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Melancholy:  
A New Anatomy

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This exhibition explores the enduring relevance of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621.

2021 marks four hundred years since the first edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* – an eccentric and digressive encyclopaedia of the kinds, causes, symptoms, and cures of melancholy – which has been described as ‘the best book ever written’. Its author, Robert Burton, was an Oxford scholar and himself a sufferer, who tells us that he ‘wrote of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy’. Writing the *Anatomy* was a form of self-cure. It also offered the reader the opportunity to manage their own melancholy – not only through recommendations for diet, exercise, sleep, and medicine, but also through the distraction and mental exercise offered by reading the book itself. Readers throughout the intervening centuries, from Samuel Johnson to John Keats, Charles Lamb and Sir William Osler to Philip Pullman, have testified to its absorbing power and appeal.

Burton subscribed to beliefs in the four humours, the influence of astrology on the human body, and supernatural causes of mental distress. Although such theories are no longer current in Western medicine, Burton's cures and recommendations nonetheless find unexpected connections with modern healthcare and

with research investigating multimodal approaches to mental health and wellbeing