rather more compelling. This theory becomes more coercive still, when one considers the example of the use of the dissimulare maxim, modelled by no less than the King.  

Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch all used the literary technique of dissimulation as an important means of imparting lessons of moral and political education within the context of their respective eras. They practiced such didacticism with regard to distinguishing the mere appearance of virtue and wisdom from qualities that actually deserved those names. Dissimulatory rhetoric is, in fact, particularly valuable as a tool of pedagogy because, as Plett remarks, of the “dialectic relationship it creates between truth and falsehood and between reality and semblance”. This latter discourse provides the essential materia of Burton’s Philosophaster. The res absens is more easily perceived if it stands in opposition to the res praesens, both of which are placed in clear relief when the ‘fictive’ is played alongside ‘reality’. As the layers are peeled away, the audience is counselled and instructed according to the process of ‘human events’. In Burton’s satire we are left with the final, reverberating counsel:

34 My assessment of Burton’s engagement with Machiavelli allows for the fact that, like others of his time, he tended to assimilate or use certain Machiavellian phrases that were in common currency. Of course, Burton may well have chosen such ‘turns of phrase’ for their idiomatic value, considering their utility in terms of artistic licence, rather than actively promoting or adopting specific aspects of Machiavellian ideology.
35 “I felt myself obliged to give an early assent to my grandfather King James’ maxim which he had from Louis XI of France… ‘Nescit regnare qui nescit dissimulare ’”. See Eikon Basilike deutera Portrait of His Majesty King Charles II (1694) EEBO, pp. 4-5.
36 Derived from Benner, Ethics, pp. 84-5.
37 Plett, Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture, p. 475.
“Sing the triumph of most serene philosophy!” The philosophasters have been vanquished, the rightful path to virtue and the *vir civilis* has been restored, peace has been made, and the kingdom, at least for the moment, is secure.

The exposition of language in *Philosophaster* proceeds in such a way that it continues to privilege the highly malleable theatre of rhetoric. Words themselves continue to be the quantity which is ‘on show’ in Burton’s theatre; the idea of an epideictic rhetoric turning on the axis of itself, is perpetuated. Characters not only disseminate rhetoric, they are themselves defined by it. Moreover, their relationships with each other, including important relationships of power, are structured in terms of rhetorical praxis.

In Act I, Scene ii of *Philosophaster*, in the company of his two counsellors, the Duke Desiderius meets and interviews the philosophasters for the first time. The audience has already been primed with regard to the notion of the importance attached to appearances, having been introduced to the garments (tunics, togas, beards, clothes, etc.) and language (“you will pretend; lie; dissemble” etc.) of appearance, in the preceding act. Indeed, the last words of Act 1, which are uttered by Polupragmaticus are: “Let each one play his own part”. Continuing this commentary on appearances, the first words of the Duke upon viewing the company of supposed scholars are: “Not an unpleasant sight, thank heaven!” In saying this, the Duke, in a strategic confirmation of the Machiavellian thesis, assesses the newly arrived group of ‘academics’ with his eye, rather than by any other measure. The Duke acknowledges this group as being academics, and is even perhaps surprised that this representative ‘sample’ doesn’t offend the eye too much. This tells us two things: first, as I have already mentioned, the Duke appears likely to judge by external appearances; secondly,

---

his concept of those who call themselves academics might be rather vague or tentative, poorly informed perhaps, due to a lack of real experience in that realm. A wordy exchange then follows, portraying the process by which both the Duke and the counsellors appear to test the aspiring stipend holders in terms of their scholastic and rhetorical prowess, and therefore the potential securing of their positions. In almost every response, the philosophasters let fall ‘signs’ of their dissimulation, but the Duke and his counsellors are not sufficiently skilled to comprehend these signs, mainly because of the fact that their assessment has already been made according to the dictates of appearance. There are cloaks and beards,\(^{41}\) therefore it follows that these men must be philosophers.

The fact that an energetic and ongoing exchange of rhetorical and sophistical/philosophical terminology prevails in this scene, would seem to confirm the initial visually observed premise. Words are fired back and forth at an impressive, although upon investigation, somewhat nonsensical rate. Terms are bandied forth and exchanged not so much for the sake of the real philosophy behind them, but rather for the sake of their aural impact. The result of such a cross-fire is that the rhythm and musicality of rhetoric fills the air with what is little more than nonsensical noise. The real work of meaning is not fully achieved – at least, not by the Duke and his counsellors. Yet in some senses, the philosophers are in fact delivering covert packages of *honestas* in the rapid fire of denotational terms. Polupragmaticus, for instance, assures the Duke: “I am a follower of none and of all.”\(^{42}\) He also states: “I will prove myself an expert and you will know what sort of man I am.”\(^{43}\) Polupragmaticus is indeed a follower of none and all; he has no authentic and ongoing appreciation of true philosophy, rather he is the archetypal opportunistic “smatterer”, an entity whom

\(^{41}\) See footnote 3 of this chapter.
\(^{42}\) Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 47.
\(^{43}\) Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 47.
Wayne Rebhorn refers to as a “confidence man”. Polupragmaticus says that he will “prove himself an expert” – yet the question is, an expert in what? In deception? In dissimulation? Nonetheless, it is true that in delivering this impending ‘proof’, the Duke will know what sort of man he is (a con-man). Truth therefore may be delivered, even whilst simulation or deception is being practised. The perception of truth, as Machiavelli suggests, and Burton here proves, is arbitrated by appearance.

Intriguingly, when Cratinus asks Theanus, “Why do you have those scales?” he replies: “I weigh the weight of words, move the emotions, practise the marrow of persuasion.” This of course, reminds us of nothing quite so much as a distorted version of Cicero’s dictum. The “weight of words” is the only real philosophy the philosophasters’ practice. In delivering an ongoing quantity of words, in producing a weighty display of rhetoric, they make their case for acceptance as true scholars. In this case, the quantity (weight) delivers the result (acceptance). Theanus is being truthful; in weighing the words, he moves, he persuades; yet unbeknown to the Duke and his counsellors, such persuasion may not be to virtuous ends.

After the efforts of the ‘poet’, Amphimacer, the ‘grammarian’ and aspirant Duke’s chaplain Pedantius, is the next one to boast his art. He instructs:

I am Pedanus to the people, master to the boys. Through antiphrasis, I am ludimagister; through periphrasis, leader of the young and castigator of minors – which is, just as, as if, as it were, so to speak a [list of satirically appropriate terms follows] …

This idea of Pedantius being “Pedanus to the people”, combined with the notion of using words in a sense opposite to their proper meaning, leads us once again down the

---

45 Burton, *Philosophaster*, p. 49.
46 See, for example, Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, p. 103-4.
track of irony and its relation to dissimulation. Additionally, the term “ludimagister”
takes us back to the question of semantic transparency. McQuillen observes:

“Ludimagister” is appropriately a schoolmaster, that is, the “magister” of the “ludus.” But
“ludus” can also mean, according to Cooper: “play in actes: mirth in woordes: sporte: game:
pastime.”

In an even greater irony, although Pedantius responds to the Duke’s question in an
astoundingly ‘honest’ manner, given his absurd and strangely apposite use of
terminology as regards his true calling, the Duke does not appear to be suspicious of
this particular ‘scholar’. “Write grammarian,” the Duke replies abruptly, absorbing only
the superficial appearance of this man, before moving on. Once again Burton
underwrites the Machiavellian commentary concerning the vital lesson of appearances.
In a rather courageous stance on Burton’s part, the Duke, however (the Prince, the
King?), is implicated in the problematic scenario of perceiving “by the eye” rather than
“by the hand”. His counsellors are of no help in this situation (a contingency which is
also treated by Machiavelli), and it would seem from this one strategic error of
perception, from this intrinsic inattention to the true nature of appearances, that the
troubles of the realm follow. In inaugurating this scenario of the possible consequences
of the discretionary actions taken in leadership, allied with the use of language as a
corrupting factor in the exercise of judgment, Burton is actually pursuing a course that
is well established in the classical tradition. We only have to look to the works of
Plutarch, Thucydides and Xenophon in the classical canon, to investigate this link
further; a couple of brief examples follow.

Erica Benner cites Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* as being “one of the most finely
crafted examples of a text that dissimulates in order to educate citizens”. This work

---

appears, superficially, to be a work simply epitomising the characteristic qualities and actions of the ideal prince (Cyrus of Persia). Ultimately, however, the work may be read as a trenchant examination and exposé of princely machinations that are less than conventionally virtuous. For my purposes here, I wish to briefly discuss the nature of appearances in relation to syntagma of leadership of power. Benner states:

> Outward appearances, particularly the use of clothing in the extravagantly regal style of the neighbouring Medes, were among his chief means of entrancing subjects. For Cyrus “thought that if anyone has any personal defect that dress would help to conceal it.”

In *Philosophaster*, Burton seems to be confirming this very point. In appropriating the dress of academics (the “tunics, togas, beards, clothes, habits”), the pseudo-philosophers are concealing not only their true professions (confidence men), but they are also concealing a multitude of personal defects (vices). As the play continues, we also learn that the personal defects of the Duke’s two counsellors are substantially concealed behind the dress, as well as the manners/language, of royal courtiers. Benner continues that “even as a youth Cyrus perceived that ‘nothing is more effectual toward keeping one’s men obedient than to seem wiser than they’”. Moreover, in the *Cyropaedia* acts of “philanthropia” are also deemed to be of supreme importance for securing good order. This is where the spotlight falls, in an act of ironic mimesis, on Burton’s royal patron. In a gesture of *philanthropia* (the establishment of the university), the Duke Desiderius wishes by reflection, to appear wise. He cloaks himself in the dress of the ‘wise man’, thereby hoping to secure both the good judgement of the people, and, by extension, to secure the realm. The ethics emanating from Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* are predominantly Socratic in nature. Transparency and trust are presented as fundamental tenets of Persian morals, and as necessary foundations of stable government. The text

---

51 Benner, *Ethics*, p. 73.
52 Benner, *Ethics*, p. 73.
of *Philosophaster* may be evaluated in a similar fashion, with regard to the value placed on transparency and trust. One could argue that the whole of *Philosophaster* may be read as a commentary on the violation and manipulation of the qualities of transparency and trust, and the potentially dire consequences (civil chaos and disorder) which tend to result from such distortion. For Burton however, it is not only the more overt signage of sartorial dissimulation that he wishes to critique; *language* as a site of “sartorial habit” is also a problem he is determined to investigate.

Plutarch, the Greek historian, biographer and essayist, was not only a favourite of Machiavelli, he is also (after Seneca) the most cited classical source occurring in Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Plutarch’s preoccupation with questions of moral and religious relevance would have been correspondent to, and informative of, Burton’s own socio-cultural interests and investigations. Moreover, Sir Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Lives* in 1579, along with the translation of the complete *Moralia* in 1603 by Philemon Holland would have ensured a focus of contemporary interest in the ancient Greek polymath and scholar in the period during which Burton was actively writing. For my purposes (at this point in my discussion), the work of Plutarch is also useful in examining a specific application of language as it occurs in Robert Burton’s *Philosophaster*. That is, language as it is associated with the notion of dissimulation, and the implications that such an alliance harbours for the rulership of state. In pursuing this avenue, I would like to take a closer look at the rhetorical *figura* of paradiastolic redescription.

In his essay “How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend”, Plutarch cites Thucydides’ examination of investing names with meanings which are antithetical (for political purposes). In the *Peloponnesian Wars*, Thucydides speaks of investing names normally illustrative of qualities of vice with associations of virtue. Thucydides actually uses such examples to illustrate markers of civil disorder, a societal symptom not far removed
from humanist concerns regarding the dissipated or decaying state - a state which is not vigilant enough in promoting or policing the standards of its education or scholarship, and therefore of its leaders and citizens. As always, in terms of Early Modern humanist renditions of socio-political ideology (the latter being appropriated from the classical models), the health of the state is intimately connected to the health of the individual. The works of Plutarch could be harnessed to demonstrate just how vital this public-private corporeal continuum was deemed to be. In his *Mores* Plutarch instructs:

> Those then that readily praise and join in applauding some word or action on the part of someone whether in jest or earnest, only do temporary harm for the moment, but those who injure the character by their praise and by their flattery undermine the morals, act like those slaves who do not steal from the bin, but from the seed corn. For they pervert the disposition, which is the seed of actions, and the character, which is the principle and fountain of life, by attaching to vice names that belong properly only to virtue.\(^{54}\)

Thus, as Democritus himself would have us know, “the word is shadow of the deed”\(^ {55}\). Words, once infested, corrupt not only the ear, but the whole essence of the man.

In terms of the Early Modern mind-set regarding the status of the body/soul relationship, one might say that to undermine the morals of the individual was tantamount to undermining the integrity of the state. Didactic lessons therefore concerning instruction in the informed perception of such potentially ruinous eventualities were offered (and suffered) in abundance. In terms of precedence, of course, the classical models ruled supreme. Plutarch goes on to nourish the Early Modern conscience with more historical examples of the ‘flatterer’s’ infection of the moral code and the devastating effects wreaked on preceding civilisations:


\(^{55}\) C.C.W. Taylor, *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus, Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), Sec. 17 (no page numbers supplied).
...but praise applied to vices as if they were virtues, so that one is not vexed but delighted with a
vicious life, removes all shame from wrong-doing, and was the ruin of the Sicilians, by calling
the savage cruelty of Dionysius and Phalaris detestation of wickedness and uprightness. It was
the ruin of Egypt... it was nearly the overthrow and destruction of the Ancient manners of the
Romans... what else brought Nero on the tragic stage... 56

In Thucydides’ assessment of language in this comparative (and very specific)
instance in the Wars, the reader is shown how terms of qualitative judgment, in
circumstances which are less than transparent, are apt to become slippery. Thucydides
reports (via Plutarch):

...in times of faction and war “people change the accustomed meaning of words as applied to
acts at their will and pleasure, for reckless daring is then considered bravery to one’s comrades,
and prudent delay specious cowardice, and sober-mindedness the cloak of the coward, and
taking everything into account before action, a real desire to do nothing.” 57

Plutarch continues (echoing Thucydides): “…wastefulness is called liberality, and
cowardliness prudence… meanness, frugality....” 58 Such an association of “decent
words and less decent deeds” 59 was a recurrent theme in the writing of the ancient
Greeks. In terms of paradiastolic redescription, Burton’s writing in Philosophaster sees
similar semantic relocation. The learning of “certain sesquipedalian words” becomes a
substitute for “knowledge”; impudence is relegated to the status of the “one and only
virtue”, and “a parasite, a vain, a fox, an ape” becomes the epitome of the “first-rate
philosopher”. 60 Such examples are common in Burton’s text where language is
constantly distorted, deployed and manipulated in the cause of its secondment as a tool
of didactic signage. Moreover the relationship between the decay of state and individual
slides from the domain of the Microcosmus into the Macrocosmus, when we see Burton

56 Plutarch, Morales, p. 168.
57 Plutarch, Morales, 168.
58 Plutarch, Morales, 168.
59 Benner, Ethics, p.71.
60 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 141.
tussling with (amongst other concerns) the additional ideational paradigms of a changing universe as defined by Brahe, Digges and Galileo. Language is the outer signifier of the inner mutability, becoming the extraordinary and, effectively, the historically evolving commentary on the decay of an ailing world. For Burton in particular, in the early years of the seventeenth century, this thesis was to become summed up in one word, and that word was “melancholy”.

The *Anatomy of Melancholy* is commenced in the terminology of the mutable and the degenerating (“Man’s Fall”) where man, in a state of decay (“disobedience, pride, ambition, intemperance…”), has fallen from the secure haven of God. Man (“the most excellent and noble creature of the world” has become a “castaway, a caitiff”. Language (“our fabulous poets”) immediately situates him in a scenario akin to the “tale of Pandora’s Box, which, being opened through her curiosity, filled the world full of all manner of diseases”. Ethical decay therefore both charts the course of and pre-empts man’s sorrowful decline in the commencing pages of this thesis of malignancy which Burton ventures forth upon: “In sickness the mind reflects upon itself, with judgment surveys itself, and abhors its former courses”.

This classical intonation (from Pliny) is endorsed and, in contemporary humanist fashion, strategically aligned with the Christian hypothesis of the same:

…St Austin acknowledgeth of himself and in his humble Confessions: “Promptness of wit, memory, eloquence, they were God’s good gifts, but he did not use them to His glory”.

Language interfaces with the consummate icons of culpability (wit, memory, eloquence); bodily decay results: “Bodily sickness is for his soul’s health, *periisset nisi* |

---

62 AOM: Title given to the opening section of The First Partition, 1:130.
63 AOM, 1:131.
64 AOM, 1:131.
65 AOM, 1:131.
66 AOM, 1:133.
periisset…” The link between ethical and physical illness is thus definitively established in these early pages of the *Anatomy*; in terms of the Early Modern mentality, this link was prefaced and substantiated by language. Language was the external signifier of the internal state. In Socratic terms, it advertised the state of the soul, and the state of the soul, was nurtured by knowledge [*arête*]. Thus we return to the Burtonian advocacy of the authentic study and promotion of “supreme philosophy”. We return full circle to the 1606/17 stage set of *Philosophaster*.

In Plutarch’s view (a view which is, by the way, substantially reprised by the sixteenth and seventeenth century humanists):

>> The corruption of ethical language starts as a symptom of corrupt practices, but may also [ultimately] become a contributing cause of civil disasters…**67**

Similarly, Burton’s *Philosophaster* is a text which asks: what if the nation’s universities were similarly infected, invested with pseudophilsophers where there should be real philosophers (the signifier of virtue being duplicitously and systemically invested with vice)? Given that many of these young graduates of Oxford and Cambridge were to become the nation’s statesmen, decision-makers and politicians – how might this auger for the future of the state? Machiavelli’s concern that “the generality of men feed on what *appears* as much as what *is*” is yet again, reiterated. The notion of the “ethical decay of language” as stated by Plutarch (above) as I have suggested, is amply illustrated in the pages of *Philosophaster*. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* however, this paradigm undergoes a powerful and resonant transformation.

Both *Philosophaster* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* are texts which privilege the investigation and exposition of notions of mutability and decay, but whereas in *Philosophaster*, it is language that is on display, in the *Anatomy*, it is the body which

---

**67** Benner, *Ethics*, pp. 71-2. Note: Plutarch’s view is not meant to be read here as indicating an Early Modern indictment of “the decay of language” as a whole.
becomes a site for ethical decay. The latter is translated, initially and increasingly pervasively (systemically?), as a withdrawal from sociability. This ethical decay of the body is intimately related to the body’s moving away from the Ciceronian ideal of the \textit{vir civilis}; the further removed it becomes from this ideal, the more prone it is to suffer (in terms of putative infiltration) from the various contaminations of melancholy. Of course, it must be noted that the melancholic body, by its very definition, is one that must be excluded from the category of that which fulfils the functional requirements of the \textit{vir civilis}. Indeed, in the pages of the \textit{Anatomy}, melancholy becomes the touchstone of association with the degenerative change away from the industrious, good and prosperous citizen. Melancholy disables the \textit{vir bonus}, who becomes increasingly removed from the vital industries of the corporeal state, and more and more prone to solitariness and “idleness” – two quantities which are nearly always presented simultaneously in the \textit{Anatomy} (for example, the final and iconic salutation: “be not solitary, be not idle”).\footnote{AOM, 3:432.}

On the subject of the conceptual premise of the \textit{vir civilis}, Walker offers this:

\begin{quote}
…for the Romans, the \textit{vir civilis}, the good citizen, is the virtuous, wise, rational man who exercises his mastery of the art of rhetoric to serve his community [by pleading for just verdicts in the courts and beneficial policies in the assemblies]…\footnote{William Walker “Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes”, \textit{Philosophy and Literature} 21:1 (April 1997), 204-7.}
\end{quote}

The \textit{vir civilis} is the “virtuous, wise and rational man”, who in health is able to serve his community appropriately and well, articulating his virtuosity, wisdom and rationality thorough the use of rhetoric. The ‘disabled’ citizen however, that is, the one who can no longer be considered wise, virtuous and importantly, rational (especially in relation to his service to the community), is therefore one who is suffering from ethical decay. \textit{His body becomes the site of this ethical decay, which symptomatically constitutes itself}
within the diagnostic (and prognostic) parameters of the [social] disease of melancholy.

The Socratic virtue of ‘knowledge’ (and ‘self-knowledge’) suffers concurrent compromise. Walker continues:

…citing the Tudor humanists who were instituting and teaching at the grammar schools, but also several sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English rhetoricians, poets, and prose writers, Skinner then observes how this classical theory of persuasion and its ideal of citizenship achieved "widespread currency" (p. 1) in England and served as the foundation for "the rhetorical culture of Renaissance humanism".

Thus Burton’s *Anatomy* might be said to represent an allegorical journey into the insidious and ongoing decay of society, through the simultaneous and indeed, pre-emptive decay of the human body. This decay is expressed through Burton’s own allegorical interpretation of the rhetorical culture which nurtures him. As one reads the *Anatomy*, one senses that this decay as Burton presents it, is like a virus, spreading almost exponentially, systemically, uncontained, invading at every opportunity. Such a process of degeneration might be said to be occurring in Burton’s contemporary England; as the *vir civilis* becomes ever more compromised, so does the Kingdom. It is in scenarios such as these that men dream up Utopias.70

This thesis of the body becoming a site for ethical decay, articulated as a withdrawal from social interaction, is made very clear in Burton’s “The Author’s Abstract of Melancholy”, which prefaces his work. In this piece, which is reminiscent of a classically-styled canticum, the overriding theme is the connection of the state of being solitary, with the potential for entering into a concurrent and symbiotic state of melancholy. Being “all alone”, a phrase which is issued repeatedly in this verse effort by Burton, is equated with being vulnerable to the suffering of delusional fantasies, and the inability to be rational and authentically happy. There is an almost schizophrenic

70 For more on the relationship between melancholy as disorder and the associated ‘antidote of the utopia’ see Chapter 5 of this thesis. Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) offers a comprehensive treatment of this subject.
shift which occurs from verse to verse, where the versifier is seen to alternate irrationally between praising and denouncing his state of being solitary and its burgeoning association with an apparently intractable melancholy.

Undoubtedly, the true *vir civilis* in Ciceronian terms is the man who is upright, virtuous and proficient in administering both public and private affairs; he is a man who moves seamlessly between the arena of the personal and the public. Burton’s melancholic citizen obviously appears to fail in the challenges appurtenant to this arena. In his *Institutio oratoria* [ca. 95 CE] Quintilian adds that the true citizen will be a “*vir bonus*, a good man endowed with ‘all the virtues of the mind’ together with ‘a true understanding of an upright and honorable life’.” 71 It becomes obvious that Burton’s reiterated cry of “be not solitary, be not idle” is being substantially rehearsed and reinforced in this prefatory “Abstract”. The solitary and idle man is an outsider in the Ciceronian state; his understanding fails, his judgement fails, his virtue fails, and ultimately (“lend me a halter or a knife”) his claim to life fails. He fails within the system of the state, and in doing so, perpetrates its own demise.

* * *

The relation of the Plutarchian sources to other major themes informing Burton’s writing, may be observed in Act 1 Sc. 2 of *Philosophaster*. This is the scene where the Duke first meets and interviews the ‘academics’ who are to be installed in his new university. Burton’s “Pedanus to the people” as Pedantius rather brazenly presents himself to the Duke (assuming the air of Machiavelli’s “crafty fox” as instructed by the

---

master Polupragmaticus)\textsuperscript{72} becomes one of those covert conspirators who design to lead “the many”, treating them as “gullible consumers of false appearances”.\textsuperscript{73} The fact that Pedantius may address the Duke in the manner in which he does is made possible through his application to the device of \textit{simulatio}, operating within the domain of \textit{eironeia}. Ironically indeed, the Duke responds to the duplicitous presentations of the pseudo-philosophers, finally effectively vindicating Pedantius’ ploy when he instructs: “Enrol them together and freely. May this prove good, propitious and prosperous for the state”. Yet the real irony occurs two lines later, when the Duke says: “I give to each of you the authority to read and to practice diligently the subject of which you are master.”\textsuperscript{74} Of course, this is not lost on the audience, for the only subject which these con-men ‘academics’ hope to master, is that of deceit.

What we are witnessing in this scene, is the supremely succinct example (given that we are still in only the second scene of the play) of the practice and exposition of \textit{celare artem} – the didactic artistic treatment of \textit{simulatio} and \textit{dissimulatio}. Burton pointedly reminds us that “this play is not about true scholars.” In delivering the subject in the form of the negative, he is offering us a hint as to how to most effectively read his play; that is (\textit{Qui nescit dissimulare nescit vivere}): do not be deceived by appearances. The remedy or prescriptive ‘antidote’ against the folly of being taken in by appearances is to demonstrate to your audience in advance, what it is that they must watch out for. This tradition was espoused not only by Plutarch, but also by other pedagogues before him, such as Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle. As Benner explains:

\begin{quotation}
Ancient writers such as Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch used dissimulation as an important tool of moral and political education. Its main purpose was to develop capacities for independent, reasoned judgement, especially by teaching… how to distinguish appearances of
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{72} Burton, \textit{Philosophaster}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{73} Benner, \textit{Ethics}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{74} Burton, \textit{Philosophaster}, p. 51.
virtue or wisdom from qualities that deserve those names. By reading works that “imitate” the misleading appearances seen in the public realm, attentive readers learn how these phenomena are generated, and thus become better equipped to avoid traps set for them [by demagogues]…

This notion of didactic exposition as sociological and political remedy instructs the whole framework of Burton’s *Philosophaster*. Moreover, the concept of writing as “civil medicine” is later taken up in the *Anatomy*, where Burton pursues this notion to the point of promoting his own writing as being an “illocutionary” therapy, a subject amply treated by Mary Ann Lund.

Once again, we must take a moment to appreciate the implication of Burton’s close reading of both Plutarch and Machiavelli. Burton opens the first paragraph of the *Anatomy* with a quotation from Plutarch’s *De Curiositate*, a fact which reinforces the thesis that he attributed considerable value to the philosopher-moralist’s works. In their own ways, both Plutarch and Machiavelli took the premise of the *vita activa* and the discourses (reasoned accounts: *logoi*) which treated potential political and social problems, and enlarged upon them as was deemed appropriate within their respective cultural contexts. Plutarch advised that any “adequate conception of statesmanship consists of the continuous practice of *politeia* and philosophy”, a thesis which Benner sees as demanding [therefore] a “high degree of ethical reflectiveness about political activity.” Such “ethical reflectiveness” is echoed in the works of Plato, Socrates and Xenophon. Moreover, Plutarch argues that true philosophers, forsaking personal ambition, “seek to benefit their cities and mankind”; the “true” philosopher therefore, is

---

76 Benner, *Ethics*, p. 64.
78 AOM, 1:15.
like a “civil doctor” working to heal [the individual] for the benefit of the state.\textsuperscript{80}

Paraphrasing Plutarch, Benner states (and I will expand on this a little later):

Philosophers are thus like doctors who treat political disorders “as if they were diseases” making for them [the afflicted populace] a “secret political medicine”.\textsuperscript{81}

It goes without saying that Burton’s “Democritus Junior” in the \textit{Anatomy} designs to concoct a suitable ‘medicine’ for the socio-political disorder of melancholy which he views as insidiously infiltrating Early Modern society. The philosopher-divine becomes the divine philosopher, who in appropriating the doctor’s mask seeks to cure the afflicted populace from a disease which ostensibly has no definitive locus of infection, despite the strenuously arranged ‘tables’ which seek to physically contain and categorize the potential agencies of infection.\textsuperscript{82} Our divine philosopher does not want to be like Plutarch’s objectionable species, those who “trim the lamps… but fail to pour in oil”.\textsuperscript{83} Burton pours in Plutarch’s oil of philosophy, bringing substance to his dictum:

But when philosophical reason derived from philosophy has been established as the ruler's coadjutor and guardian, it removes the hazardous element from his power, as a surgeon removes that which threatens a patient’s health and leaves that which is sound.\textsuperscript{84}

In fact, to further prove his point, Burton seems to be deliberately instituting the opposite scenario in \textit{Philosophaster}. The hazardous element has surely been left in, with the prospect of a pseudo-philosophy ruling reason at the Duke’s ill-fated university (through the mouths and actions of pseudo-philosophers). Moreover the help that is on

\textsuperscript{80} Benner, \textit{Ethics}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{81} Benner, \textit{Ethics}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{82} For more information on the synoptic or “Ramist tables” which Burton employs, see Karl K.J. Höltgen “Literary Art and Scientific Method in Robert Burton,” \textit{Explorations in Renaissance Culture} 16:1 (1990), 24-9.
\textsuperscript{84} Plutarch, \textit{Moralia}: “To an Uneducated Ruler”, p. 55. \url{http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Ad_principem_ineruditum*.html} (accessed 21/10/2012).
offer from the Duke’s two duplicitous ‘counsellors’ does nothing to improve the situation; on the contrary, it serves to highlight the precariousness of the situation.

The ideal of philosophy informing statecraft may be witnessed at various junctures within the works of Plutarch and Machiavelli. Benner comments that “significantly, the most prudent characters in [Machiavelli’s Florentine Histories] are presented as reflective men of letters, not as dynamic men of action who have no time to read ancient works or engage in longwinded ragionare”.85 The concept of the study of philosophy, of scholarship, as being essential to the inherent armoury of the successful civil campaigner (be he Prince or otherwise), is brought to the fore. To be informed is to be wise, to be educated; from such learning issues success. Plutarch’s remarks about philosophers and the nature of philosophy appear to be instrumental in determining Burton’s approach to the subject in the Anatomy. In Philosophaster, the study and practice of authentic philosophy is presented as both the premium defence and the quintessential remedy in the war against political and sociological decline. In the Anatomy however, it is the persona of the philosopher himself that occupies the locus of privilege in the narrative. Plutarch observes:

Those who make real progress [in philosophical studies] “do not arrogate themselves… or even give themselves the title of philosopher…” …Many who came to Athens to study, were, at the outset, wise; later they became lovers of wisdom, later still, orators. As time went on however, they at last became “just ordinary persons [idiotas] and the more they laid hold on reason, the more they laid aside their self-opinion and conceit.”86

These words from Plutarch’s “Progress in Virtue” offer considerable material for the reader to muse upon with regard to Burton’s composition of both Philosophaster and the Anatomy. In relation to Philosophaster, we see Burton pursue the subject of those who arrogate to themselves the name of philosopher. Yet what does this mean?

85 Benner, Ethics, p. 52.
86 Benner, Ethics, p. 52.
According to Plutarch, it means that (as part of an ongoing personal evolution) such scholars are initially apt to practise self-opinion and conceit. The pseudophilosophers in Burton’s play are seen to borrow these habits of self-opinion and conceit, being neither cognizant of, nor intellectually or morally able to draw on anything more refined. In other words, they ‘ape’ the most obvious external signifiers of the status of philosopher. In dressing in beards and gowns, in assuming the mantle of philosophy, these charlatan philosophers are simulating the most blatant iconography of philosophic “wisdom”. Similarly, in assuming the iconic (epideictic) rhetoric of philosophy, they are also seeking to mimic the stylised persona of the philosopher. But are they, in fact, wise? Does the overt display of wisdom guarantee it actual presence? Does the res media of the discipline actually demonstrate its nous?

In Philosophaster, Burton is trying to teach his audience that in fact, such outward signs of a phenomenon (in this case, erudition, wisdom), do not necessarily display its inner presence. He gives us ample proof of this hypothesis, in the characters of the two wandering scholars, Polumathes and Philobiblos. Burton highlights the latter’s unending search for a ‘wise man’. Although Polumathes has “peregrinated long” and “wandered through many cities”, the wise man has yet to be found. Ironically, later, within the pages of The Anatomy of Melancholy, the wise man would, ostensibly, appear to have been discovered, and he is laughing in his garden at Abdera. In the guise of the simple man, in the guise of the laughing idiotas, or Machiavelli’s “dotard” [barbogeria], Burton finally presents us not only with his version of the arguably consummate wise man, he goes further, and actually arrogates this persona to himself, as author, as divine, as ‘student’, as physician.

In the project of the Anatomy, Burton appears to avoid the Plutarchian vice of “giving himself the title of philosopher”, by simply assuming the mask. The role-

---

87 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 59.
88 Benner, Ethics, p. 52.
playing that is representative of the player in the theatrical drama also helps him frame his didactic enterprise, setting his stage, as it were, for the lessons to come. He is, quite overtly, the one who has “come to play the pedagogue”. In assuming the role of philosopher-teacher, Burton is already preparing his audience for his treatise of instruction: he is handing on the knowledge of the acclaimed ancients. Yet at the same time, Burton is also, quite strategically, protecting his own personal and professional interests. “It is not me, but Democritus dixit”, 89 he exclaims, in a voice which appears to embody the ‘complexity and fluidity of persona’ which Catherine Curtis cites as being useful for “avoid[ing] charges of vindictive malice and defamation, and of offending the decorum of office”.90 In a highly utilitarian sense then (politically speaking), Burton’s reasoning behind his appropriation of the ‘mask’, operates at more than one level: he may teach from the platform of comparative security that such a contrived ambiguity of personal voice offers. From this carefully constructed stage, Burton offers the world (the afflicted populace) his allopathic, and indeed, holistic medicine – his cure for the general social disease. Burton has thus performed his Plutarchian task (his requisite precondition); he has read his ancient works and come to a decision. The significant thing is that this decision is a quantity which finds its early substance in the province of the stage; in nothing less than the pages of Philosophaster. As the clearer picture emerges, we begin to see that Burton, in fact, never really left the subject of his early theatrical focus – he simply refined it, augmented it, altered his approach. In some respects, we see Burton himself evolving, making the Plutarchian journey of the wise man. As Babb reports, “a strangely small proportion of the Anatomy is devoted specifically to medicine and psychiatry”.91 This observation is not entirely surprising. From the early

---

89 AOM 1:121.
91 Babb, Sanity in Bedlam, p. 6.
rehearsals of a philosophical didacticism in *Philosophaster*, to the later full-blown pedagogic treatise that comprises the *Anatomy*, Burton never really leaves the initial socio-political focus of his personal concerns. How might the salvationary vehicle of “serene philosophy”⁹² be annexed to save a state, a Kingdom? Ultimately, in the familiar and formulaic tradition of the theatrical, Burton simply chooses to put on the habit of the philosopher (appropriates his *persona*, his “wisdom”, his dress), and in this guise, and on this stage, he sets about both refining and administering his remedy.

The Implications of Location in *Philosophaster*

Robert Burton’s decision to situate his play in the Spanish town of Osuna has led to considerable speculation concerning the reason for such a choice of location. Commentary has mainly revolved around the homophonic assonance of the two place names. One commentator, however, has gone further, and suggested that Osuna, as representative of the Andalusian universities of the time, was associated with facets of anti-humanism, Catholic resistance theory and support of the Pope against Protestant monarchs.⁹³ Kathryn Murphy suggests that such associations tended to highlight concerns in England regarding the actions and motivations of the Counter-Reformationists. Murphy states:

> Just as Osuna and Southern Spain had preserved the Aristotelian tradition while the rest of Europe was barren of philosophy, Oxford must currently provide refuge from the barbarism of Catholic Europe.⁹⁴

---

⁹³ Murphy, “Jesuits and Philosophasters,” p. 112.
⁹⁴ Murphy, “Jesuits and Philosophasters,” p. 112.
This comment bears further investigation, especially since it engages with the ongoing substratum narrative (concerning humanism and humanist scholarship) which occurs across Burton’s major works.

The representation of “true” scholarship in Philosophaster coincides with the arrival of the two ‘wandering’ scholars, Philobiblos and Polumathes, who make their entrance in Act I, Sc. v. Immediately upon the entrance of these two scholars, Burton draws his audience into a very direct commentary on the state of scholarship in the world, and the associated and paradoxical idea that despite a wealth of “flourishing universities”, there is an adamant “dearth” of wise men. Polumathes states:


Once again, the association is made between rhetoric and rhetoricians and money seekers, usurers and other generally duplicitous and underhand characters, or as Burton puts it, “men of that sort”.\footnote{Burton, \textit{Philosophaster}, p. 61.} These men are found in the streets of the university towns, and at the universities themselves, yet they represent nothing but a praesens absens, an empty shell of the signifier of scholarship. This fact is important, especially as far as the art of rhetoric is concerned. As part of the Renaissance studia humanitatis (an extension of the former Medieval Trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric) in the period that Burton was writing his play, rhetoric was the subject of some undeniably negative appraisal. To gauge a quick understanding of this more negative (and perhaps less known) representation of rhetoric, we might consider the opinion of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, for instance:

Rhetorike… is a certaine subtiltie and sharpnesse of witte, and that it is neyther commendable nor honest, but rather a dishonest and seruile flattery… the Rhetoritians striue vnto thys houre...
what the ende thereof is, whether to persuade or to speake well, and not contente with the true
causes, do devise new and feyned. They haue besides this found out so many Theses,
hypotheses, figures, colours, guidinges, caracters, persuasions, controuersies, declamations,
prohems, insinuations, gettings of good wyll, and most artificiall narrations, that vnneth they can
bee numbred, and notwithstanding they denie that there is an ende of Rhetorike.  

It may not be coincidence alone that finds Burton’s philosophasters assiduously
embodying the long list of serial offenses which von Nettesheim pronounces above.
Montaigne similarly takes offence at the art of rhetoric, when he says in his essay “Of
the Vanitie of Words”:

> Ariston did wisely define Rhetorike to be a Science, to perswade the vulgar people; Socrates and
> Plato, to be an Art to deceive and flatter… It is an instrumente devised to busie, to manage, and
to agitate a vulgar and disordered multitude; and it is an implement imployed, but about
distempered and sicke minds, as Physicke is about crazed bodies. And those where either the
vulgar, the ignorant or the generalitie have had all the power, as that of Rhodes, that of Athens
and that of Rome, and where things have euer beene in continual disturbance and uproar, thither
have orators and the professors of that Art flocked…

In an image parallel to the one above, in his Argument to Philosophaster, Burton states
that with the new university of Osuna having been established “…philosophers stream
[flock] from all over, and right behind them, philosophasters, pimps and whores.”

The Englishman Samuel Purchas adds his voice to the decrying of rhetoric,
when, in 1619, he warns:

> Rhetoricke… is a swelling Poyson, it climbes into pulpits, Tribunalls, Theaters, to proue a
publike Pestilence, it knows the Arts of Adulation, of Hypocrisie, of malicious Slandering, of
Aequiuocations; all sorts of Iuggling, and Lying; it makes Men see with others Eyes, with
strange Glasses, which makes things seeme bigger, or lesse, or double, or not at all; it is Master
of Mens furious Passions, and leades them (so Hercules was pictured) by the Eare… to any Out-

---

97 Plett, Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture, p. 69.
98 Plett, Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture, p. 72.
99 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 27.
rage. Therefore did Plato banish Orators and Poets together out of his Commonwealth, Tertullus against Paul is bitterly eloquent; Cicero against Antonie is fruitlessly bitter; vnlesse this be the fruit which followes these swelling Rhetoricians, that they are brewers of Sedition and Schisme in the Church and the Commonwealth.100

Bearing these quotations in mind, the question arises, given that Burton finally performed his play in 1617/18 (at “the urging of others”), how can one interpret its commentary on rhetoric, which appears to instruct the very essence of the play? Returning to Murphy’s comments about the preservation of the Aristotelian tradition at the Universities of Osuna and Southern Spain (in relation to a similarly projected rubric at the University of Oxford), one mustn’t forget that the study of rhetoric in Spain during this time was lauded. To this day, at the University of Salamanca, there remains a plaque over the entrance to the School of Rhetoric advertising its once illustrious status.101 In Philosophaster, however, Burton places rhetoric on display as an art which although it has obvious value for the achievement of positive ends (the instruction in true scholarship, prudence and practical wisdom), it tends simultaneously to offer opportunities for sedition, for “Sedition and Schisme” even.102 As I mentioned earlier, this “ambivalent moral status”103 of rhetoric was problematic, in both a historical and a contemporary sense. Names such as Hobbes, Erasmus and Montaigne – these were just some of the commentators who were actively contributing to the substantial anxiety which increasingly pervaded humanist attitudes to rhetoric as the Renaissance period wore on. As Kahn reports:

100 Quoted in Plett, Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture, p. 72
101 Plett, Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture, p. 10.
102 Burton owned multiple copies of Purchas’ Hakluytus Posthumus (see Kiessling, The Library, pp. 247-8).
103 Kahn, Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism, p. 42.
…at the same time that their texts reveal an awareness of the ideal alliance of rhetoric [and prudence], their rhetorical strategies prove to be symptomatic of an increasing anxiety or skepticism about the power of rhetoric to persuade to right action… 104

Robert Burton, it would appear, was empathetic to their concerns.

In *Philosophaster*, Burton demonstrates that rhetoric, ill-taught and ill-used, has the potential to exist as a substantial liability to institutions of education, as well as to Church, state, monarchy and indeed, commonwealth. Reading along these lines, we might therefore assume that if universities like Salamanca and Osuna championed the rhetorical arts at a time that rhetoric was prone to vulnerability (as far its application solely to matters of right action, prudence and integrity was concerned) then Oxford, being likened to Osuna in this case, was surely similarly at risk in terms of the ‘integrity’ such rhetoric was promoting. “Did you see dear old Oxford?” asks Philobiblos in Act 1, Sc. V. Here we note the aura of intimacy, of a benevolent, if not beloved frame of reference to Burton’s own university town. Polumathes replies:

And it’s furnished library. I saw no living wise men here, but many dead ones, badly held with chains. 105

In other words, at Oxford, the only wisdom evident to Polumathes is contained in not in living men or scholars, but in books, historical repositories of ‘wise words’. Moreover, such wisdom is chained, so that it might not be carried off. Wisdom therefore is once again viewed as a quantity which is vulnerable, ‘at risk’ (“badly held”), something which might be invaded, damaged, taken advantage of, manipulated or even extinguished. One deduces that current Oxonian practices therefore (those of seventeenth century England) in Burton’s view at least, might not in fact promote the cause of wisdom – hence as Polumathes infers, the wise do not necessarily reside at Oxford, at least, not in the form of contemporary individuals. The overarching

---

104 Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism*, p. 27.
implication is that the conditions for the ‘nurturing of the wise’ are inadequate. How does this assertion similarly accommodate the idea that Oxford, just as Osuna had once done, should provide refuge from the “barbarism of Catholic Europe”? In a “barbarism of Catholic Europe” which saw the factional and warring progress of the Crusades and the Inquisition, Osuna (Andalusia) provided a place of relative calm, where the treasures of scholarship and philosophy might be safely harboured. In a Europe where a new breed of religious factionalism was undermining both Church and state however, perhaps Oxford might be seen to be impoverished of philosophy, in part at least, as a result of the contemporary problems of religious dissent. Burton might be inferring that religious “barbarism” is interfering with the nurturing and progress of scholarship, with the supreme quality or prize of ‘wisdom’ being undermined or compromised due to such religious discord. Catherine Curtis affirms Burton’s use of satire in connection with the Wars of Religion; she also extrapolates such a critique to the possibility of its providing commentary upon “the conditions which would give rise to the British civil wars”,¹⁰⁶ a subject which I will return to later in this thesis.

Oxford’s apparent poverty of wise men (lack of scholarship or philosophy) may be attributed in part then, to the very lack of religious consensus which eventually was to destabilize both Church and state in the century in which Robert Burton wrote.¹⁰⁷ Regarding the comparative status of the two universities of Oxford and Osuna (in terms of the implied relation between peace, intellectual enlightenment and the evolution of scholarship), one takes into account that political power and cultural developments centred initially on Cordoba (756-1031), then Seville (c 1040-1248) and lastly Granada (1248-1492) in Al-Andalus [the name given to Muslim territory on the Spanish peninsular]. It was during the tenth and early eleventh centuries, under the independent

¹⁰⁷ Gowland, Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy, p. 145.
Caliphate of Cordoba, that Al-Andalus reached the height of its power and became famous for enlightened scholarship (it was through Al-Andalus that much of the learning of ancient Greece was transmitted to Christian Europe), as well as religious tolerance. I reiterate here that the twin prizes of scholarship and wisdom must be assessed as being the fruits of peaceful times and religious stability. If the name of Oxford is to be examined in a capacity comparable to Osuna (as Murphy suggests), then surely what Burton is saying is that Oxford must become the similar “nurturing” home of classical scholarship. Yet, in a contemporary sense, it appears that this is all but impossible: there are no living wise men (no excellence of scholarship) available at Oxford; contention and lack of reason reign supreme.108 Moreover, we read just two lines on:

The arts are banished, philosophy banished. Lawyers, of course, are making lots of money, but the rest are held of no account.109

Burton is yet again pursuing the thesis of a pejorative evolution, a degradation of the principles of scholarship, at the hands of the universities themselves. These few lines of script provide the reader with some very provocative material. The association of erudition (learned men) with the “arts” and philosophy is highlighted; Burton is adamantly suggesting that it is the study of arts and philosophy which produces a truly learned or wise man. Yet this statement refers us straight back to the political arena (inferring therein an implied critique of sixteenth century state, constitutional and religious policy), where it may well be productive to take a moment to review the Platonic tradition of philosophical politics, a journey which has intimate association with both Early Modern humanism and Robert Burton himself. This journey also brings

---

108 In making such a polarized comment concerning the state of scholarship at Oxford, one must allow Burton a little artistic licence. Quite obviously, there were colleagues whom he admired at Oxford (Edmund Gunter, for instance, being one such example); for the sake of satirical style and comment, however, it would undoubtedly suit Burton’s purposes to take an extreme stance, in order to make his point.

us back to review philosophy in relation to the specific humanist concerns of morality and politics; concerns which issue at the very heart of Burton’s work.

Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Cicero believed that “moral philosophy was a necessary foundation of both statesmanship and citizenship.”¹¹⁰ As we have seen, the healthy state was above all located in man as a successful, actualised citizen, that is, as the archetypal vir civilis. Burton promoted this notion of the ideal citizen (and therefore the healthy state) as being firmly founded upon the dual relation of the vita activa and the vita contemplativa; I suggest that Burton saw these two modes of action as being mutually dependent, rather than separate, in their relation. Philosophaster therefore is none other than Burton’s endorsement of this interdependence of the active and contemplative lives. The state may not function optimally (or even viably) without input from the study of philosophy and the arts. To neglect to include these in the education of the state’s kings and counsellors, its gentry and nobility, is to neglect the very health of the state itself. As is shown in the ‘exhibition case’ of Osuna, where the study of the arts is inadequately instituted and carried out, where such practices fail, civil disorder and moral breakdown soon follow. Of course, this aligning of the precepts of moral philosophy implicitly instructs the construction of the author as physician to the state, a role which Burton follows closely in his later Anatomy, where we see him attempting to supply “physic” to a sick and decaying society (propagated by sick and ‘decaying’ citizens). “Melancholy”, under the microscope of Burton’s discovery, increasingly becomes attributable to almost everything; moreover, all citizens are at risk. The “philosopher” (Democritus Junior) must step in and attempt to save society. We are quickly advised of Burton’s credentials for doing the job: he is ‘philosopher’ by borrowed heritage, ‘physician’ by observable, topical treatment offered, and ‘divine’, by ostensible occupation. This strategic alliance of the moral and the ethical (via the study

¹¹⁰ Benner, Ethics, p. 2.
of the arts, incorporating philosophy and religion) offers Burton considerable traction in his ambition to ‘rescue’ or resuscitate a sick state, especially with regard to his earlier observations in *Philosophaster*. Only a skilled ethicist, presumably one who has studied the arts and philosophy, only a skilled moral philosopher, schooled in the histories (wisdom) of the ancients, only a truly wise scholar-philosopher might conceivably save an ailing commonwealth. Burton places this thesis on the table in his *Philosophaster* in 1617/18; it is not so surprising then, when we find the same purported remedy put forward in his masterwork, some three or four years later.

If we return to the intrinsic framework of Renaissance rhetoric, the pattern above, of the author, the skilled ethicist or ‘wise man’ offering instruction in the exercising of prudential judgment as a path to the right course of action, is one which is informed by strong precedent. Kahn comments:

…The Renaissance humanists… go beyond their classical mentors in conceiving of literature not only as the cause and effect of prudence and right action (i.e., the writer is presumed to be prudent and to inspire prudence in others), but as a form of prudence itself. Rhetoric here is not primarily conceived of in terms of style or ornament, but in terms of its capacity to exemplify and encourage the activity of practical reasoning…

The rhetoric employed in *Philosophaster* thus enables Burton to make personal comment on what may be occurring at Oxford by the very virtue of the overt debasing of its technical style and ornamental brilliance. However, it also (and importantly) allows Burton to instruct his audience in the activity of practical reasoning with regard to the assessment of educational practice as it was pursued at the university during that time. In both cases we see Burton “subordinating” rhetoric as a “skill to moral judgement”. In the *Anatomy*, on the other hand, the ‘prudence’ of the writer works to

---

guarantee the prudential actions of the reader; the text itself, exemplifies the puissance of the prudential status. Kahn continues:

Prudence is, in this sense, the precondition of artistic decorum, just as it is of ethical decorum. As a result, the work of art is seen less as an object than as reflecting a certain process or activity of judgment. Second, and consequently, the reader’s knowledge of the literary text… can only be practical, since the interpretive practice of reading requires the same acts of discrimination, the same judgements of decorum, as does the author’s practice of writing. Thus, the practice of interpretation, like the practice of writing, exemplifies for the humanist the inseparability of moral philosophy and rhetoric.¹¹³

The testing and victory of [moral] philosophy is exemplified in the dramatic course and epideictic corpus of Philosophaster; moreover, this same moral philosophy is applied via the vehicle of rhetoric in Burton’s The Anatomy of Melancholy. In both cases, the “aesthetic dimension” is the “precondition of the political”,¹¹⁴ although where the one is delivered via the theatrical device of satire, the other is delivered via the device of rhetorical prose. Yet again, we witness the influence of the early experience of the stage on the later work of Robert Burton. Yet again, the aesthetic dimension of the poet/playwright informs the superordinate dimension of the political.

Nescit regnare qui nescit dissimulare

When considering the notion of Burton’s embedding a political commentary or critique in the pages of Philosophaster (and the later Anatomy), it is useful to examine the milieu in which he was writing, and look to those forces which influenced not only himself, but his peers. The examination of contemporary commentators such as the

¹¹³ Kahn, Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism, p. 39.
¹¹⁴ Kahn, Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism, p. 40.
Oxford Professor of Jurisprudence, Alberico Gentili, and statesman, scientist and essayist Francis Bacon provides us with an insight into this area. One of Burton’s major concerns in *Philosophaster*, was to investigate the deceptiveness of appearances, and those ruses or actions which informed those appearances. Machiavelli, whom Burton read, along with many of his generation at Oxford\(^{115}\) once wrote:

> …the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar… If, however, there is no one in the world but the vulgar, those men who consider themselves wise, are no more immune to deceptions than the coarse multitude.”\(^{116}\)

This particular thesis has intriguing repercussions for many of the characters in Burton’s play, not the least of which are the true scholars (Philobiblos and Polumathes), and the Duke, Desiderius. The notion of the dangers behind good words and appearances and the subsequent necessity for teaching men how better to see through such deception is a motivating theme driving *Philosophaster*. Burton was by no means alone in this desire to look behind the mirror of appearances. The ancient Greek and Roman sources speak of dissimulation and *ironia* in relation to acts of (political) secrecy and deception. In the Early Modern era, this preoccupation with the actions and implications of deception and dissimulation was not dissimilar in terms of its focus on the political arena. Francis Bacon’s interpretation of the uses of dissimulation (as opposed to deception) is highlighted in the following paragraph:

> Deception involves the attempt to persuade others that one’s intentions or qualities are altogether different from what they truly are. By contrast, dissimulation conceals some intentions and qualities while revealing others in indirect ways. As Francis Bacon put it, deception or “simulation” occurs when a man industriously and expressly feigns and pretends to be other than he is; dissimulation occurs when a man lets fall signs and arguments, that he is not that [which] he is, or appears. Used judiciously, Bacon argues, dissimulation can be a valuable means of

---


\(^{116}\) Machiavelli, *The Chief Works*, Gilbert trans., pp. 64–7; also see Benner, *Ethics*, p. 64.
helping people to see through falsehoods and deceptions. Prodded by subtle “signs and arguments” to notice the true qualities of judgements that a dissimulation conceals from full view, the attentive can pick up the clues and try to interpret the dissimulator’s true purpose for themselves. This kind of interpretation gives them training in critical observation, since they must work hard to spot the scattered “signs” and piece them together in a coherent account of the person or argument that remains concealed beneath very different appearances.¹¹⁷

Bacon’s summary of duplicitous behaviours is cogently illustrated in Burton’s play, where the audience is shown both the actio of simulation (via the actions of the philosophasters pretending to be scholars), and the alternative and corresponding actions of dissimulation, where the interactions of the true scholars with the philosophasters, for example, further instruct the audience about the salient markers of deception. Burton is therefore offering a guided lesson to his readers/audience; he is instructing them how not to be “gullible consumers of false appearances.”¹¹⁸ Importantly, Burton is offering his audience these lessons through the theatre of laughter (satire).

On the surface, the gap between what appears to be the case, and what is actually the case, may be said to be amusing. Beneath the surface of theatrical sport however, and depending on the audience Burton had in mind, perhaps the observations on offer may have been rather more acerbic in nature, especially as regards the possibility of a commentary directed at the purview of a King. Was Burton’s original vision of the performance of Philosophaster predicated upon the presence of the royal auditor in the audience? Kathryn Murphy reports:

[Burton] had already contributed to Alba, an earlier play, now lost, which was performed before James at Christ Church in 1605… There is some evidence that Burton revised Philosophaster in expectation of a similar occasion, since Holyday’s Technogamia, performed three days before

¹¹⁷ Benner, Ethics, p. xl
¹¹⁸ Benner, Ethics, p. 54.
Philosophaster brings before its Christ Church audience ‘What he prepared for our Platonique
King/Deeming your iudgements able to supply/ The absence of So Great a Maiesty…’

The religio-political constraints of the era deemed that all publicly pronounced words
were potentially for the ears of a King. Notwithstanding scenarios unique to the Early
Modern era however, historically, the subject of free speech has always been
problematic. In response to this problem, variations on the theme of ironic dissimulation
have been practised by various factions and individuals for centuries. One only has to
look back to Machiavelli’s own literary favourites, Plutarch and Xenophon (both of
which Burton similarly favoured), to discover the link not only between the use of
ironic dissimulation to tell a tale, but also to understand the connection between the
good or ‘wise’ man or leader, and the true subject of his pedagogical focus.

In his essay “How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend”, Plutarch advocates friendly
“interlocutors” as being facilitators of the dispensing of harsh truths, finding “oblique,
diplomatic ways to convey them” whilst simultaneously showing respect for
“independent judgment. As Benner advises, “…Plutarchian ‘frankness’ allows for
different degrees of what might be called constructive dissimulation, which are
particularly valuable for addressing men in power”. Such frankness might equally
well find its expression in the words of those characters appearing in the performance of
a satirical play. In another essay, “How a Young Man Should Study Poetry” Plutarch
advises:

Plays on ambivalent meaning of words are one of the principal methods of dissimulation used by
poets and philosophers. Ambivalence ‘works through the normal usage of words,’ so that readers
must constantly ask themselves whether a writer is using a given word in one sense or another.

Murphy, “Jesuits and Philosophasters,” p. 119.
Benner, Ethics, p. 67.
Benner, Ethics, p. 68.
It is in coding strategies such as these, Plutarch advises, that the able writer might seek to communicate his meaning; he simply requires a well-trained and astute audience upon which he can practise his skills. In *Philosophaster*, Burton’s pseudo-philosophers are constantly turning up ambivalent phrases, manipulating and even advertising the vulnerability of these phrases in terms of how they might be used to such effect. Yet what of this fine balance between instructive commentary and useful (i.e. ‘receptive’) audience? How might Burton view his own position in relation to this model?

In response to this question, Lawrence Babb makes the following observation concerning Burton’s (largely self-reflexive) view on the relation between commentary and audience receptivity:

> In many passages of the *Anatomy* he [Burton] rails at the prosperity of the stupid and unworthy. Evidently he feels that he and his kind have been unwisely and unjustly excluded from the affairs of the world and its rewards. They are denied the opportunity to perform the services that they could and should perform: “we that are University men… are never used: or, as too many candles, illuminate ourselves alone.”

This kind of sentiment fits in well with *Philosophaster’s* general agenda, that is, that the “wise” are excluded from the affairs which should concern them, albeit much to the detriment of the state. The wise are excluded, unacknowledged, overlooked even, in the interests of looking to the shining advertisements, insinuating ways, or shrewd flattery of others who are more willing to compromise their integrity in chasing fame, power and wealth. Once again, the line of commentary which was started in *Philosophaster* is continued into the larger work of the *Anatomy*. Babb similarly notes, that in Burton’s somewhat transparent “Utopia”, “the most honourable and responsible posts are occupied by scholars.”

---

In another tract advising on the potential uses of dissimulation, Plutarch advises that a writer who wishes to expose the faults in his subject might appear to do nothing but praise it. Burden appears to come dangerously close to this, in the song which he has Amphimacer sing:

Oh Desiderius Dux

Your face shines as lux

In your wisdom, O Proceres

Mores shine as Flores;

We admire your honores.

You be my Maecenas;

I’ll be your Marones...

The song is a somewhat sparing encomium to the Duke (or possibly the King), for although the Duke is a light in his shining “wisdom”, this wisdom is a quantity which has yet to be truly tested. It exists in theory, but will it continue in fact? The historical Maecenas was the friend and political advisor to the first Emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus. Maecenas was best known however for his generous and highly informed patronage of the arts. He was patron of both Virgil and Horace, and indeed Virgil wrote the Georgics in his honour. It is said of Maecenas, that his patronage was often exercised with a view to the higher interest of the state. Burton’s loyalty to James has been documented, and perhaps this is what Burton is getting at, the fact that he views the Duke (James) as having the potential to deliver the state to higher things – such as the arts and philosophy. Burton views the King’s essential code of principles as being sufficient to enable the process of true scholarship to survive and flourish – perhaps

---

124 Benner, Ethics, p. 69.
125 Murphy, “Jesuits and Philosopherasters”, p. 119.
thereby better facilitating the project of the *vir civilis*. Yet the manner in which Burton has Amphimacer deliver this song at the same time undermines any true faith the words offer. The implication, especially in the last two rather colloquially structured lines, is disconcerting; sarcasm and cynicism frame the true nature of the sentiment. The effect is to cause any thinking audience member to reconsider the apparent virtue and abilities of the Duke (King), in his capacity as a prudent and wise ruler.

Burton actually shares quite a close moment with Machiavelli at this juncture. Machiavelli used “signs, codes, ambivalence and other techniques of dissimulative writing” in his works and plays. Benner points out that certain commentators of the era, such as Bacon and Gentili recognised and commented on this very fact, and indeed, at the time Burton was writing, such men saw Machiavelli as something of a moral philosopher. Machiavelli wanted to teach people “the way to hell” so that they might learn to avoid it.\(^{126}\) So often, in the pages of *Philosophaster*, Burton seems to be offering a similar lesson. Benner states that:

> Machiavelli’s methods and aims have clear pre-cursors in the Greek writings… he frequently echoes a Socratic metaphor that identifies philosophical discourse with medicine for corrupt souls and cities, and calls for a “physician” who can introduce it.\(^{127}\)

We see this theme echoed quite transparently in the opening pages of Burton’s later *Anatomy*; in fact, this particular Socratic metaphor can be said to permeate and inform the whole of that work. I will take up this topic (particularly in relation to Burton’s inclusion in the category of ‘Neo-Platonic’ commentators of the period) in later chapters of this thesis.

On the function of philosophical writings that dissimulate about politics, Benner continues:

\(^{127}\) Benner, *Ethics*, p. 70.
One of the indispensable foundations (*fondamenti*) of good republican or princely arms is the ability to “recognise snares” and resist the appeal of misleading appearances. Writings that dissimulate about politics can serve as a valuable medicine for those who need to build up better defences.\(^{128}\)

With regard to the play, *Philosophaster*, Burton’s “Duke” is unable to sufficiently discriminate between simulation of appearance and veritable *personas*. Not only is he taken in by the pseudo-philosophers, but he is also, and more worryingly, taken in by the apparent ‘good counsel’ of his advisors, Eubulus and Cratinus. Perhaps the Duke is already, to some extent, ensnared by the poor (and self-serving) advice of his toadyng courtiers/counsellors, a fact which is concerning in itself. In a town where every citizen is prey to the snares of vice (greed, lasciviousness, etc.), and where the Duke/King’s advisors are themselves consumed by self-serving and mobile ambitions, the Duke would already appear to be in a state of considerable vulnerability. In a careful and strategic didactic exercise, we could read this play as Burton taking it upon himself to teach the Duke/King the possible errors of his ways. He must apply to the wisdom of those denied the opportunity to perform the services that they “could and should perform”. “We that are University men… are never used: or, as too many candles, illuminate ourselves alone…”\(^ {129}\) In illuming the monarch, the true scholars (the true philosophers) may illume the state; indeed, they may illume all gullible consumers of false appearances.

Hierarchies of Power and the Question of the Philosopher-King

\(^{128}\) Benner, *Ethics*, p. 70.
\(^{129}\) AOM, 1:322.
I have investigated the philosophaster of Burton’s play of the same name in terms of his identity as a fraudster or trickster, a creature of duplicitous purpose. I have also alluded to the fact that ironically, it is not only the philosophasters of this play who are duplicitous, scheming, self-serving and manipulative; in fact, all of the characters in Burton’s play are shown in some way, to embody the latter qualities. The nobility and townspeople are depicted as being scheming and personally ambitious, the bawd and her protégées seek money and potential social advancement; the Duke’s advisors are quite patently egocentric and “fox-like” in their personal manoeuvring, and of course, the servants, as epitomised by the sly and linguistically mobile Aequivocus, appear to belong to a breed of fraudulent tricksters who prove themselves quite as capable as the next man, as far as self-promoting acts of greed and duplicity go. The only characters in Burton’s play who might be said to stand curiously apart from the general malaise of self-serving and duplicitous protagonists, are the Duke, Desiderius, and the two wandering scholars, Philobiblos and Polumathes. The Duke occupies an interesting position in Burton’s play. We see him at the top of a pyramid of highly mobile and scheming deceivers, the stratum directly below him being occupied by his counsellors, with the structure of the pyramid then moving down through the nobility, gentry, students and townspeople, through to the servants and rustics.

A strategic triangular and interconnected relationship may be charted, with reference to the Duke and the two scholars, Polumathes and Philobiblos. The Duke remains at the head of this triangular relationship with the two scholars forming the other two axis points, but as the play progresses, the lines of power which may be said to operate between these three points of the triangle undergo significant change. As the Duke becomes subject to (and eventually cognizant of) the various deceptions which both he and his subjects have been exposed to, his power becomes a quantity which is shown (in terms of his ‘possession’ of it) to be vulnerable to slippage. Through the
actions of not just the philosophasters, but also the furtive asides of the calculating counsellors, we see the ostensible power of the Duke as being something quite capable of being compromised, infiltrated, undermined or placed at risk. We watch as the power shifts from the Duke to the wandering scholars, notably the seemingly prudent and outspoken Polumathes. Polumathes enlightens the enraged Duke, showing him not only the extent of the deceptions which have occurred, but also offering to put in place measures to expose the offending philosophasters, as well as advancing suggestions for dealing with their punishment. In this way, Polumathes is shown to mediate not only the Duke’s rage and perspicuity, but also his power. Ultimately, the full range of this transition of power is demonstrated when the Duke instructs the two scholars to take over the administration of the university, “walking along the streets by night or day, they may of their own authority punish and oversee that these things be done”. Effectively, a contract is put in place, with the Duke concluding: “I praise your ready mind, and if anything is left to be put right, I entrust it to your faith.”

In his book, *Foxes and Lions, Machiavelli’s Confidence Men*, Wayne Rebhorn reminds us that tricksters fell broadly into two categories in Renaissance literature, those of the cunning, adept deceivers, and those of their dupes, the less cunning and perceptive, and therefore the ones whom they defraud. At this point in Burton’s play, we see the Duke come perilously close to being one who is duped, in a most public and parlous fashion. Yet the patent embarrassment and implicit compromise to power that might result from such a situation is largely prevented from eventuating, by virtue of the two ‘true’ scholar-philosophers. The perilously imminent ‘crisis’ of the Duke demolishing the university, and instead returning the funds to “warlike uses” is averted by the actions of our two heroes, the wandering scholars. Momentarily, the scholars

---

take on the embodiment of the good and virtuous Christian (“princely”) voice when they pronounce (against the demolishment of the university):

Lest the good be exiled with the bad, or lest art be held in poor esteem because of the abuse of artifice. In Osuna [Oxford?] are learned, illustrious, and serious men who are truly and sincerely devoted to philosophy; for their sake, most serene prince, I have begged in earnest that you revoke this sentence.

The scholars, at this strategic point in the play, are seen to be espousing and pronouncing the virtues of justice, altruism, honesty and the pursuit of excellence in the interests of both citizen and realm, through the pursuit of proper and correct education, that is, through application to philosophy. Without a doubt, the two scholars are preponed by Burton as the saviours of the day, the only ones capable of clear vision, who have inquired into the apparent status of the situation at hand and not been deceived by what they see. It is evident that their perspicacity has saved both a Duke and a city, as well as a potentially esteemed and laudable institution – not to mention the saving of the dual muses of art and scholarship. With the saving acts of the two scholars installed in law (“I want placed in authority two men… elected annually by public vote”), the Duke and his townspeople may now relax and celebrate, singing a hymn in praise not of God, not of King or country, but of philosophy. Philosophy is thus promoted as being the general panacea for all ills; the extent to which it might be tabulated, evinced, labelled and employed is of course demonstrated in Burton’s next and very politically and semantically complex work, the Anatomy of Melancholy.

The next chapter in my thesis charts this conceptual transition from ‘philosophy as general panacea’ in Philosophaster to its further endorsement as a holistic and palliative agent in the pages of the Anatomy. Inevitably, in the scenario where Philosophy (or the Philosopher) is construed as ‘King’, one is drawn to the precedent of

---

132 Burton, Philosophaster, p. 195.
Plato in the *Republic*. It is easy enough to draw comparisons between Burton’s triumph of the rule or ‘justice’ or ‘supreme Philosophy’ in *Philosophaster* and Plato’s *Republic*, however, it is in Burton’s construction of the *Anatomy* that we witness the most cogent and comprehensive endorsement of the Platonic paradigm.

If the *Anatomy* is read in terms of its being a treatise on health which, in turn, embeds a further political commentary (in itself an act of *celare artem*), then potentially, the points at which it intersects with the *Republic* are many. Philosophical discourse *per se* becomes both the start and the end point for invoking a medicine not only for the corrupt soul, but for the corrupt city. Indeed, as Benner suggests (via Plato) there is an adamant call for a “physician” who can introduce such a philosophical discourse.¹³³ In the *Anatomy*, Burton becomes that physician. He puts on the respective ‘healing’ hats of divine, physick and philosopher and sets about treating his “disease of the soul”. Burton commences with Plato’s unjust city (consumed with its disease of melancholy) and, in a highly didactic and methodical sense, he works from the apparent problem right through to its theoretical resolution. Burton tries to recover that (lost) normative order of the soul which, if engaged once more, may be induced to instruct the public and private lives of the citizens, accordingly.¹³⁴ That is, normative ordering of the soul, in its capacity of functioning as it should, becomes the instrument of healing for both the individual and the *polis*.

The question becomes – in practical terms, how does Burton go about instituting such a process as the normative ordering of the soul? If one assumes that Burton’s ‘normative ordering’ is based on a Christian ordering of the soul¹³⁵ (that is, the task of working to restore man’s prelapsarian status with regard to his relationship with the divine), then what Burton must offer, one assumes, is some form of paideic programme

---

¹³⁴ From an idea originally stated by Mitchell Miller (concerning Socrates’ pedagogy) in Ferrari (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, p. 334.
¹³⁵ See Chapter 5 of this thesis.
for the analysis and education of the soul. With the soul being accessed through the
conduit of the rational will, the mind of man (and therefore the soul) might be instructed
through the “well-framed pursuit of knowledge”.\textsuperscript{136} The rightful pursuit of truth is
therefore prioritised; order must be extracted from disorder. The bridge from

*Philosophaster* to the *Anatomy* must be crossed; the observable effects of incomplete or
imperfect knowledge and resultant vice and disorder must be allowed to be duly
rectified through the concerted application of the remedy of proper knowledge and
subsequent access to health. If disorder finds its locus in conditions of infirmity and
weakness issuing from the mind of man, then order must find its form in the active
correction of those pathogenic influences which give rise to infirmity and weakness. In
perfecting the mind, one perfects the soul. As Corneanu suggests, “to perfect the mind
was emphatically a process… It was a work that involved all the capacities of the mind,
cognitive, volitional and affective alike.”\textsuperscript{137}

Burton’s essential epistemological and methodological project, therefore, was
one that had as its primary desired outcome, the potential for the soul to be cured,
through the pre-emptive and therapeutic cure of the mind. Through the processes of
self-examination and [self] education, the rational creature (man), in a task “assigned to
it by its Creator”\textsuperscript{138} could re-establish both his spiritual integrity and his proper place in
relation to the deity. Ultimately, in restoring order to the soul, man *counters* the problem
of disorder; infirmities of the mind and of the body are treated – creature, community
and ‘disease’ are correspondingly cured. The original conceptual matrix for this process
(based on the rightful pursuit of true knowledge accessed through the rational will),
stems from “ancient representations of both philosophy and religion as ‘culture’ or

\textsuperscript{137} Corneanu, *Regimens*, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{138} Corneanu, *Regimens*, p. 2.
‘cures’ for the soul”. Corneanu agrees that such cultures are indebted to both the Socratic (Platonic) as well as the Patristic/Augustinian traditions, and suggests the *medicina-cultura animi* textual genre associated with these cultures provides exactly the kind of structural framework which commentators such as Burton were able to both utilise and build upon. Importantly, the integrated nature of the approach of these holistic regimens optimises the potential for cure; as Burton demonstrates, particularly in the *Anatomy*, the nature of the disease (virulent; epidemic; complex; multi-faceted; endemic) dictates the nature of the course of cure (holistic; encompassing; flexible; reactive; source-oriented). Burton advocates an ‘art of living’ more in alignment with the Early Modern view of “philosophy as fundamentally *paideia* or *askesis* rather than simply *theoria*”. As we progress into the second part of this thesis, I will examine exactly this – the idea of Burton constructing (notably, in the *Anatomy*), a regimen for cure of body and soul, for both the individual and, by extraction, the corporate body or community. Burton called the disease he was to combat in this way ‘melancholy’; I will argue that the *Anatomy* constituted his therapeutic response to the disease of melancholy, specifically, by way of its promoting a comprehensive paideic programme for cure.

---

139 Corneanu, *Regimens*, p. 4.
140 Corneanu, *Regimens*, p. 4.
Chapter 4

Burton and the Paideic Regimen: the Socratic and Patristic Traditions.

In *Regimens of the Mind*, Sorana Corneanu considers what she defines as an “anthropological-therapeutic”\(^1\) core to the English Early Modern experimental philosophers’ approach to the problem of knowledge. Corneanu aligns this conceptual core with the therapeutic work process of the tradition of Early Modern *medicina-cultura animi* texts and names Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as a work which is representative of this genre.\(^2\) Corneanu’s *medicina-cultura animi* genre encompasses aspects of specific structural, conceptual and semantic features which I have already described as being methodologically and teleologically inherent in Robert Burton’s project of the *Anatomy*.\(^3\) Corneanu states:

> Its [the literature of the *medicina-cultura animi*] professed aim was to offer “medicine” or “physic” or else to prescribe the best “culture” for a mind described as “diseased” or “distempered” or “perturbed”. In turn, these notions explicitly elaborate on ancient representations of both philosophy and religion as such “cures” or “cultures” for the soul: they are thus jointly indebted to what I will describe as the Socratic and the Patristic/Augustinian traditions... [I will] emphasize the noncompartmentalized nature of this early modern endeavor, which transgresses disciplinary as well as institutional boundaries, and whose practitioner is often called, with a comprehensive term, the “physician of the soul”.\(^4\)

---


\(^3\) Ref. earlier thesis chapters.

\(^4\) Corneanu, *Regimens*, p.4.
Corneanu goes on to investigate the Early Modern inheritance of the Socratic and Patristic/Augustinian traditions of the cultures or “cures” of the soul, in the form of the various recommended paideia of the soul; she calls such regimens of paideic concern, “regimens of the mind”.\footnote{For the sake of clarity, I have followed Corneanu’s lead of calling the traditions of the paideia or cultures of the soul ‘Socratic’ and ‘Patristic’. Corneanu, Regimens, p. 4.}

There is no doubt that Burton’s Anatomy may be considered as conforming to the basic tenets of the medicina-cultura animi genre; the notion that the Anatomy offers a specific regimen for paideic practice is one which I should like to investigate further. Burton is a self-described ‘physician of the soul’; via the complex and lengthy instruction of his ‘anatomising’ treatise, he offers an anthropological-therapeutic regime which instructs the holistic health of the individual - that is, he advises on “spiritual physic” as well as on “proper remedies for bodily diseases” (“corporal cure”).\footnote{Corneanu, Regimens, pp. 1-13.} It is how Burton goes about implementing his cure that has relevance as far as my investigation is concerned. In attempting to further pursue this issue, I will be considering some key questions: for example, how does Burton’s ‘holistic approach’ both represent and differ from the usual ‘paideic’ template?\footnote{AOM, 1:37.} In assembling the elements of his particular paideic exercise, what, if anything, does Burton reference as an exemplary ‘standard’? If this ‘standard’ can be identified, does it mean that any further parallels may be said to exist between the referent template and Burton’s own posited therapeutic paradigm?

Moreover, the term “holistic” implies a relation of parts to a whole, a corporate unity. If this is the case with Burton, what is the unity to which he applies? Is it, for example, a unity which relates to the Platonic or the Aristotelian conception of the (Supreme) “Good”? Is the unity invoked more compatible with notions of the (Patristic) Christian God? Or is it perhaps more accurately defined as being a combination of these

\footnote{AOM, 1:37.}
\footnote{Corneanu, Regimens, p.4.}
convergent traditions, infused as they were (are) with the complex and ongoing historical interjections, glosses and distortions which successive commentators, classical and otherwise, have applied? Still further questions arise when one examines Burton’s paideic project in this manner. What of Burton’s method? How is his eclecticism, his humanist, rhetorical method employed in the service of the paideic programme? How does it function, in the sense of promoting the desired or necessary ‘medicinal cure’? Can we suggest that Burton’s ‘logophile doctor’ approach is, in fact, part of a more general ‘pre-science’ movement (akin to Kristeller’s “intellectual ferment”) pre-empting the later, more refined methodologies of the early English experimental philosophers, for example? To what extent does Burton see language as an instrument, which, if rightly used, “can aid in transcending the world of the senses” and transport us to “the intelligible realm, where we may find the unity and rest (wellness) that we seek?”

In this chapter, which opens the second part of my thesis, I will commence by charting a brief history of the evolution of the Socratic and Patristic traditions, endeavouring to establish how these traditions might have been received in the Early Modern era. I will then investigate how Augustine’s reception and translation of Platonist and Neoplatonist ideas informed Early Modern Christianity (especially in relation to the nature of the soul); further to this, I will examine how certain aspects of the Augustinian position may have influenced Burton. Finally, in bringing these strands of investigation together, I will determine how they (jointly) influenced the structure

---

and ideology behind Burton’s own anthropological-therapeutic regimen, namely, the complex and palliative ‘paideic programme’ of the Anatomy.

The Socratic/Platonic Tradition.

The Socratic paideic tradition embraces the notion of “philosophy as a way of life”\(^{14}\) and it comes to us, much as it did for the Early Moderns, via the thought and conceptual transmission and translation of the works of Plato. This fact in itself poses certain problems, for the inheritance (transmission; translation) of Platonic ideology has been a source of considerable frustration down the centuries. As Kristeller points out, in attempting to isolate an authentic Platonic (and, by inference) Socratic ideology, issues of purity immediately arise:

We must resign ourselves to the fact that in most cases the Platonist elements of thought are combined with doctrines of a different origin and character, and that even the professed Platonists did not express the thought of Plato in its purity, as modern scholars understand it, but combined it with more or less similar notions that had accrued to it in late antiquity, the Middle Ages or more recent times.\(^{15}\)

In the strictest sense therefore, if one seeks to isolate an authentic Socratic/Platonic corpus and its accompanying ideology and chart its possible infusion in a subsequent and potentially cognate project (Burton and his Anatomy, in this case), the task will be an onerous, if not impossible one; certainly, the inherent limitations of such a task must be borne in mind. Also to be taken into consideration, is the fact that in the period with which we are dealing (Early Modern/Renaissance), there was no “deep divide

---


\(^{15}\) Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, p. 65.
recognised between Plato’s teachings and those of the Neoplatonists.”

This “absence of the deep divide” correlates with this further comment from Kristeller:

It would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of sixteenth-century Platonism, or to overlook its almost ubiquitous presence, often combined with humanism or Aristotelianism or other trends or ideas, but always recognisable in its own distinctive physiognomy.

In searching out the Socratic/Platonic influences on the work of Robert Burton therefore, we encounter a twofold challenge. First, one must identify, as much as is possible, the nature and particulars of the original Socratic/Platonic corpus (and accompanying ideology or ‘philosophy’); secondly, one must determine the nature of its survival, transmission, translation and reception in the Early Modern period. In performing this exercise, we may more accurately investigate the degree to which the Platonic paedeic programme might be said to inform Burton’s work.

In attempting to discover the influence of the Socratic [henceforth referred to as the ‘Platonic’] philosophical-paideic tradition on the writing and ideological mind set of Robert Burton, one must first posit the possible framework in which Burton might have chosen to assimilate and/or represent this tradition. In the Anatomy, Burton constructed a work which investigated the causes, diagnosis, prognosis and potential cure for a disease which he viewed as a complex malignancy, affecting body, mind and soul. In

---

17 Kristeller, Renaissance Thought, p. 59.
Early Modern terms, the *Anatomy* is a treatise on ‘physick’, a medical text,\(^{18}\) nonetheless, its worth as a literary work has also been endorsed.\(^{19}\)

Burton’s subject is “melancholy”, a disease which he describes on numerous occasions and in various ways throughout his text, as a pathogenic process which perpetrates infection in the world in an ongoing and insidious fashion:\(^{20}\) “a disease so frequent… in these our daies, so often happening”; “a disease so grievous, so common…”;\(^{21}\) “Never so much cause of laughter now, never so many fools and madmen”;\(^{22}\) “melancholy, madness… the generality of the disease”.\(^{23}\) In summoning such language of extrapolation in his referencing of melancholy, Burton makes an overt transition or ‘conceptual shift’ in the parameters of his case, presenting melancholy as not only a disease of the individual, but as a disease which infects society. In other words, he makes the leap from acknowledging disease as a discrete process belonging only to the individual, to acknowledging disease as a pathological process on a much grander scale, thereby bringing a specifically social/collective perspective to his therapeutic project. In Platonic terms, we might speculate that Burton is concerned at once with the ‘state of the soul’ and the ‘soul of the [city] state’; analogical paradigms involving the tripartite relation to notions of order and justice are accordingly invoked.\(^ {24}\) Burton taps into the Platonic tradition of philosophy as a way of life; he simultaneously accesses the associated exercise of the diagnostic assessment of man. Philosophy then,

---

\(^{18}\) In modern terms, Burton’s *Anatomy* may be said to treat the psychopathological disease process of melancholy.


\(^{20}\) For confirmation of the perceived extent of the disease of melancholy (from contemporary commentators such as Melanchthon, Mercuriale and Chiodini), see Angus Gowland, “The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy”, *Past and Present*, 191 (May, 2006), pp. 77-9.


\(^{22}\) AOM, 1:52.

\(^{23}\) AOM, 1:38; also Corneanu, *Regimens*, p.46.

\(^{24}\) For further analysis of the condition of melancholy as embodying a specifically sociological function with regard to order/dis-order syndrome and the concept of anomie in particular, see Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp 7-14.
becomes an art of living, the correct way of living, for an organism which ultimately, is part of a greater whole – a greater ‘organic’ community, a greater unity. At the deepest and most integral level then, it becomes incumbent upon the individual, who remains in the service of the larger organism (the city/state, or possibly the Christian community, as we shall see later),\textsuperscript{25} to adopt the philosophical regime which best promotes not only expedient accession to the unity, but, which also, ultimately, contributes to the organic and functional success of that unity/community. In the presence of pathology therefore, the onus is on the individual to address that pathology, to acknowledge it and accordingly reform it; in doing so, he/she contributes to the integrity, holism and success of the greater unity to which he/she belongs. The question is, of course, how might that unity best be defined? In terms of the Patristic tradition, this is not such a difficult question to answer. The unity must be defined as God, or, in a purely spiritual sense, as the community of man in God. Importantly, this is a God to whom man and the universe are subservient and in whose image man has been fashioned. For Burton, melancholy has the potential to separate man from God (“melancholy is the devil’s bath, and invites him to come to it…”);\textsuperscript{26} melancholy separates man from the holistic unity which he must experience with God, if health, rather than disease, is to prevail; this notion, including the specifically Christian context in which it prevails, will be revisited later in this chapter. Returning to the specifically Platonic tradition for the moment, however, we see that our question becomes a somewhat more complex one. What constitutes the Socratic/Platonic unity? What are its essential features? Can we give it a definitive name?

In endeavouring to discern more accurately what Plato meant when he placed man in relation to the unity, the ‘God (s)’ or the Good, we immediately enter into a maze of both conceptual and semantic challenges with regard to these ideological

\textsuperscript{25} See page 189 of this chapter; also Chapter 5, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{26} Burton, AOM, 3:417.
constructs. Furthermore, the modern reader will naturally bring to the table contemporary traditions of what the word ‘unity’ might invoke. For Plato, nonetheless, certain conceptual principles stand. These are (in no particular order):

Knowledge of the Forms is the only good. [Only knowledge of the Forms is true knowledge and the basis of wisdom]^{27}

The very highest form or idea is the “form of the good.”^{28}[All Goodness derives from knowledge of the Form of the Good]

The soul is immortal; the body perishes.

The most important knowledge is to know oneself. [Moral self-knowledge must be derived from philosophical wisdom]

The ethical ideal is the well-ordered soul in which reason rules the spirited and appetitive faculties (will and desire, respectively).

The good life is not a life of pleasure, but rather one of reason.

The truly strong [healthy?] work for justice, which is due proportionality.

The ideal of action, is that of harmony.^{29}

Already, we observe that, in attempting to interpret the mind of Plato, obtaining a clear idea of the definition of the unity to which the individual and (by inference) the corporate soul might desire to accede, appears challenging. The nearest we might come to in approaching the definition of the unity, is comprehending that it might stand for Truth, approached through Reason. It is not until we reach Plotinus (Neoplatonism) that

\footnote{27 Expansions on these points (italicised, in brackets) occur as a result of correspondence with Gowland (April 2016)}


we encounter the idea that unity is ‘God’ (God is Unity).\textsuperscript{30} Plotinus takes the more abstract notions associated with Plato’s unity and he lends them a more definitive physiognomy – that ‘face’ is God. The idea of return of the soul to God, of which it is part\textsuperscript{31} becomes a predominant and ongoing theme in Platonic doctrine after Plotinus; this is particularly the case in the course of the amended Platonic doctrinal models thereafter assimilated by the revealed religions. This fact must be borne in mind when we consider Copenhaver and Schmitt’s assessment of the “absence of the deep divide”, for if Burton was a true product of his time, then we might assume that his concept of unity would incorporate the later Neoplatonist doctrine in such measure as it informed the original Platonic doctrine.

The tradition to which Burton might well have been appealing then, in terms of the Platonic inheritance of the paideic process, appears, at first instance, obfuscated. The fact that the good life equates to an ethical ideal, whereby the well-ordered soul rules a material (physical) body which inherently harbours potent desiring (‘sensible’) faculties, signifies that the good life is one which is inherently at risk. The physical body is naturally of the physical world, and as such, it is constantly engaged in warfare against the desiring senses. Socrates’ admonition to ‘know thyself’ enters onto the very fields upon which the war between reason and the lower sensibilities is waged. It is only through man’s wilful application to reason that he might be saved from the pathologies that are associated with the indulgences of the senses. The secular philosophy of Plato then, the speculative method of pure enquiry, his ‘theoretical concern’ wherein the unity, holism or degree of health attributed to an organism underwrites a Nature that finds within it only a mediatory\textsuperscript{32} place for God, is a formidable place in which to locate the germinal connection for a paradigm which connects health/holism with the relation

\textsuperscript{30} Feibleman, \textit{Religious Platonism}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{31} Feibleman, \textit{Religious Platonism}, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{32} Feibleman, \textit{Religious Platonism}, pp. 122,126.
to a unity. Nonetheless, I suggest that such a context significantly influences Burton’s project of the *Anatomy*, especially when one considers that Burton’s Platonism, as Copenhaver and Schmitt point out, was inevitably a ‘hybrid’ Platonism. In understanding the complex, overlaying structures that Platonic philosophy accrued as it was added to and amended in the centuries leading up to the Early Modern period, we discover how this early philosophy of self-reflection and correction might well have translated to Burton’s own ‘paedeic programme’. My next strand of investigation considers Platonic ideology as was received by the Early Modern inquirer; to this end, I offer a brief history of its course.

Feibleman makes the case for Plato perpetuating two religious approaches over the course of his philosophical career and works, namely, Orphic Idealism and native Greek Realism. From the one, we are introduced to the potential for the “supreme organizing mind behind the universe”; from the other, we are introduced to a God whose purview is limited to the “demiurgic function of filling the receptacle with the forms, a sort of principle of individuation connecting the two worlds.” In making this observation, Feibleman captures the elusive quality which so often characterises Plato’s thought and writing. Nonetheless, his assessment also serves to introduce one of the core differences which distinguishes Plato from his Neoplatonist successors – that difference concerns absoluteness of belief. As Feibleman suggests, Plato’s ‘method’ includes a certain amount of uncertainty. Plato’s method of reason is speculation, yet where there is certainty of belief (as in the philosophies of the Neoplatonists), there can be no

---

34 Feibleman, *Religious Platonism*, p. 68.
speculation. Plato’s ‘God’, if one can assume the monotheistic signifier when defining the latter, is a God who finds definition (if at all) only in the spaces between the uncertainty. He is a God who answers to and supports the flexible framework of Philosophy, rather than the imposed doctrinal rigor of Religion. As Feibleman asserts, Plato was a rationalist and there was no authority above that of Reason. With the advent of the Neoplatonist successors however, philosophy was subordinated to religion and belief became something that was absolute, gifted through faith. God the intermediary became God ‘The One’; nature was subsumed in the material body of man and the finite became the transcendental infinite. Thus, with a succession of Platonic proponents, commencing with Aristotle and carrying on down a line which included Philo, Plotinus, Proclus, and Pletho, along with commentators such as Boethius, Augustine, della Mirandola, Bruni, Ficino and Erasmus, we see how Platonism accrued a raft of philosophical and religious doctrines which clearly never belonged to its original namesake. This has implications for how we must understand the Socratic paideic inheritance as it entered into the Early Modern mind-set. A sound understanding of this phenomenon is of particular importance with regard to Burton’s approach to both Philosophy and Religion; it will also describe how his respective (and at times, convergent) constructions of these two disciplines potentially informed his own working version of Platonism, especially with regard to paideic practice and its intrinsic Early Modern relation to medicine. In this regard, Feibleman states (and I will quote him at length):

Long before the advent of Christianity, Neoplatonism was concerned primarily and almost exclusively with religious questions. The pre-occupation with God is paramount; God is the beginning and the end of everything, and all conceptions are permeated with His participation. Beginning in its strongest vein with Philo’s work on the reconciliation of Greek philosophy with Judaism, and with Plotinus’ reconciliation of Greek philosophy with Greek religion, it was

36 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 97.
absolute in its beliefs and subordinated reason to faith, with the resultant accent on religious
values rather than on logic and fact. Thus when religious Platonism passed into Neoplatonism, it
had already assumed a form in which it could become the established charter of institutions of
religion or of churches. What it lost in flexibility, it gained in amenability to imposition…

Robert Burton then, Early Modern humanist, divine and scholar, encountered a Plato
who was already and almost indiscriminately imbued with philosophical and religious
doctrinal attributes that were not, in fact, his own. Burton, perhaps not unlike many of
his contemporaries assimilated a Plato who had been significantly distorted, according
to the needs and agendas, of others. Quite plausibly, the Good, the One, the Unity, was
God; Ficino’s “One beyond being, the “perfect Truth… who diffuses himself in all
things and remains present”, the architect of Soul; Erasmus’ ‘divine mind’, “master
and part of history, revealed within it according to situation… accessible through the
holy scriptures of revelation”. Burton was seeking the final, or most comprehensive
remedy for a universal wound – a wound incurred through an act of compromise. If the
compromise was located in the advent of original sin (separation from the germinal and
beneficial unity), then postlapsarian man had the mandatory and challenging task of
restoring order to his house (his body; mind; soul). Only in successfully achieving this,
(Burton’s “fly to God”, endorsed by Augustine; “His judgement is to be adored,
trembled at…”, “…rely on God, call on him in thy trouble and he will hear thee”),
might that lost unity be restored.

37 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 100.
39 Christine Christ-von Wedel, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Advocate of a New Christianity (Univ. of Toronto, 2013), p. 112.
40 AOM, 3:431.
41 Augustine, Confessions, 5.2.2.; Burton, AOM, 3:431.
42 AOM, 3:425.
43 AOM, 3:427.
A successful paideic regime must, by virtue of its very definition, concern itself with two vital issues. First, it must assume a certain pre-existing discourse with the divine and secondly, and in keeping with the first concern, it must speak, didactically, to the speculated requirements of the soul. In terms of the soul and its requirements, the Socratic/Platonic tradition offers the template of a soul which is avowed to exist both before and after the advent of the material body. Death, under such conditions, is “the disconnection of the soul and the body”; the immortal soul, imbued with the legacy of its material experiences, carries on. Plato owes a considerable debt to Orphism in this regard, as Feibleman points out. In this scenario, the soul is likened to reason; it is also the source of motion (self-mover): as such, it cannot be destroyed; it is eternal. By the time Aristotle discourses on this topic, the notion of the soul is more aligned to the principles of Greek Realism. For Aristotle, there can be no separate existence of the soul – the soul is inseparable from its body; ‘relative to a body’; the soul does not survive the body. This brings us to an important point with regard to Burton and his proffered regimen for the soul, in the Anatomy. For there to be a regime that potentially instructs, aids and indeed heals the human soul, the soul must a priori be in discourse with the divine; it must be one of the [many] ‘parts’ that constitute the unity and it must be capable of reuniting with that unity, under certain ascribed conditions. One assumes that the soul that is in discourse with the unity, is a soul that has the possibility to acquire (or re-acquire) full health, even if, currently, its health may be compromised. Under such conditions, the proposed regimen for health must acknowledge these facts. Burton’s regimen for the sick and suffering soul does indeed acknowledge these facts, which find their origins in Plato (if not before), and going forward, are similarly informed via

44 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 69.
46 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 88.
47 For example: “then shall we love Him alone…as the most amiable and fairest object, or sumnum bonum, or chiefest good” (AOM, 3:316); “doubt not of thine election… your present affliction… will shortly end” (AOM, 3:428); “God is the author of our religion Himself… He dwelleth in us and we in Him” (AOM, 3:321); “that decayed image of God, which is yet remaining in us” (AOM, 3:337)
the evolutionary and syncretic path of Neo-Platonism and its instruction of the Christian religion, as shall be demonstrated later in this chapter.

In tracing aspects of Orphic Idealism, from Plato’s assimilation of it onwards, we find that Philo (the “chief founder of Neoplatonism”)* was the philosopher who did the main work of orchestrating the subordination of philosophy to religion. Philo also took the question of the individual and his duty for self-fulfilment, and moved the focus and means of achieving that self-fulfilment from serving society to serving God. The notion of “thoughts in the mind of God” (as opposed to Plato’s independent and eternal Ideas) is another shift which illustrates Philo’s subordination of philosophy to religion. As Feibleman states:

All of the ways in which Philo departed from Plato were characterised by an increase in the use of God as an explanatory principle and an elevation and increased participation of the role played by God in things natural and human.†

This conceptual and semantic shift informed the stance of the Neoplatonists, which in turn informed the Christian paideic tradition - that which was inherited by the Early Moderns. In following along this line of inheritance, we begin to see the framework which allowed for the theologico-philosophical evolution of an immortal soul, vulnerable to a system of eschatological rewards and punishments and being in discourse with the divine. This being so, the soul also had access to the understanding that it was inherently apart or estranged from a state of salubrious unity with the

---

*Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 96.
†Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 115.
Divine/Eternal and therefore compromised in health and in need (always-already) of a regimen for salvation.

By the time we get to the burgeoning religion of Christianity, what we see is a religion which had evolved trying to reconcile aspects of the Jewish and Greek theological regimes which preceded it. With scholar-philosophers such as Plotinus, Origen, Constantine, Hippolytus and Clement of Alexandria contributing to the dialogue, we also observe Christianity to be a religion that defines itself through its ascription of power to a Deity who rules over man, nature, mind and soul, alike. The Logos of Philo becomes the Christ of the New Testament and Knowledge is obtained through revealed scriptures.\(^{50}\) Feibleman states, that from the fourth century on, for Christianity at least, “there were three authorities in Greek philosophy: Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus”.\(^{51}\) As Christianity headed towards the later Middle Ages, the desire to moderate the abstract metaphysical led to the recruitment of Aristotelian ideology. In doing so, however, there is the argument that claims that what this in fact this amounts to, is simply a recapturing of those concepts which were contained in the Greek version of Realism, according to Plato.\(^{52}\)

Platonism, of course, was not actually substantially represented by the works of Plato in the Middle Ages. Apart from portions of the *Timaeus* by Cicero and Chalcidius, and versions of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* completed in the twelfth century,\(^{53}\) Plato’s works were only published with any force in the late fourteen hundreds. Yet, this does not mean that the ideology representing the tenets of Platonism, via the route of Aristotle and Neoplatonism, was not available. As Etienne Gilson memorably asserts:

---

\(^{50}\) Feibleman, *Religious Platonism*, p. 168.


185
“Plato was nowhere, but Platonism was everywhere during the Middle Ages.”54

Feibleman points out that:

…while the doctrines of Plotinus, or extensions of them, could be exhaustively studied in Macrobius or Dionysius, any philosopher who sought to advance from the Augustinian position by drawing more heavily on ancient sources was bound in practice to end up as a Neoplatonist.55

The Middle Ages was a period that was defined by its application to the practical; subjects like Medicine, Law and Theology were therefore appropriately prioritised, schematized and promoted. Aristotle’s doctrine of substance could be tailored to fit these stringent requirements, yet an Aristotle that had “been through the hands of the Hellenistic Neoplatonists and the Moslem theologians”56 was, nonetheless, a distorted Aristotle. Moreover, for Christianity (as well as for the Jewish and Moslem religions), Aristotle presented certain intrinsic problems:

…first, the eternity of the universe, which was the necessary corollary of his conception of God as the First Cause; second, the limitation of God’s knowledge to universals, which excludes particular providence; and third, his denial of immortality of the individual soul. All these theories are integral parts of Aristotle’s system, and they are in flat contradiction to the fundamental doctrines of all three religions, creation, providence and retribution.57

Feibleman offers a pithy history of Neoplatonism as it might be found in the work and thought of Aquinas and shows the ways in which Maimonides and Averroes also contributed to the perpetuation of Neoplatonic ideas via the vehicles of the revealed religions during the Middle Ages.58 It is when we reach the Early Modern/Renaissance periods, however, when the texts of Plato reach Europe, that the story becomes more compelling. We are finally able to comprehend how Robert Burton (along with other

54 Etienne Gilson, as quoted by Feibleman, p. 190.
55 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, pp. 190-1.
56 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 192.
58 Feibleman, Religious Platonism, pp. 193-205.
social commentators of his age) might have both encountered and reacted to the newly available Platonic doctrines; we may also more properly understand the connection between politics, disease, paideia and the city/state and observe why Burton the divine might write a work that spoke abundantly to this intricate connection.

**The Augustinian Tradition and Burton’s Notion of the Soul.**

As we approach the Renaissance, we observe that, on the whole, most philosophers of that period believed that “Plato’s ethical doctrines were far closer to Christianity than those of other pagan philosophers, in particular, Aristotle”. The comparative ease with which Platonic doctrine was able to be assimilated into the Christian religion was due to a number of factors, including the observation that Plato directed his efforts towards “that which was divine and immortal, separate and eternal, imperceptible and intelligible”. Ficino, in particular, made use of this strand, emphasising those aspects of Platonism which he believed linked the early theology of Moses to later Christianity; the fact that Plato placed the *summum bonum* in the life to be looked forward to after death (the future life of the soul) also helped establish the Platonic link to Christianity in the minds of many Renaissance and Early Modern commentators.

The gradual Christian “transformation and transvaluation of pagan ethics”, as received by the Early Moderns, owed much to the thought of one of Burton’s favourite commentators, Augustine of Hippo. Moore makes the observation that for Augustine

59 Kraye in *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 356.
60 Kraye in *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 356.
61 Note: Burton refers to God as the “*summum bonum*” (AOM, 3:316).
“Neoplatonism… was much more than the bridge by which he passed over to the Church; it entered into his religious experience and its influence on his thinking was pervasive and permanent.”\textsuperscript{63} Importantly – and especially with reference to Burton - Augustine also initiated the idea that original sin was derived from the evil nature of matter. The material world was the source of man’s separation from the good, or God, and that which was associated with the material world could be cited as being both the instigating and perpetuating cause of spiritual pathology. For Augustine, man’s soul was the seat of the ongoing dialogue between man and God, therefore the integrity of the soul was paramount. The healthy soul was the rational soul, which, in denouncing the ‘worldly’ in the act of contemplation, listened to the divine creator through the dual instruments of Faith and Grace. When pathology enters the soul, via the conduit of the material world, man is removed from the salubrious relation with God. With the consequent privation of the good, evil (sickness) ensues. Of course, this very scenario is enacted in the first partition of the Anatomy, where we are offered a highly rhetorical and emotive re-enactment of the Fall.\textsuperscript{64} In this section, man’s refusal to listen to God, or to listen to the (rational) nature of the good as extended or revealed to man by God, renders man vulnerable to “death and disease… all temporal and eternal punishments”.\textsuperscript{65} Burton reminds his readers of both the precarious nature of the human condition and of the therapeutic unity which man may enjoy if he (his soul) is properly aligned with God. Yet, remaining at this stage within the constructs of the Augustinian tradition, one might assume that this unity can only be complete if it is achieved through the vehicle of Christ. This introduces a new element into the [original] Platonic/Neo-Platonic equation, but it is one which we nonetheless naturally anticipate, given that Burton is by vocation, a Christian cleric: “We are all brethren in Christ… members of

\textsuperscript{63} Feibleman, Religious Platonism, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{64} AOM, 1:130-4.
\textsuperscript{65} AOM, 1: 131.
one body…” Burton states,66 (and indeed, it could be implied here that the ‘body’ that is sick and suffering, is the collective spiritual body in Christ). As the equation is refreshed, we see it now accommodates the Logos in Christian form – that is, it now accommodates Christ. The unity that Burton refers to by implication, is now, as Beeley states “the unity of God and humanity in Christ”. This unity “is the very ground of both faith and hope”, but also of love.67 Burton invokes this alliance when he describes the ‘corruption’ of man’s relationship with the *summum bonum*, the ‘chiefest good’:

And Him our will would have loved and sought alone as our *summum bonum*, or principal good, and all other good things for God’s sake: and nature, as she proceedeth from it, would have sought this fountain; but in this infirmity of human nature this order is disturbed, our love is corrupt, and a man is like that monster in Plato… [etc.]68

Christ, the Logos, is part of the *summum bonum* as accessed through the vehicle of the healthy, listening soul, in the safe-guarding presence of the [Trinitarian] God. Satan, as author of melancholy,69 is both repugned and renounced: “If Satan summon thee to answer, send him to Christ: He is thy liberty, thy protector against cruel death… thy righteousness, thy Saviour, thy Life…”70 For Burton then, access to the salubrious unity is closely connected with the therapeutic triad of acknowledgement of sin, due repentance, and reunification or reintegration with the unity via the protective and salvationary intervention or grace of that greater unity. This observation endorses Burton’s previously stated priority concerning the proper approach to, and indeed, the most expedient order of healing, that is: “A divine… can do little alone, a physician,
much less…”71; also: “pray first to God with all submission and penitency, …confess [their] sins, and then to use physic”.72 Burton’s ‘disorder’ of melancholy, then, finds its defining instantiation in the advent of the Fall; moreover, it is presented as a “constant human quality” (And who is not a fool? Who is free from melancholy?).73 Being born into such prevailing disorder presupposes and, indeed, demands both an inherently motivated and definitively proactive action on the part of the sufferer, as regards ameliorating his/her hereditary ‘disordered’ condition. If we are to better understand Burton’s therapeutic approach to health (order) versus disease (disorder), it is useful to examine more closely Burton’s ideas on the nature of the soul.

Burton’s notion of soul (theologically speaking, at least), is essentially based on the Augustinian-infused notion of the Platonically inspired construct of the soul; this is a soul which survives the material body and thus it is eternal. Man (body and soul) is “the principal and mighty work of God… the “marvel of marvels”.74 Man is “the sovereign lord of the earth, viceroy of the world, sole commander and governor of all the creatures in it”,75 he is created “to God’s own image, to that immortal and incorporeal substance, with all the faculties and powers belonging unto it.”76 Thus, Burton contrives to show us that man, in enjoining with the nature of God, and indeed in being modelled after this nature, reflects the image of God. Yet at the same time, man’s soul is a soul that is disrupted with regard to its relation to the unity. The damage or disruption suffered is

71 AOM, 1:37.
72 AOM, 2:10.
73 Lepenies, Melancholy and Society, p. 15. As Lepenies points out, historically speaking, notions of disorder emanate from classical antiquity’s ‘knowledge of order in nature’, relocated to the Christian tradition, this disorder is appropriated by man at the moment of the Fall. Lepenies, p.19.
74 AOM, 1:130.
75 AOM, 1:130.
76 AOM, 1:130.
due to the fact of man’s being born into sin. (“O pitiful change! Is fallen from that he was…”). We observe therefore, that even in these initial few paragraphs of Burton’s first partition, we have a soul that, being compromised through sin, experiences a longing, if not an overwhelming need to return to the One, the God, who created it. The soul that is apart from the nurturing and salubrious unity, wishes, or indeed is adamantly compelled to return to that unity; such a “return”, in Christian terms, is typically referenced as the soul’s ‘ascent’ to God. The soul, in a state of privation, is sick:

The impulsive cause of these miseries in man… this destruction of God’s image, the cause of death and diseases, of all temporal and eternal punishments, was the sin of our first parent Adam, in eating of the forbidden fruit, by the devil’s instigation and allurement.78

If sin initiates the separation of the soul from the unity, perhaps the key to understanding the soul’s ascent or return to that unity, lies the understanding that for Burton, as for Augustine, the soul is created in the image and likeness of God (refer italics in the quotation above). For Augustine, “the image of God is man, or to be precise, [it is] man’s rational soul”. As Louth states, since God is in the Trinity, the image of God in man’s soul, is trinitarian – that is why, in Genesis, God says “let us make man after our image, in our likeness”. Man is therefore not an equal and perfect reflection of God – he is rather an imperfect image of the unity, privy to the pathology of sin. Yet, as Louth points out (alluding to Augustine), the “image” seeks to return to the archetype from which it hails. As Burton similarly intimates, the imperfect soul, suffering disruption from the unity, seeks full reunion with the God-Creator, effectively making the Neoplatonic ascent to a unity that overcomes material or worldly isolation and instead, finds its rest (wholeness; wellness), in God. The question is: how does it

77 AOM, 1:130.
78 AOM, 1:131 Note here also, that the devil is once again associated with the promotion of the disruption from unity and the onset of disease (see also footnote 68 of this chapter).
achieve this reunion, this reincorporation of the ‘aberrant part’ with the palliative whole? The soul that seeks to become well again, must, in the true Platonic sense, contemplate itself (“know thyself”) and in doing so, thereby understand how reunion might be achieved. The act of contemplation, as Louth comments, constitutes the [unitarian] act of return; the path to that return, is the ongoing act of self-correction, the commitment (in Burton’s case, at least) to the therapy of the paideic programme. The soul that is estranged must follow its natural longing to return to the unity, a longing that is enabled firstly through the act of self-contemplation, and subsequently through the further act of the commitment to the institution of the corrective regime. If the afflicted part of the soul (“where sin is, there is the storm”) concerns itself with application to Reason and Truth (the image of God), it will not only escape God’s wrath (“God’s just judgement for our sins… God’s wrath”) it will suffer his loving correction (“He is desirous of our salvation… and for that cause pulls us by the ear many times, to put us in mind of our duties”).

Yet for Burton, what constitutes ‘the duties’ to which he refers? As he elaborates, quoting Pliny: “In sickness the mind reflects upon itself, with judgement surveys itself and abhors its former courses… bodily sickness is for the soul’s health”. If Burton’s sickness results from the Adamic act of human error, and a spiritual longing to return to the state of health from whence it came, if it looks to the remedy of Truth via the vehicle of Reason, for salvation from a God who actively chastises to recall his creatures to acts of self-reflection and correction, then what we have is a soul that can only be satisfied (healed) by Truth (God) itself. The duty of the soul, as Burton infers, is to make reparation, to return to God. We are returned to Augustine’s concept

---

79 AOM, 1:131.
80 AOM, 1:132.
81 AOM, 1:132.
82 AOM, 1:133.
of the longing for the true and thus ultimately for God, as a sort of principle of cohesion in the soul.\textsuperscript{84} This healing cohesion “draws the soul together into unity and draws the soul into the realm of eternal reality”;\textsuperscript{85} the malady that describes melancholy thus, at its essence, describes a spiritual disease of longing that exhibits symptoms in response to the prompting of a God who would demand Truth. (“the Lord correcteth him whom he loveth”).\textsuperscript{86}

Burton instructs:

\begin{quote}
St Austin acknowledgment of himself in his humble confessions: “Promptness of wit, memory, eloquence, they were God’s good gifts, but he did not use them to his glory. It is in offending in some of these six non-natural things … in giving way to every passion and perturbation of the mind: by which means we metamorphose ourselves and degenerate into beasts…

So long as we are ruled by reason, correct our inordinate appetite and conform ourselves to God’s word, are as so many saints: but if we give reins to lust, anger, ambition, pride, follow our own ways, we… transform ourselves, overthrow our constitutions, provoke God to anger and heap upon us this of melancholy, and all kinds of incurable diseases, as a just and deserved punishment of our sins.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Thus God, reflected truly, via the mediating and moderating path of Reason is the true image, the unitive image. As is the case with Augustine, mind (\textit{mens}), knowledge (\textit{notitia}) and love (\textit{amor}) form the coherence that is necessary to health and this particular spiritual trinity safeguards and guides “true self-knowledge”. True self-knowledge (the true image of God in man) enables the soul to return to its archetype.\textsuperscript{88}

To make this return journey, however, to gain its release from the bonds of the external (material) world, the soul must distinguish true wisdom from knowledge – in effect, the

\textsuperscript{85} Louth, \textit{Origins}, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{86} AOM, 1:133.
\textsuperscript{87} AOM, 1:136.
\textsuperscript{88} Louth, \textit{Origins}, p. 148.
soul must become capable of distinguishing (in Burton’s terms, perhaps!), the true philosopher (philosophy) from the mere philosophaster. To paraphrase Louth, since the advent of the Fall, the soul knows only scientia – it must return to its pre-Fall state of knowing sapientia; true wisdom is the path to authentic self-correction and therefore to (healing) salvation. Thus the healing of sickness (melancholy) itself, takes effect by gradual progress in the renewal of the image, that is, in man, as he returns to God.\(^89\) It is important to note once again here, that the unity which Burton refers to, is one which necessarily incorporates Christ. The divine wisdom of God, Jesus’ human existence, the life of the church and the full range of voices in Scripture\(^90\) are all essential and enabling points of focus in Burton’s remedial medical theology – together, they constitute the therapeutic unity which man, through the specific and focussed action of his soul, must approach. The vehicle which allows him to make this approach, is that of the holistic and paedeic Christian programme, as Burton attempts to relate it, through the pages of the Anatomy. Yet this very programme has, at its heart, a dualism that remains firmly based in the earlier Platonic rubric; Burton’s ‘programme’ facilitates the healing (salvation) not simply of the individual, but also (potentially) of the state, and I shall return to this notion presently. First, in the interests of better situating Burton and his Anatomy in the context of the more general medicina-cultura animi tradition,\(^91\) I will offer a brief, historically-oriented encapsulation of the nature of the paideic programme.

\(^{89}\) Louth, Origins, p. 152.
\(^{90}\) Beeley, Unity of Christ, p. 241.
\(^{91}\) As described by Corneanu, Regimens, pp. 4-5.
The Paideic Programme: its relevance to Burton and the Anatomy.

The initial Socratic/classical vision of paideia, was that it was proper to the project of endeavouring to live a philosophical life. Plato advocates that the care of the soul is inherently established in the ongoing self-corrective process of “a filling up with true belief, knowledge, understanding and in sum, with all virtue”, the ultimate outcome of such a travail being that a “kind of health, fine condition and well-being of the soul” is achieved. The Stoics and the Epicureans viewed the care of the soul as claiming as its goal the notion of the tranquillity of mind, gained through achieving a correct philosophical understanding of the nature of the universe. The Stoics sought to “to view all things with a mind at peace”, and recognised man’s nature as being part of (and encompassed by), the more expansive nature of the whole. Cottingham, however, warns of the dangers inherent in confusing what he refers to as such Hellenistic ‘silver-age’ approaches to the philosophy of the care of the soul, with the comparative austerity of the original Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions. Cottingham asserts:

… if we look back at the founders of philosophy, what we seem to find is less in the way of recipes for tranquil living, and much more in the way of logical argumentation, conceptual analysis, the search for accurate definitions and abstract inquiries about language and meaning.

Cottingham adds that the logical and conceptual inquiries of Plato and Aristotle were “very much in the service of metaphysics, a vision of reality and man’s place within it”. The original Socratic thesis of the paideic programme, therefore, is rigorous and analytical and concerns itself with the problems of semantics, transmission, definition

92 Corneanu, Regimens, pp. 48-9.
94 Cottingham in Chase et al, Essays, p. 152.
95 Cottingham in Chase et al, Essays, p. 152
and language. Moreover, it situates itself in the realm of an ontological discourse where man exists in relation to a specific (postulated) version of reality. Yet that same philosophical life, as expressed by the educational.corrective programme of the care of the soul goes beyond mere discourse and engages in a world beyond that of words (as we observe with the life of Socrates). As Shusterman comments, it is a tradition of “embodied physical life”.96

I would like to take this notion further and suggest that the individual who undertakes the paideic regimen (lives the ‘philosophical life’), can only achieve true progress if he/she, in a very holistic sense, acquires those skills of mastery, which pertain to the management or ‘control’ of what is, after all, a highly dynamic and complex human body. Rising to the challenge to ‘know thyself’, he/she must self-educate and self-regulate all of those psycho-physiological (and spiritual) aspects which may be said to potentially affect the body-soul continuum. This notion is of critical importance when we place such a task in relation to achieving the Aristotelian state of flourishing or happiness (eudaimonia) or conversely, the failure to achieve that state of happiness. The level of mastery that the individual attains in achieving a holistic ‘control’ or order (as opposed to ‘disorder’) over his/her life in the human body, is directly related to attaining that level of wisdom which enables the attainment of happiness or eudaimonia. Conversely, the individual’s lack of mastery over those aspects which potentially affect the attainment of such a health or holism, leads to a degradation or compromise (‘disorder’) of that same holistic enterprise. The latter may be said to unravel in much the same way that Burton traces the unravelling of the project of ‘happiness’, a process which he variously depicts as an unqualified and unrelenting burgeoning of ‘melancholy’, definitively related to the health of the body-soul continuum. Burton places man’s ownership of the faculties which allow him to

seek and obtain happiness firmly within the domain of man’s relationship with God. Postlapsarian man, being apart from the salubrious state of unity with God, is greatly compromised in terms of his ability to achieve happiness: “…we use reason, art, judgement, all that should help us, as so many instruments to undo us…”97 More than this, man’s skill and judgement in using the ‘remnant’ God-given faculties which he retains, are subject to degradation: “…those excellent means God hath bestowed on us, well employed, cannot but much avail us; but if otherwise perverted, they ruin and confound us…”98 Such degradation of the faculty of reason is due to the influence of the passions as they respond to stimulation from the external or material world; the result is that man’s life (in the world) is increasingly subject to the consequences of folly. Men “swell in life as if they were immortal and demi-gods, for want of understanding”.99 Burton famously advises on what he views as being the lamentable status quo of his age: “Never so much cause of laughter as now, never so many fools and madmen.” 100

If, as Seneca advises, philosophy “takes as her aim the state of happiness”, then her business is surely (equally) that of the palliative care, if not the actual remedy (or prescription for cure) of the state of unhappiness, a state which may be encapsulated, perhaps, in the rather general term of ‘melancholy’. If this is so, then the investigation of the problem of melancholy becomes inextricably linked to the project of achieving happiness, an observation which coincides with the sentiment expressed in the preceding paragraph. Either way, we observe that the health of the individual is bound up with the project of attaining success in the paideic programme; the success of the spiritual quest is aligned with the status of the physical. In an Early Modern sense, medically speaking, this relates to the disease of melancholy being (specifically) a

97 AOM, 1:136.
98 AOM, 1:136.
99 AOM, 1:50.
100 AOM, 1:52.
“passionate disease”. With the passions under the aegis of the will (Reason), the individual is tasked with undertaking a curative philosophical regime (the paideic programme). Yet such a programme is necessarily overlaid with, or informed by, the particular social, cultural and political nuances and exigencies of the period. Because of this, the individual inherently harbours an era-contextual ‘pathology’; the latter has implications in the context of both the public and the private experience of the disease. With regard to Burton and the era in which he was writing, we thus observe that one of the more overt epidemiological concerns of the period was that of the disease of melancholy; aetiologically speaking, it appears to issue from all points of the religio-cultural and socio-political compass. Moreover, ‘melancholy’ has the distinction of being a disease which not only contains within its immediate domain many subsets of associated illnesses and symptoms, it also tends to attract under the aegis of its nomenclature many other, perhaps non-related or peripheral illnesses, which, as we observe in reading through Burton’s Anatomy, is an issue which is hugely problematic.

102 Associated with this potential for the disease of ‘melancholy’ to extend beyond the domains of the purely physiological, commentators such as Shklar and Lepenies propose that the extended ‘social disease’ of melancholy has the potential to produce a “quiescent and resigned consciousness” where the individual (being socio-politically disenfranchised and dispossessed) generates certain ‘utopias of order’ to escape the chronic inactivity which immobilises him/her. In constructing such a ‘utopia of order’, the individual effectively constructs the antidote for the disorder he/she experiences or perceives. In creating his/her utopian ‘political fiction’, the melancholic is (at least nominally), socially reinvested and re-empowered. Lepenies’ study of Burton’s “veritable utopia” (which is cited as occurring in the “suppressed and forgotten” ‘Democritus to the Reader’ section) offers an invaluable illumination of the reading of Burton’s disease (disorder) of melancholy as incorporating the pathophysiology of the ‘body politick’ (“The State was like a sick body which had lately taken physick…. etc.”). The relevance of order to the healthy and rational life is thus commuted from individual to state, through the expression of a prescriptive programme (the utopia). It could be further suggested that the prescriptive programme of the utopian vision is based on the individual commentator’s interpretation of certain paideic principles of evolution, wherein a specific, remedial consonance of order may be both applied to and prescriptively employed, for the betterment of the ‘body’ in question. Lepenies, Melancholy and Society, pp. viii-ix, 13.

The notion of retaining an evaluation which is contextually authentic to the period is one which is critical. Cottingham notes that the *askesis* which Plato calls the individual to participate in when he undertakes the paideic regimen, amounts to that which selects as its goal a complete moral as well as intellectual transformation. The latter distinction has important repercussions for scholars examining the notion of paideia as it was inherited during the Early Modern period. As Cottingham urges:

The very notion of separating out these two kinds of progress into quite distinct elements involves retrojecting our modern separatist categories into what was, for Plato, a unified conception of the calling of a philosopher… Plato observes that the aim is the welfare of the whole city, *(holê hê polis)*, not that of any one group.  

Thus, the project of enhancing the soul of the man, is equally the project of enhancing the soul of the state; the health of the individual impacts on the health of the city-state, and vice versa – no groups or classes of individuals are subject to exemption from this call. The Delphic imperative to live appropriately, as transmitted through the Platonic project of living in a self-controlled or temperate fashion has implications for the whole of society. The reward offered is the “true happiness of a good and rational life” *(hou dei ton eudaimona ploutein, zoês agathês kai emphronos)*. As Burton advises: “… to be wise and happy are reciprocal terms…the honourable man is both good and wise”. The correct implementation of the rational will offers the key to individual ‘salvation’ in the form of happiness or ‘flourishing’ - the ‘God’ whose inner voice demands obedience. Again, Burton reinforces this notion of the proper exercise of the rational will being allied with the respective health of the relation to God: “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if any did understand… but all are

---

107 AOM, 1:76.
Plato’s ‘temperate life’, accessed through authentic self-knowledge and an appropriately associated degree of wisdom, is also reiterated by Burton: “If men would attempt no more than what they can bear, they should lead contented lives, and learning to know themselves, would limit their ambition…” Burton’s paideic programme coincides with that of Plato on more than one level here, as we see the path to personal “salvation” equated with achieving happiness or flourishing through accessing authentic self-knowledge and acting responsibly thereupon.

Pierre Hadot speaks of the general tenor of ancient philosophy, as it emanates from Socrates and Plato down through the Hellenistic philosophers and the Neoplatonic writers of the third century AD:

All the schools agree that man, before his philosophical conversion, is in a state of unhappy disquiet. Consumed by worries, torn by passions, he does not live a genuine life, nor is he truly himself. All schools also agree that man can be delivered from this state. He can accede to genuine life, improve himself, transform himself and attain a state of perfection. It is precisely for this that spiritual exercises are intended. Their goal is a kind of self-formation, or paideia…

In terms of providing a viable and utilitarian paideic platform, the Socratic tradition, as noted above, appears to offer a very useful framework into which the later Christian paedeic tradition might incorporate itself; indeed, the one is built upon the precepts of the other. How easily we might substitute ‘philosophical conversion’ with ‘spiritual conversion’; similarly, ‘deliverance’ might be read as ‘salvation’; the ‘genuine life’ as ‘the holy life’. If we relate this simple formula across to Burton’s project of the Anatomy, we might consider the following analogy: Before man’s “spiritual conversion”, he exists in a state of disquiet (“O pitiful change! Is fallen from that he was… become miseribilis homuncio, a castaway, a caitiff… an unregenerate man…

109 AOM, 1:45.
110 AOM, 1:50.
111 Cottingham in Chase et al, Essays, p. 154.
miserable and accursed”). He does not live a genuine life (“a new company of counterfeit vizards, whiffers, Cuman asses, maskers, mummers, painted puppets… fantastic shadows”). Yet man can be delivered from this sorry [postlapsarian] state: “Call upon God… let God be of thy counsel, consult with Him that healeth those that are broken in heart… and bindeth up thy sores”. He can transform himself and attain a state of perfection – but only with God’s grace. (“He alone must help”, “pray first to God with all submission and penitency, to confess their sins, and then to use physic”.

In a way, Burton’s paideic programme is designed to induce a sort of natural confession and penitence on behalf of his patient/petitioner. Burton’s call to self-knowledge involves the seeker undertaking a path which implies a connection with God, through the heart of the self – the soul. In the participatory act of reading, in concerning or associating himself with the ‘corrupted’ inheritance of Adamic man, the seeker potentially enters into Burton’s scenario of not only assigned culpability, but also of anticipated and prognosticated healing. It is noteworthy that the overture to this journey or pilgrimage to health is offered in the specifically Christian sense of the journeyer being in a prior and seemingly endemic state of ill health or damage due to the fact of original sin. Indeed, the latter condition provides the definitive point for Burton’s commencement of his narrative of aetiology and healing – we see this fact neatly encapsulated in the title and subtitles of ‘The First Partition’ of the Anatomy (“Man’s Excellency, Fall, Miseries, Infirmities; the causes of them.”) The idea of an underlying narrative or history of liability affiliated with man’s ongoing failure to construct a viable discourse of self-knowledge and subsequent self-correction is an

112 AOM, 1:130.  
113 AOM, 1:52.  
114 AOM, 2:10.  
115 AOM, 1:180.  
116 AOM, 2:10.  
117 AOM, 1:130.
interesting one. Burton’s construction of the *Anatomy* may be said to read like a Greek tragedy at times, where the original and instigating debt or misdeed (original sin) sets up a long and degenerating path to an ultimate defeat, unless, of course, one attracts the sympathy of the Gods (God) and is ‘saved’. The narrative of the original misdeed, overlaid with further, compounding miseries, alternating with attempts at allaying them (through physick/medicine or endeavouring to live the proper life) provides a fertile framework on which to build a tale of “submission, penitence and confession”\(^{118}\) as a prelude to an act of arbitrary salvation. “Call on God”,\(^{119}\) advises Burton, before offering his final admonition (courtesy of Augustine): “Be penitent while sound of mind; by so doing I assert that you are safe, because you have devoted that time to penitence in which you might have been guilty of sin”.\(^{120}\) The ‘narrative’ upon which the medical text is overlaid or constructed thus returns full circle, revisiting the initial problem or source of conflict as established by Burton, embodied in the fact of sin. Despite the considerable tests, hopes, trials and even achievements the sufferer endures in this lengthy journey of healing, ultimately, the pilgrim appears to remain in the grip of the very condition which plagued him in the first place – and he is there, because, for the most part, Early Modern man believed sin to be his wholly lamentable birth right. “*Sperate miseri, cavete felices*” declares Burton in the grandest tradition of the tragic, and certainly it is a provocative note upon which to let fall the final curtain.

Religious themes and terminology persist in the pages of Burton’s *Anatomy*; even Burton’s considerable body of unalloyed ‘medical’ intervention (such as it may be said to exist in the Early Modern era) is substantially interlaced with religious instruction. “We must submit unto the mighty hand of God, acknowledge our offences, call to Him for mercy”\(^{121}\) Burton advises. In taking the course of Burton’s cure, the

---

\(^{118}\) See Burton’s words above.  
\(^{119}\) AOM, 3:431.  
\(^{120}\) AOM, 3:432.  
\(^{121}\) AOM, 1:179.
pilgrim on the journey to health is always and already involving himself in the Christian ethic. “If He strike us” says Burton, “the same hand will inflict the wound and provide the remedy… He alone must help; otherwise our diseases are incurable, and not to be relieved.”

Notably, the spiritual exercises that Burton offers the seeker/sufferer are intrinsically connected, if not wholly dependent upon the individual’s relationship with God. More than this, the actual possibility of cure is also dependent on this relationship. Although physic will help, prayer and physic must be used both together; the implication of the order to pray, confess and then use physic is vital here. Burton is actually advising that the programme of therapy that he is prescribing cannot exist apart from an ongoing and specifically Christian programme of self-examination, repentance and correction; the ‘cure’ to either the individual’s or (by extension) the world’s problems cannot be obtained solely within the domain of a secular realm. Burton’s therapy is a God-based therapy wherein the strictly medical component is endorsed, but it is nonetheless seen as being secondary or accessory to the principal faith-related element which appears requisite if one wishes to enter into the desired cure. Moreover, it is inferred that this cure is desired not only by the individual, but by God himself, who wishes to see the individual reunited with Himself in the holistic and palliative unity. The success of Burton’s therapy therefore, depends on the success that the individual achieves in locating his position in relation to God and, as a consequence of this determination, in acting responsibly according to that status. The fact that Burton opens his first petition with a religious/spiritual scenario and ends his work with another such scenario, is crucial. The section on ‘Religious Melancholy’ brings the reader back full circle, revisiting the (original) issue of the separation from God and its attendant

122 AOM, 1:180.
123 AOM, 2:9.
124 AOM, 2:10.
problems and offering advice on how to overcome the obstacles necessary to achieve the desired reunification with God. “Prayer and physic” represent the physician and the divine\textsuperscript{125}, the spiritual and corporeal cure – but they also represent the intricating of the secular with the spiritual; the allocation of priority in the invocation “pray, submit, confess and then use physic”\textsuperscript{126} is critical, however. Burton’s paideic programme is built on the Socratic invocation to make the moral and intellectual transformation, yet it takes that rubric a step further, incorporating, quite specifically, the Christian spiritual dimension. Yet rather than simply taking the latter and adding it to the Socratic rubric, Burton uses the Christian spiritual dimension as the basic building block upon which the success of the paideic programme is not only assessed, but derived. The practice of medicine, such as it was in the Early Modern era, is thus intricately woven into the fabric of Burton’s cure, in such a way that it is seen to both support and enhance the prior and established problem of the long-standing, if not species-specific and indeed hereditary spiritual pathology and cure. In some ways, the whole of Burton’s undertaking in the \textit{Anatomy}, may be seen as a lengthy entreaty to the divine, placed on behalf of the petitioners for whom he speaks, or indeed, on behalf of the souls whom he represents, in his capacity as clergyman-healer.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125} AOM, 1:37.
\textsuperscript{126} AOM, 2:10.
Chapter 5

Rhetoric and Medicine; Rhetoric as Medicine in Burton’s Anatomy.

In this chapter, I continue with my assessment of an element which I regard as being crucial to the ‘ideational project’ observed in Burton’s construction of the Anatomy; that is, I consider the written text as exemplifying, both in and of itself, a utilitarian and functional vehicle for ‘cure’. To this end, I consider the efficacy of Burton’s text as both embodying and facilitating reader access to a complex, self-reflexive, remedial paideic programme – a system of constructive self-cultivation for both the body and the soul. I investigate how Burton employs rhetoric in the service of Early Modern ‘medical’ practice; I also examine how his particular version of discursive rhetorical investigation might be said to be instrumental (in the Early Modern sense) in effecting specific therapeutic outcomes. Corneanu’s evaluation of Boyle, whose Christian philosopher (‘physician of the soul’) accesses a domain which is premised upon right reason as a horizon of the perfected mind and experience as paideic practice and Nancy Struever’s notion of the “rhetorical-medical mind set” and the associated “intrication of therapy and cure” direct the tone of my investigation in this regard.

1 Corneanu, Regimens, pp. 117-40.
In his Foreword to Lain Entralgo’s *Therapy of the Word*, Walter J. Ong makes the comment that “the ancients were strongly verbomotor”. Indeed, from ancient times, the “potential in logotherapy and the need to define its range – the possible effectiveness of the use of speech in restoring a person to health” has been acknowledged in various ways. Concerning Greek culture, which was dominantly rhetorical, Ong comments that:

Early attempts at logotherapy included… the “apt words” which Plato recommends that physicians apply to their patients, either to convince them (by dialectic) or to persuade them (by rhetoric), as may be necessary to produce in them the *sophrosyne* or tempered accord of everything in their being without which true health is not realised and physical medication ineffective.

As we have observed, the evolution of logotherapy becomes even more finely attuned to the palliative nature of the word (*Logos*), when we see it embodied in a later period, in the person of Christ. There is a complex and subtly balanced distinction between the word as therapy and the Word (Christ) as Therapy. It is this distinction which I now wish to discuss, in relation to how it is that Burton uses specific structures, rhetorical and otherwise, to facilitate healing in his own specifically centred paideic regimen.

The crossover from disease presenting categorically as “unforeseeable psychic accident” to, conversely, its signifying a morally aligned calamity or punishment, occurs, as Ong points out, in the Hellenic age, where the “physical character of moral impurity” takes form. The translation of this notion of contingent physical heredity to the revealed religions becomes apparent when we observe the nature of original sin and its subsequent effect on man. Nonetheless, by the time the revealed religions, notably Christianity, absorb this inherited moral/physical ‘wages of sin’ tradition, a way through

---


5 Laín Entralgo, *Therapy of the Word*, p. x.

6 Laín Entralgo, *Therapy of the Word*, p. 35.

7 Laín Entralgo, *Therapy of the Word*, p. 35.
such a predicament is simultaneously offered – that way, is through the word of Christ, allied with the doctrine of Grace, as it may be extended from the Christian creator-God; undoubtedly, this inheritance owes much to Augustine. What an Early Modern commentator might have at his fingertips then, in terms of tools for a regimen for the healing of ills, is the doubly enhanced utility of the word as palliative and indeed, illocutionary therapy, mediated by the embodied presence of the Word (Christ); I would suggest that this is the formulation which Burton applies to in the construction of his *Anatomy*. Burton the rhetor, is the orator-healer *par excellence*, “perceiving probabilities and adjusting his argument to his audience, offering a viable model (or models) of ethical action and interaction”.⁸ As Burton himself says (citing Galen), “many have been cured by good counsel and persuasion alone… a gentle speech is the true cure of a wounded soul”.⁹

Examining Burton’s methodological approach in the *Anatomy*, one might say, firstly, that he commences by affirming Plato’s cogent comparison between persuasive speech and medicaments. As Gorgias says to Socrates:

> If you knew everything, Socrates, you would see that it [rhetoric] embodies in itself and holds sway in all powers. I am going to give you a good proof of it. It has often occurred to me to accompany my brother or other physicians to the house of some patient who was refusing a medicine or who would not allow himself to be treated by iron and fire; when the physicians admonitions were powerless I would persuade the patient with no other art than rhetoric. Let a rhetor and a physician go together to whatever city you will: if a discussion is begun in the assembly of the people or in any gathering to decide which of the two will be elected as physician, I declare that the physician will disappear and the orator will be preferred, if it so please him.¹⁰

---

⁹ AOM, 2:112.
In relation to the latter, Laín Entralgo asks: “How can the professional rhetor be a better physician… than the practitioner of medicine?” Of course the answer lies in the power of the *technē* of verbal persuasion – “all the more if to the medicament of his word, the rhetor knows how to add medicines that act upon the body”. The word, of course, is the vital tool of communication for both the divine and the physician. Both employ language in the service of ethical action and interaction, at the level of the preservation of the patient’s health – especially in the Early Modern sense, when the physical was so imbued with the spiritual. As Burton says: “A divine in this compound mixed malady can do little alone, a physician in some kinds of melancholy much less, both make an absolute cure”. Words then, especially in the cultural climate of the Early Modern era, were the primary tool of employ for both the divine and the physician; Pender *et al* record various examples of this in a very useful text which treats rhetoric and medicine in Early Modern Europe.

One must take into account Burton’s use of a textual *persona* (Democritus Junior) when considering his delivery of rhetoric. The use of this *persona*, as Lüthy points out, is an interesting one, as in terms of the historical appraisal of the Democritus *persona* across the centuries, we discern, in fact, four distinct, differing faces. Nonetheless, it would seem that Burton chose to align himself with the “moralizing anatomist” face of the ‘Christianized’ Democritus; no doubt this alliance gave him a supremely suitable vehicle for his cause. If the “anatomical research and writing of his predecessor represented just a first step toward a personal recovery”, then presenting

---

12 AOM, 1:37.
himself as a ‘dwarf standing on such a giant’s shoulders’ how much more he might achieve! Democritus the ‘moralizing anatomist’, as opposed to the ‘giddy’ or ‘materialist’ philosopher-Democritus was Burton’s specific point of departure for a journey which conjoined the paideic with the Christian, moral routes in attempting to discern the proper wisdom and care of the soul. Lüthy advises, that for Renaissance readers, the ‘laughing anatomist’, rather than the ‘laughing philosopher’ was, quite definitively, the safer, more acceptable option for referral. Moreover, the redefinition of Democritus’ behaviour in terms of humoral pathology was a subtle but enhancing one for Burton, who could capitalize on this evolution when designing the construction of his medicalizing thesis.

At this point, I would like to briefly consider the Democritus Junior persona as a method for Burton’s enhancing of the possibilities of self and societal examination, as well as lending ethos and authoritative validation to the process of his ongoing enquiry. If one examines something through the (apparent) auspices of another, this action tends to allow the inquirer to extend the limits of enquiry; it also affords a certain amount of protection to the actual authorial self. In speaking through the persona of another, a distance may be established, which allows greater freedom of licence; it also allows the inquirer to ‘borrow’ from a known and established background of experience, thus establishing one’s authority more quickly. As Shusterman states, “Since Plato’s use of the figure of Socrates, philosophy has made great use of such textual personae”. In utilising the Democritus Junior persona, there is no doubt that Burton is appealing to the authoritative heritage of one of history’s great early philosophical inquirers; Burton is able to buy into a proven and established tradition not only for the benefit of his own status, but also on behalf of the interests of his own searching ‘inquirers’. Moreover, the

---

17 Adapted from AOM, 1:25.
18 Lüthy, “The Fourfold Democritus...”, p. 462.”
20 Shusterman in Chase et al, Essays, p. 52.
Democritus Junior persona also allows Burton to bring himself into the public gaze under certain (initially) controlled conditions, “transforming himself productively through the public exposure that literary composition brings and that rescues the subject from the privacy of his/her thoughts and feelings”.21 This statement has dual implications, as regards Burton. First, both in the original version of the Anatomy and throughout the subsequent editions, Burton quite undeniably wavers from the sentiment expressed in the latter part of the statement; Burton chooses to insert his own thoughts and feelings at will, as he deems necessary to the successful delivery of his therapeutic agenda. Burton often works to achieve empathy with his readers through the targeted ‘confession’ of private thoughts and feelings (“Saturn was lord of my geniture…”);22 “Experto crede Roberto: something I can speak out of experience…”23). This strategy serves to establish a common ground of experience between Burton and his reader; it also prompts the motivated reader to commence a program of curative therapy – the very program which Burton is advocating. On the other hand, however, the Democritus Junior persona allows Burton to speak more freely and less personally. It is the device which allows Burton to obfuscate his private thoughts (where he makes the strategic choice to do so), thus enabling greater ‘liberty’ in terms of the rhetorical treatment of his chosen subject matter (for example, in an interesting nod to ‘Machiavel’, Burton notes: “virtue and prosperity beget rest; rest idleness; idleness riot; riot destruction; from which we come again to good laws…”).24 The orator plays to the audience, and Burton, his mask in place, offers his audience a true play both on and of words. Yet, it is almost inevitable that shades of the authorial ‘self’ will tend to emerge, especially in a work as discursive and lengthy as the Anatomy. At times, Burton finds it expedient to promote his ‘authentic’ voice (“I say this is the fault of all of us… we have actually introduced

21 Shusterman in Chase et al, Essays, p. 52.
22 AOM, 1:18.
23 AOM, 1:22.
24 AOM, 2:155.
these evils ourselves”; “Philosophasters innocent of the arts become Masters of Arts and those are made wise by order who are endowed with no wisdom…). Notwithstanding such incidences as the latter, however, when even the practised orator is seemingly swayed by emotions which are at times, barely in check, there is always the useful mask of the persona which may be reverted to. In the Anatomy, the Democritus Junior persona provides, amongst other things, the leitmotif of movement which carries Burton’s rhetoric forward.

The idea that rhetoric, particularly for Burton, carries a probative function is one which requires further investigation. Burton’s discoursing on probability and proof is itself an exercise in the ‘science’ of calibrated inquiry, exemplifying an aspect, perhaps, of Kristeller’s “intellectual ferment” in an age which saw the eventual revision and redaction of rhetoric stripped down to the Early English experimental philosophers’ much-promoted ‘doctrine of truth’. I would suggest that we might even speak of a ‘pre-science’ function with regard to aspects of humanist Early Modern rhetoric in general, in this genre. Rhetoric, in its own way, places differing quantities in the measure of the scales. Burton’s ‘speculative thinking’, his discursive and rhetorical process of sifting through extant possibilities represents a recognisable investigative effort. One might ask the question: can one fairly assess Burton’s particular style of speculation as representing ‘theoretical knowledge divorced from the process of experimental investigation’? Strictly speaking, in the sense of ‘experimental investigation’ as promoted by Bacon et al, one might answer such a question in the affirmative. Undoubtedly, Burton’s range is wider, his experimental material less controlled, his group of ‘subjects’ less contained – but through his process of investigative rhetoric, he nonetheless performs a manner of logistical inquiry which

25 AOM, 1:327.
26 “He [Burton] was the first [utopian] to use a scientific, comparative method as the basis for his sociological theories: in this connection he pre-empted modern sociological methodology”. Lepenies, quoting J. Max Patrick in Lepenies, Melancholy and Society, p. 16.
27 See footnote 11 of Chapter 4.
seeks to compare, contrast and evaluate in the specific interest of determining a useful
(and even quantifiable)* result. Arguably, this sort of speculative examination of a
given subject might be included in what Kristeller refers to as the “intellectual
fermentation” which was to prove so necessary in prefiguring (and indeed provoking)
the later reactive reformulative process of the experimental philosophers. The “hurried
leap of understanding to universals and principals”* is something that in fact promoted
the later vision of a more pure and controlled route to knowledge about the natural
world. In Burton’s hands, the physician-practitioner’s rhetorically-based inquiries serve
to illuminate and educate through a more unwieldy process of deduction and vicarious
experiential enquiry. One could say that Burton’s observation of nature is arrived at
through an almost ‘dialectical’ process, where the thoughts and experiences of others
are consistently offered and waded through, in the procedural effort to arrive at the point
of Truth.

In the Anatomy, in terms of structural techniques which support the rhetorico-
medical rubric, as Höltgen emphasises, Burton’s adoption of the Ramist method
signifies his intention of producing a “scientific medical treatise”.30 Ramist tables
enabled the “complete contents of one particular field of knowledge” to be presented
in a comprehensive and utilitarian way; they enabled the user to have at his fingertips “a
database...”; an “instrument for knowledge storage and retrieval”. This scientifically
responsible method for managing and retrieving data was part of Burton’s commitment
to the cause of science – to producing a work which engaged with contemporary
conversations concerning knowledge and information and then assess and organise such
data accordingly. Moreover, in the interests of a fuller consideration of certain topics,

---

28 That is: is the patient’s condition improved through the use of this [specified] remedy? For example:
“Eugubinus often brags that he hath done more cures in this kind by rectification of diet than all other
physic besides”. AOM, 2:22. Also: “…carduus benedictus, which I find much used by Montanus in his
consultations”. AOM, 2:217.
29 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 36.
30 Höltgen, p. 28.
31 Höltgen, p. 27.
the Ramist system allowed for a “rhetorically effective ‘prudential method’
characterized by diverse repetitions, declarations… enlargings or amplifications…
outgoing from the matter, called digressions”. 32 The latter function allowed the
classically based humanist commentator, for example, to enter into the more strictly
scientific basis of the study in hand, and amplify it, rhetorically, according to his needs.
We observe Burton taking advantage of this option on numerous occasions, but perhaps
most memorably, in his ‘Digression of Air’. 33

Importantly in the Anatomy, Burton’s methodological process takes the
therapeutic word – the point at which philosophy and medicine intersect 34 - and
transforms it to facilitate what is a primarily practical operation. Burton’s rhetoric
participates in Corneanu’s “reorienting and reconfiguring the operations of the human
psuche”. 35 Through rhetoric, Burton uses the instruments of philosophy, ‘science’ and
religion to “conceive alliances between reason and grace, or reason and the emotions” 36
constructing a curative programme to heal the human soul whilst simultaneously
alleviating disease [the passionate disease of melancholy] in the body. Sugg offers a
cogent endorsement of the validity of Burton’s essential medico-scientific goal in the
construction of his treatise when he states:

Books such as Sawday’s The Body Emblazoned and Andrea Carlino’s Books of the Body have
helped to shift the intra-literary bias of older scholarship back toward concrete social events and
phenomena. But neither of those points quite explains why Bamborough or Frye choose to
ignore a clue served up to them by Democritus Junior himself: ‘If the title or inscription offend
your gravitie, were it a sufficient justification to accuse others, I could produce many sober
treatises, even sermons themselves, which in their fronts carry more phantasticall names’. It is,
he adds, ‘a kind of policy in these dayes to prefix a phantastical title to a booke which is to be sold’ because ‘many readers will tarry and stand gaping’ at such arresting tags.\textsuperscript{37}

Sugg adds that “this admission hardly seems to correspond with the [previously attributed] ‘intellectualised [as opposed to practically-oriented] approach’ of Burton’s chosen form. Burton’s Anatomy was not simply an exercise in pursuing an ‘axiomatic synonym for intellectual rigour’, rather, it immerses itself in the social and political context of its era, in a highly practical and utilitarian manner.

Given his efforts as an investigator in the field of the natural sciences, it is valuable, perhaps, to assess Burton’s fulfilment of the quality of ‘objectivity’ in the light of Corneanu’s notion of the “personal virtuous disposition” guaranteeing, to some extent, the essential objectivity of the inquirer. Certainly, in Early Modern terms, Burton goes to great lengths to assure his readers of his embodying such a disposition (“I have lived a silent, sedentary, solitary, private life, \textit{mihi et musis…}”; “for thirty years I have continued a scholar…”; “I was much moved to see that abuse which I could not mend…”).\textsuperscript{38} Yet perhaps it is Burton’s “smattering in all”, his determination “not to be a slave of one science, but to rove abroad”\textsuperscript{39} which recommends his possible claim to Corneanu’s ‘objectivity’, at least in the early pages of the Anatomy. In these commencing pages of the Anatomy, we are assured that we have a scholar of reliable experience and indeed polymathic vision, one who recognises ‘abuse’ when he sees it and, accordingly, seeks to remedy that abuse. Burton’s “thirty years of scholarship” will not be “dishonoured”;\textsuperscript{40} he is a “worthy member”; as regards the issue of his reasoned approach and objectivity, such claims encourage the reader to put their faith in him.

Thus, even in the exercise of disclosing his plans to ‘anatomize’ his chosen subject,

\textsuperscript{37} Sugg in Pender and Struever, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{38} AOM, 1:17; AOM, 1:19.
\textsuperscript{39} AOM, 1:17.
\textsuperscript{40} AOM, 1:17.
there is a promise of achieving some degree of holism, a term which is premised upon the concept of (impartial) inclusion or objectivity, rather than exclusion.

In purely conceptual terms, one might suggest that Burton’s *Anatomy* performs (at least in part) the function of a ‘methodological and cognitive bridge’ between the contemplative or speculative mode of philosophical inquiry and the more rigorous ‘purged’ or cleansed nature of inquiry which later experimental philosophers such as Sprat, Bacon and Boyle both advocated and participated in. How might we affirm such a claim? The concern of experimental natural philosophy included the goal of “purification, rectification and reordering of the human mind”, to be achieved through a ‘medicining’ of the inherent culture of the mind, imposed via a dedicated re-structuring of investigative methods and processes. The initiative for the revisiting of posited outcomes and associated experimental methodology had, as one might suspect, a highly specific locus. In terms of identifying that germinal locus, as Corneanu suggests, it is expedient to examine the Early Modern *cultura-animi* texts and contexts. Indeed, in a contemporary sense, what texts like Burton’s *Anatomy* provided, was an integrated approach to the investigative process, one which privileged analyses of error (albeit, in an often verbose, rhetorical style) along with the virtue of examination, in the interests of resolving not only problems of knowledge, but also other (related) problems of anthropological-therapeutic origin. The overarching framework of engaging specific evaluative structures (in Burton’s case, employing contemporary anatomical and physiological ‘facts’, for example) in an ongoing and reductive investigative process prefigures the more evolved, sophisticated investigative process of the later experimental philosophers. The (often) speculative nature of Burton’s precedent physiological ‘facts’ (for example, “Capivaccius and Mercurialis have copiously

---

discussed this question, and both conclude the subject is the inner brain”, etc.) doesn’t alter the essential nature of his methodological process: Burton takes the available ‘information to hand’, variously subjecting it to his own process of ‘interview’ (rhetorically-based evaluation) and having worked to procure the outcome of such a process, leaves the final detail with the observer (reader). The fact that the final detail often remains without further comment from Burton is itself testimony to a process which endorses an element of investigative integrity. Conversely, on those occasions when Burton does choose to comment, such a stance abruptly returns him, as author, to the position of the “virtuous moral persona”, the exemplary identity who (in this case) inhabits the domain of his own ongoing experiment. The author at this point becomes the locus at which the experiential and the speculative foci meet, a situation which Burton attests to on various occasions (“I have laid myself open in this treatise”; “one must needs scratch where it itches…”).

When examining the actual [textual] structures which support the concept of Burton’s *Anatomy* as providing a conceptual and methodological “bridge” between philosophy as speculative versus experimental enquiry, it is useful to consider Boyle’s ‘advices’ or paradoxes concerning the nature of the experimental philosophical mind. Inasmuch as Boyle’s “free mind” understands that the search for God’s truths cannot ever be truly completed, Burton, as ‘rhetorical experimental philosopher’ seems to tick the boxes for this particular aspect of Boyle’s rubric. Burton concedes that his object of inquiry

42 AOM, 1:171.
43 AOM, 2:102 provides us with just one such example of this.
44 AOM, 1:27.
45 AOM, 1:21.
(the diagnosis and cure of melancholy) far exceeds the capacities of the human mind; he notes this on several occasions (for example, “the matter is diverse and confused”), and we see him endorse this assessment when he advises the sufferer, in the Augustinian fashion, to “fly to God”. Burton also fulfils Boyle’s ‘advices’ in other ways. For example, Boyle talks of the free and rational mind of the true [experimental] philosopher nurturing “a steady preparedness to revise formed opinions in light of new discoveries”. If we peruse the pages of Burton’s Anatomy, we do indeed find examples of such preparedness to revise. For example, on the topic of phantasy or imagination in the subsection entitled “Diseases of the Head”, Burton muses:

Not that I find fault with those which have written of this subject before, as Jason Pratensis, Laurentius, Montaltus, T. Bright, etc., they have done very well in their several kinds and methods; yet that which one omits, another may haply see; that which one contracts, another may enlarge. To conclude with Scribanius, “that which they had neglected, or perfunctorily handled, we may more thoroughly examine…”

In keeping with Boyle’s mind that is ‘free to search into God’s truths’, we also find evidence of Burton treating numerous ‘discoveries’ as tentative; having declared them as such (“it is much controverted between Tycho Brahe and Christopher Rotman”; “which Delrio, Lodovicus Imola … and many of the Fathers affirm”) Burton then chooses to continue his search. Burton also “suspends judgement” when “no sufficiently ponderous proof appears to the mind”. Moreover, he exemplifies Boyle’s “refraining from denying the existence of things whose manner of operation remains inexplicable”. Concerning the numbers of ethereal spirits, for instance, Burton offers this somewhat canny assessment: “Be they more or less… [what is beyond our

---

47 AOM, 1:174.
48 AOM, 3:431.
49 Corneanu, Regimens, p.123.
50 AOM, 1:139.
51 Corneanu, Regimens, p.123.
52 AOM, 2:49.
53 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 123.
comprehension does not concern us]. Howsoever, as Martianus foolishly supposeth …they care not for us, do not attend our actions, or look for us, those ethereal spirits have other worlds to reign in, belike, or business to follow…”.

Burton refrains from “declaring false those things that seem to contradict some received ‘Dictate of reason’”; often such examples are couched in terms such as “if we may believe…”.

Neither does Burton reject as false “those things that we do not know how to reconcile with what we already know to be true”.

Burton tends to retrieve the bulk of the latter from certain ‘grey areas’ of contemporary Early Modern thinking, for example: “Thus far Piso; but this is not always true…” and the more subtly phrased “Hercules de Saxonia differs here from the common current of writers…”.

In short, in terms of prerequisite personal qualities allied with method and process, Burton reveals himself to be an investigator who fairly consistently aligns with the later heirs to the ‘experimental process’.

In relation to these questions concerning the evolution of the Early Modern experimental and investigative process, we might ask: How does Burton conceptualise of the role of knowledge? I would suggest that Burton sees knowledge as the key facilitator linking ‘diseased’ [postlapsarian] man to his reformed (healed) self.

Knowledge, or Truth, is that state which describes man’s proper relation with God; the care of the mind, through the faculties of will and reason, is the way to knowledge or truth. In the same way in which Boyle and Locke saw the duty of the Christian philosopher as that of becoming acquainted with the infirmities of the mind and thereby determining the best remedies for cure (the return to Truth or God), Burton also places

54 For example: “If we may believe Paracelsus, many men are forewarned by familiar spirits in divers shapes, such as cocks, crows, owls… (AOM, 1:195).
55 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 124.
56 AOM, 1:409.
57 AOM, 1:409.
emphasis on this critical route to spiritual and psycho-physical wellness. On this subject, Corneanu advises (regarding Locke):

Locke’s approach to the limits and corruptions of the mind is shaped by a Christian-philosophical conception of man’s task of governing and educating the powers of his mind as a God-assigned duty…human nature is corrupted in a variety of ways, but its depravity is not insurmountable except through divine grace; human concourse is required for salvation, and man’s care of his own soul is assumed as a Christian task and expressed in a program of religious-philosophical regimens. Reason is man’s principal instrument in this task.58

Locke’s approach coincides with that of Robert Burton; the physician of the soul takes the “human embodied mind”59 and cultivates its health or virtue to the point where it stands cured in direct proportion to the integrity of its concourse with the divine grace of God. Knowledge is the catalyst or facilitator in the attaining of this concourse; self-knowledge becomes the prime authority for self-guided therapy to this end. The knowledge that accompanies enlightened experiential and experimental forward progress leads man to salvation, to reclaiming holism, to cure. The bridge to knowledge (and therefore the bridge to cure) is provided by the particular regimen which the physician of the soul sets down and recommends: this is Burton’s purpose in the Anatomy.

Burton’s ‘medicine’ – his programme for self-rectification (‘salvation’) through access to therapeutic knowledge - was largely delivered via the tool of rhetoric. For Burton, the “therapeutic word”, was the vital point of intersection60 between the consanguine disciplines of philosophy and medicine. Burton’s belief in the power of the word as

---

58 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 145.
59 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 48.
60 Pender in Pender and Struever, Rhetoric and Medicine, p. 6.
curative tool is clearly established: “many have been cured by good counsel and persuasion alone… a gentle speech is the true cure of a wounded soul”,\textsuperscript{61} advises Burton. Yet on what basis did Burton imbue the word with such curative potential? Certainly, as Pender suggests, consolation was central to early Greek configurations of philosophy and medicine: \textit{oratio} could “exhort, admonish, praise and heal”.\textsuperscript{62}

The word was a prime source of communication between physician and patient, just as it was between priest and penitent; in the scheme of exacting a cure, prudent rhetorical discourse, or the vehicle of the word, embodied useful practical activity. Pender states that “as an art moored to action and intervention, rhetoric is… a discourse on probability and proof”. For the physician-clergyman therefore, wishing to guide his sufferers through a course of productive action via a specified process of prudent intervention, what better tool for discerning probabilities and evincing proofs, than the word? Words were Burton’s currency. As a scholar, as a commentator, as a divine, they were his tool of trade; moreover, Burton was known amongst his peers for his facility with words.\textsuperscript{63} Pender emphasises: “In the intimate scene of inquiry and remediation, both patients’ and practitioners’ activities are largely rhetorical: praying, detailing symptoms, reading self-help manuals and regimens, chatting with visitors and physicians, receiving counsel, occasioning or assuaging emotion.”\textsuperscript{64} Burton’s eliciting of the word, his channelling of histories of curative devices and practices, his ordering of discursive therapies, together, these processes effectively constitute his system of cure. He patently draws this to our attention:

\textsuperscript{61} Quoted in Pender and Struver, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{62} Pender in Pender and Struver, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{63} Anthony Wood, for example, states that “some of the Antients of Ch. Ch. often say [Burton] was… a thro’-pac’d Philologist…no Man in his time did surpass him for his ready and dextrous interlarding his common discourses among them with Verses from the Poets or Sentences from classical Authors”; ref. Anthony Wood, \textit{Athenae Oxonienses} (1690-91; 1721) 1:626-28.
\textsuperscript{64} Pender in Pender and Struver, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 11.
I have laboriously collected this cento out of divers writers… method is ours only, and shows a scholar…;65 I have put myself upon the stage… our style bewrays us, and as hunters find their game by the trace, so is a man’s genius descried by his works…;66 “in the theory of physic I have taken some pains…”67

Perhaps most notably in this regard, Burton assures his reader: “I will spend my time and knowledge, which are my greatest fortunes, for the common good of all”;68 he is thus drawing attention to the fact that he is channelling his abilities as priest and scholar in the interests of the common cause of (social) medicine, combating a prevalent [“universal; epidemical”]69 pathology. “I neglect phrases and labour, wholly to inform my reader’s understanding”70 Burton adds, demonstrating his commitment to streamlining his efforts in the hope of achieving such an end. Burton thus writes not primarily for the ear, not for the aesthetics of art, but for the practical and utilitarian purpose of conducting a ‘scientifically’ based enquiry, wherein the purpose is to achieve a cure. In using words in this way, Burton is drawing on a tradition of healing which ostensibly commences with the early Greek privileging of the word and moves through the various and intersecting worlds of such practitioners as Xenophon, Boethius, Cicero, and the many exponents of Early Modern humanism, before alighting on his own discursive page. Burton’s clinical encounters with his patients are indeed shaped by his rhetoric, the medium through which he is enabled and empowered as both diagnostician and prognostician; it is also the medium through which he portrays the further furniture of his ‘theatre of therapy’, via the borrowed persona of Democritus. Just as Pender comments concerning the early lectures of William Harvey, Burton “probes the body, explores the relationships between parts and wholes, matter and spirit… as he speaks to

65 AOM, 1:25.
66 AOM, 1:27.
67 AOM, 1:37.
68 AOM, 1:22.
69 AOM, 1:121.
70 AOM, 1:32.
[his] audience”. The point is, that Burton uses rhetoric as a tool for calibrated enquiry and, within earshot of the patient, he reasons about signs and symptoms and goes about the business of accessing or procuring results. His method, such as it is, is on display. Burton evokes the intimate link between natural philosophy (medicine) and rhetoric; both seek to “analyse facts, draw inferences and marshal evidence… both are fundamentally concerned with persuasion”.

For Burton, of course, the word has implications beyond mere discourse. Logos is also, and perhaps pre-eminently, the Christian word, the Christ, to whom he repeatedly returns (on behalf of his sufferers), for both authoritative endorsement and hopeful salve (and salvation). The word is thus augmented to the uniquely synchronous and indeed holistic status of discursive signifier and divine therapy (therapeutic benefactor/facilitator) embodied; the word both defines and encompasses the cure.

The rhetorical-medical mind set, the intrication of therapy and cure, is also one which suits Burton’s project from the point of view of extending its scope beyond the individual, to incorporate the larger cure. As Struever argues: “both medicine and rhetoric were pragmatic and interventionist: one devoted to the body, the other to the body politic and the soul.” Battani comments about Burton: “With his assertion that kingdoms, provinces and Politikal Bodies are subject in like manner to this disease [melancholy], Burton set the stage for a study of melancholy beyond the individual level of analysis.”

Notwithstanding the rhetorico-social implications of Heidegger’s comment (as related by Struever) that ‘rhetoric functions inside politics’, this commuting of an extant problem from one body to another is interesting on several levels. Lepenies

71 Pender in Pender and Struever, Rhetoric and Medicine, p. 14.
72 Pender in Pender and Struever, Rhetoric and Medicine, p. 21.
74 Nancy Struever, “Medicine’s Political Rhetoric: The Case of Bertini’s La medicina difesa”, Pender and Struever, Rhetoric and Medicine, p. 255.
suggests that social changes which de-legitimate social classes lead to “dysfunctional adaptations of retreatism”\textsuperscript{75} (of which the condition of melancholy may be said to represent a functionalist incarnation); from this, we see “impotent, nostalgic resignations to the impossibility of perfection in the present”\textsuperscript{76} embodied in utopian visions. Is Burton’s diseased ‘body’ the result of a displaced notion of personal loss or compromise as provoked by the impotence experienced due to a perceived social ‘chaos’? Is the body indeed, the pathogenic locus of an order which has been disrupted and now incurs (and nurtures) disorder? Does the ‘mending’ of the fractured or diseased body, in fact signify an attempt at retrieving order? More than this, does the operation of anatomy on a diseased or disrupted body constitute an attempt at reinstating order upon that body? If the \textit{microcosmos} \textsuperscript{77}(man) corresponds to the state of the \textit{macrocosmos} – how might a stale and failing (decaying) universe,\textsuperscript{78} as observed through the eyes of a substantially impotent (disenfranchised) viewer appear? The ‘body’ in question needs repair: the act of anatomizing is part of the process of repair – ‘parts’ are retrieved, detailed, identified, labelled and assessed with assiduity: order encounters chaos and is instrumental in subsuming that chaos (at least in the eyes of the utopian practitioner). Yet, specific utopian considerations aside at this juncture, under Lepenies’ rubric, Burton could be said to be responding to the impotence of chaos [melancholy] with an attempt at instituting order [upon the ostensible or commutable ‘body’] through the vehicle of the word as social and palliative instrument. In Burton’s case, words represent vigilance – or at least, they represent the patent signifiers of vigilance; as such, they facilitate the ability to both respond to and participate in (to some degree) meaningful politics. Burton takes this problem of potential exclusion from involvement in meaningful politics (and the inherent risk such exclusion carries in terms of the

\textsuperscript{75} Battani, p.158.
\textsuperscript{76} Battani, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{77} AOM, 1:38.
\textsuperscript{78} Burton’s ‘mutable’ world; “…how it wheels about, nothing being firm and sure”. AOM, 1:50. Also, “the heavens threaten us…”; “the latter end of the world, as Paul foretold…” AOM, 1:134-5.
transmutation of associated impotence and ‘idleness’ to the state of melancholy), and challenges this with his plethora of words, his attempt at the imposition of order.\(^79\) Moreover, the themes Burton addresses in *Philosophaster*, as we have seen, serve to consolidate his commitment to address a society at risk of inviting disease due to that very lack of vigilance, that lack of access to meaningful and constructive politics, particularly where application to Truth is concerned. In the *Anatomy*, Burton’s ecumenical attention to words defines the holism of his proffered exercise of cure. Melancholia is a “passive affliction”\(^80\), words signify vigilance or activity. For Burton then, words are the necessary and active response to the passive and disenfranchised condition which he observes (diagnoses; suffers?) and accordingly endeavours to treat.

In a very specific instance of demonstrating the ‘shape’ of the palliative word, Lepenies offers us his reading of Burton’s “virtually forgotten and suppressed”\(^81\) utopian vision as it occurs in the ‘Democritus to the Reader’ section of the *Anatomy*. Lepenies defines this section as being “the first original utopia written in English”\(^82\), and accordingly recommends its importance as a commentary which responds in a highly remedial, methodological, sociological and indeed scientific sense to the problems of anomie and ambiguity of aetiology\(^83\) as regards the isolation and cure of a ‘disease’ which finds its germinal locus in disorder. Lepenies asserts that in constructing his particular ‘utopian’ antidote for the disease of disorder (melancholy), Burton had to contend with “both the medical-psychopathological theory and the ‘genius’ theory of melancholy”\(^84\) as they emerged from the classical corpus. Lepenies suggests that Burton’s concept of ‘melancholy’ may be sufficiently extracted and refined if we read


\(^84\) Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society*, p. 15.
the “negative duplicate image” of his utopia and “enumerate the contrasts” \textsuperscript{85}

Furthermore, Lepenies instructs that when we closely examine Burton’s utopian treatise, what we discover is a commentator who, in his “careful classification” and pedantic shaping of language demonstrates a paradigm which “pre-empts modern sociological methodology”. \textsuperscript{86} In other words, we have the emergence of a viable methodological process for the ordered, lexical treatment of a politico-sociological problem, as instituted by a pathogenic vector whose transmission occurs at both the microcosmic and macrocosmic level (intra- and inter-corporeal, between individual and state, in this case), and which goes under the name of ‘melancholy’.

If Burton’s method is comprised of words (and indeed, the Word), how does he marshal these words in order to perform his particular process of ‘anatomy’? Burton appears to take advantage of the contemporary obsession with things anatomical, enlisting the potency of the relationship between anatomy, dissection and discourse to effect. Referring to a tract from John Hall in 1649, Sugg makes the deduction that “things unfolded are best understood; the anatomical exploration of the body epitomised reason itself…” \textsuperscript{87} Sugg continues “…both in discourse and in the flesh, anatomy addressed the relationship between parts and wholes, cause and effect, matter and spirit”. \textsuperscript{88} With regard to Burton, these points are critical. Not only is Reason epitomised as Truth in Burton’s ideology, but our clergyman-physick’s process of anatomy becomes, in itself, an act of, or witness to, ‘Truth’ ['God’]. \textsuperscript{89} Moreover, Burton’s ‘anatomy’, as evoked and perpetuated by words, is the point at which the practical aspects of his regime for self-improvement may connect with the spiritual; the ‘fallen’ and discrepant ‘part’ is able to meet with the whole – the diseased postlapsarian soul

\textsuperscript{85} Lepenies, \textit{Melancholy and Society}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{86} Lepenies, \textit{Melancholy and Society}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{87} Richard Sugg “The Anatomical Web: Literary Dissection from Castiglione to Cromwell” in Pender and Struever, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{88} Sugg in Pender and Struever, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{89} See pp. 191-4 of Chapter 4.
can encounter salvation via the guided acknowledgment and revisitation of the domain of the divine. Burton’s surgical tools in this exercise, are his words; through remedial surgical intervention (discursive rhetorical instruction), the ‘severed’ part can be reunited with the whole. As a result, man, and indeed, ‘men’ may encounter the possibility of cure, rather than be subject to nurturing an ongoing pathology. In a Christian sense, through the intervention and therapeutic empowerment of words (the Word), man takes on the ‘new body’ of the reclaimed and healed soul. Stylistically, this process of reclamation and palliative re-creation is mirrored in the structure and semantics of the words Burton offers in his introduction to the Anatomy (where he acknowledges the ‘borrowed and restructured’ nature of his rhetoric) “…the matter is theirs for the most part, and yet mine… yet it becomes something different in its new setting.” There is the option to read Burton’s ‘anatomy’ (at this particular point) as a multifaceted and ambitious vehicle of words which offers, at its heart, a viable and specifically constructed method for regaining access to the healing and reunifying Word. In a spiritual, and indeed medicinal sense, the Anatomy becomes a vehicle for the soul to become, in Christian terms, ‘renewed’ (‘something different in its new setting’). This correlates to Augustine’s potent interpretation of the ultimate purpose of the Christian spiritual journey (the encounter with Truth and the truth of the image of God in man, facilitated by the vehicle of the rational soul): “…so will receive in the end of the world an incorruptible body, in order not to punishment, but to glory…” When we compare Burton’s assessment of the intrinsic source of disease (“to punish therefore this blindness and obstinacy of ours…to chastise and to satisfy God’s wrath”) we see parallels emerge between the exiled, chastised and suffering, materially-oriented body (the ‘corrupted’ body of Augustine) and the incorruptible (reclaimed; healthy; spiritual)
body, the one that not only engages with, but is wholly and therapeutically reinstated in the domain of the divine. Just as the confessions of Augustine describe a journey of the diseased and discrepant part back to the curative whole, so Burton’s *Anatomy* might trace another such journey of a penitent struggle with “heaviness”, with the cure being aligned with the expectation of the endowment of divine grace. Again, as is the case with Augustine, Burton’s “most private physician” is simultaneously, in the most comprehensive and enduring sense, the most efficacious of physicians. The anthropological-therapeutic problem of the epidemic of disease, therefore, may be placed under the purview of the ‘supreme physician’ (God) - all that Burton, as a Christian Early Modern philosopher-physic had to do, was to show his petitioners the way. In both a practical and personal sense, Burton’s text was (is) his body and his ‘body’ was (is) his text, inspirited and illuminated by words.

---

Conclusion

In this investigation of the intricacy of philosophy, rhetoric and medicine in the writing of Robert Burton, I commenced with an in-depth examination of Burton’s dramaturgical writing (notably, *Philosophaster*), and extended this enquiry to his major work, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The themes which Burton inaugurated in the earlier *Philosophaster* (including those of political, social and physiological disorder, the pursuit of false, as opposed to true knowledge, and the overarching theme of philosophy as constitutional ‘saviour’), are all developed to varying extents within the larger architectural structure of the *Anatomy*.

In the first half of this thesis, I considered Burton’s sources – not just his dramaturgical and associated technical sources, but his ideological and philosophical sources; I investigated the notion of Burton’s actively nurturing and promoting a specific critique with regard to the cultural, spiritual and socio-political tenor of the era in which he lived. Burton’s own psychophysiology was, necessarily, era-contextual. He was a particular breed of Early Modern citizen - a university educated scholar, a Christian, a Classicist, a Humanist. More specifically, Burton was a cleric, a writer, a social commentator and a polymath, who, perhaps in keeping with Plato’s representation of his much admired Socrates, “breathed libraries”.95 Yet Burton was also, in the broadest sense, a *vir bonus*, and as such, a self-appointed challenge issuing from his larger social critique, it would seem, might be to describe a society which countered the contemporary disordered society which he observed. The depiction of such a society might well take the form of a prescriptive social vision (Lepenies’ much

---

95 AOM, 1:43.
applauded Burtonian ‘Utopia’);96 more than this, however, I would suggest that Burton took such an opportunity to create a substantial and even personalised programme for the individual pursuit of the living of a virtuous and upright life. For Burton, this ‘virtuous and upright life’ was predicated on the idea of attaining correct access to and utilisation of Knowledge, which he viewed as the path to Truth (God). Man was born into hereditary sin (disorder; unhappiness; melancholy), and the only way to attempt to cure or alleviate this compromise to the spiritually-based holism which man had formerly experienced in relation to the deity, was to enter into a species of paideic programme – a spiritual and psycho-medicinal regime for cure.

Lepenies asserts that Burton’s particular mission with regard to this regime for cure (whether for himself or on behalf of others), was aligned with the desire (if not the actual compulsion) to reform disorder. Burton’s disease of melancholy, contracted and described by a society which was mired in apparent disarray and decay, was nonetheless a disease that could be substantially countered through specific practices of vigilance which could be effected on the part of the individual and which would accordingly help erode disorder. Lepenies suggests that the outcome of such vigilance (in terms of programming) might be observed in the salvationary political fictions of the utopian vision; the static inactivity of the politically disenfranchised and dispossessed could be channelled into the more empowering ‘regimens for cure’ which the utopian vision inevitably described. In Regimens of the Mind, Corneanu offers another angle on vigilance, observing that it takes the form of (re)action and cure in programmes of self-assessment and self-correction (self-education). Such self-programming, in the form of the medicina-cultura animi paradigm offers another way to optimise vigilance against disorder; importantly, this refers not only to socio-political disorder, but also cultural and linguistic disorder.

96 Lepenies, Melancholy and Society, pp.10-22.
Although both of the above approaches might be firmly founded in the arena of philosophical ideology and practice, their expression could be constructed, perpetrated and potentially proven, in words. The vigilant mind-set, endeavouring to combat disorder and disease, could apply to the observable, tangible and even verifiable production of the printed page. Rhetoric, as a model for an enquiry practice of experiment, as an ordered and performative model for investigation and cure, became the tool of the vigilant scholar-philosopher. For the physician of the soul, rhetoric shaped the medicine of cure, much as the scalpel, in the hands of the able barber-surgeon, had the potential to institute similar cure. Burton the anatomist, was ‘anatomising’ melancholy (disorder), but he was also “fleshing out the concept of order with content”\(^7\); his remedial constructs included not just lists of potions and programmes of self-reflection and correction, his anti-melancholic vision included a concerted allusion to the ‘utopian model’, the prime example of investing corrective measures through the institutional power of the state. Yet Burton’s notion of order transcended the physicality of words; ultimately, it also transcended the physicality of worlds.

As a Christian humanist, as a clergyman, Burton viewed not only his worlds, but his cures, as belonging in equal measure, to the domain of the supra-corporeal. Burton’s Platonism was an Augustinian-infused brand of Early Modern Platonism/Neoplatonism, where the material was present only in relation to the spiritual; the body was present only in relation to the soul. In his fusion with the Democritus persona, Burton was the exemplary didact who endeavoured to prescribe the best culture for the distempered, perturbed or diseased mind. In accessing the mind, he knew he was able to lead the seeking pilgrim to Knowledge (‘Truth’) through specific acts of self-correction; his hope was that he might lead his suffering pilgrim (that is, postlapsarian man) to God. To

\(^7\) Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society*, p. 22.
this end, Burton took the Platonic (Socratic) and Patristic/Augustinian traditions and shaped a comprehensive, if somewhat complex and meandering path, to Truth. His regimen was laid down in the extraordinary and compelling rhetoric of his desire for order; his desire for cure. He took the problem of knowledge and applied it to exhaustive analysis of the “limits, frailties and distempers”\(^{98}\) of the human mind, which he wished to cultivate specifically for the purpose of cure. Burton’s cure partook in the Early Modern endorsement of practical regimes for the shaping of the individual; as Corneanu explains, the core insight here, is that the Early Modern appropriates the ancient view of philosophy as fundamentally \textit{paideia} or \textit{askesis} rather than simply \textit{theoria}.

In the broadest terms then, one might ask: what constitutes Burton’s ‘medicine’? Retaining the Platonic directive, Burton offers Philosophy, via the vehicle of the Philosopher, not only as a comprehensive cure for the individual (and therefore, by implication, the social) body, he also offers this particular therapeutic salve as a potential solution to the overarching problem of the disruption to the transcendent Unity, incorporating the hereditary condition of postlapsarian man. Philosophy, Burton claims, will bring us to knowledge; knowledge begets right order, and right order, returns us to the province of God. In the most encompassing sense, therefore, with regard to the situation of ‘constitutional’ disorder which he identifies and describes in his work, Burton offers his auditors a comprehensive set of palliative strategies through which a remedy may, potentially, be achieved.

Burton sets out both his essential ideology and the ideals of his programme for therapeutic action in the much neglected\(^{100}\) and underrated ‘Democritus to the Reader’ section of his \textit{Anatomy}. In this section, we see him define melancholy as a constant

\(^{98}\) Corneanu, \textit{Melancholy and Society}, p. 5.
\(^{100}\) Lepenies, \textit{Melancholy and Society}, p. 12.
human quality.\textsuperscript{101} And this is my point, for, as Lepenies observes “if all are melancholic then melancholy can no longer really be regarded as a disease; Burton thus “weakens the selective effect of a conception of melancholy oriented toward psychopathology and medicine”.\textsuperscript{102} The result of this, is that we begin to understand the true scope of Burton’s diagnosis and therefore also begin to understand his plan for cure. Burton’s melancholy is an endemic, hereditary disease that is part of the condition of postlapsarian man; it may present in certain psychophysiological symptoms, but its very aetiology ensures that its true cure may really only be found in application to one specific therapeutic programme – that of the paideic regime. In order to arrive at the necessary universal therapeutic salve, Burton must address all of the contributing causes, those symptoms which describe and indeed epitomise man’s life in the world.

The complexity of Burton’s diagnosis is therefore reflected in the complexity of his treatment of his subject: he attempts to capture the human condition through various reductive and descriptive means, thus we encounter his efforts at tabulation, classification, rhetorical praxis, digression (consolatory and otherwise), didactic commentary, personal recommendation, utopian construction and so on. Burton is, in fact, attempting to order the disordered; the normative order of the soul must be reinstated before the optimal order of society can be established, but overarching and indeed informing these goals, is Burton’s desire to regain the essential order of the one critical unity – the order of the man’s relationship with God. Like Augustine, Burton sees language as a tool for achieving this palliative reunification of man with the divine. To this end, language may be both performative and illocutionary, potentially facilitating a transcendence of the material world, thereby enabling the ascent to a realm where a condition of unity and wellness may be re-accessed.

\textsuperscript{101} Lepenies, \textit{Melancholy and Society}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{102} Lepenies, \textit{Melancholy and Society}, p.15.
Language then, for Burton, represents his ‘working bag of tools’. This logophile doctor-cleric seeks to enable his melancholy pilgrims to achieve a state of therapeutic self-knowledge which, itself, pre-figures cure. This pathway to cure, (rhetoric and medicine; rhetoric as medicine) is where we see Burton apply language as the major instrument in reason’s task of Locke’s “human concourse that is required for salvation”, where “man’s care of his own soul is assumed as a Christian task and expressed in a programme of religious-philosophical regimens”.103 Again, like Augustine, Burton demonstrates that language is a two-edged sword: it is “an instrument that can immerse us into the world, but it can also, if rightly used, aid us in transcending the world of the senses and ascending to the intelligible realm, where we find the unity and rest that we seek.”104 What are unity and rest, in this context, if not order and wellness?

Effectively, then, the medicine that Burton is offering, is an holistic medicine, the application of which may be used, and indeed, must be used, in both the physical (material) and spiritual domains – hence his references to the combined ‘physick’ of the cleric and the physician (“both make an absolute cure”).105 If language is a key component of the delivery of Burton’s cure, then philosophy is the basis upon which he stakes his medical (diagnostic; aetiological) therapeutic approach; through the interaction of the key domains of philosophy, rhetoric and medicine, therapy and cure are indeed intricated. Under Burton’s regime, there is the possibility for the exiled, chastised, suffering (melancholic) ‘corrupted’ body of Augustine to become instead the reclaimed, healthy, ‘incorruptible’ body; the therapy of the word, becomes the therapy of the Word (Logos; Christ), and we see Burton’s ‘social body’ extended to incorporate the Christian community of the Word.

103 Corneanu, Regimens, p. 145.
105 AOM. 1:37.
In attempting to better understand and therefore redefine the parameters of Burton’s ‘disease’ of melancholy, we must inevitably seek to reassess what is meant by his use of the term ‘medicine’. If the disease of melancholy incorporates a strong emphasis on the spiritual aspect of man and his postlapsarian/disordered condition in the world, then the nature and domain of Burton’s understanding of the term ‘medicine’ must accordingly be enlarged or redrawn. Corneanu states that the physician of the soul “stands at the crossroads of practical divinity, medicine, moral philosophy, and rhetoric and uses the analytical tools of theology and natural philosophy… the [physician of the soul’s] object is the human embodied mind, and his aim is the cure of its perturbations and the cultivation of its health or virtue…”\(^{106}\) In Burton’s scheme, the physician of the soul takes the human embodied mind and cultivates its health or virtue to the point where it stands cured in direct proportion to the integrity of its concourse with the divine grace of God. Knowledge is the catalyst or facilitator in the attaining of this concourse; self-knowledge becomes the prime authority for self-guided therapy to this end. The knowledge that accompanies enlightened experiential and experimental forward progress leads man to salvation, to reclaiming holism, to cure. The bridge to knowledge (and therefore the bridge to cure) is provided by the particular regimen which the physician of the soul sets down and recommends: this is Burton’s purpose in the *Anatomy*. We see this [Christian humanist] thesis concerning access to right knowledge and the associated concourse with cure (cure of vice/melancholy/disorder) both reflected and pre-empted in Erasmus (1503): “Prayer to be sure, is the stronger weapon (in our fight against vice)… yet knowledge is no less necessary”\(^{107}\)

---


For Burton, the “therapeutic word”, is the vital point of intersection\textsuperscript{108} between the consanguine disciplines of philosophy and medicine, and in the closing chapter of this thesis I discuss the various ways in which Burton employs words with an end to both constructing and implementing his specific project of cure. Yet for Burton, of course, the word has implications beyond mere discourse. Logos is also (and perhaps pre-eminently), the Christian Word, the Christ, to whom Burton repeatedly returns (on behalf of his sufferers), for both authoritative endorsement and hopeful salve and indeed, salvation. The word is thus augmented to the uniquely synchronous and holistic status of discursive signifier and divine therapy (therapeutic benefactor/facilitator) embodied; the word both defines and encompasses the cure. The word is also what allows Burton to “perfect and finish”\textsuperscript{109} Democritus’ original treatise concerning the question of melancholy, for it allows our Early Modern scholar-divine to bring Democritus the pagan but acceptable ‘moralizing anatomist’ into the Christian fold. Burton’s strategic and, undoubtedly, personally advantageous appropriation of an earlier but highly valuable pre-Christian philosophical regime of enquiry is thus not only enhanced, but rendered considerably more acceptable and accessible through this action of embedding it within the framework of the Christian humanist ethos. Finally, it may be said that in funding a commentary which resonates so cogently with the mind-set of the modern world, the “dwarf standing on the giant’s shoulders”\textsuperscript{110} demonstrates that notions of ‘disease’ and ‘wellness’, when taken at any one point in time, are singularly discretionary terms, reflecting nothing so much as a species in evolutionary association with its own spiritually and biologically-imposed imperative to encounter, describe and manipulate notions of (dis)order.

\textsuperscript{108} Pender in Pender and Struever, \textit{Rhetoric and Medicine}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{109} AOM, 1:20.
\textsuperscript{110} AOM, 1:25.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Herring, Dr. Thomas. *Letters from the late most reverend Dr. Thomas Herring, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, to William Duncombe... from the years 1728 – 1757*. Gale ECCO [EEBO], Print Editions, 2010.


http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23639/23639-h/23639-h.htm#Page_153a (accessed 03/10/2012).


*The Temple of the Hyperboreans in Leuce Island*. Part 1, Ch. V. 3 and 6.

[http://www.pelasgians.org/website1/05_03.htm](http://www.pelasgians.org/website1/05_03.htm) (accessed 27/03/2012).


Secondary Sources:


Anglin, Emily. “‘The glass, the school, the book’: *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and the Early Stuart University of Oxford.” *ESC* 35.2-3 (June/September 2009), 55-76.


Kahn, Victoria. “Political Theology and Fiction in *The King’s Two Bodies*.” *Representations*, 106 (Spring 2009), 77-102.


Schmelzer, Mary Murphy. ’*Tis All One: The Anatomy of Melancholy as Belated Copious Discourse*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.


Shusterman, Richard. “Philosophy as a Way of Life as Textual and More Than Textual Practice”. In Philosophy as a Way of life: Ancients and Moderns – Essays in


Struever, Nancy S. “The Case of Bertini’s La Medicina difesa”. In Rhetoric and Medicine in Early Modern Europe, eds. Stephen Pender and Nancy S. Struever. Surrey, Ashgate, 2012.


White, R.S. *Natural Law in English Renaissance literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.


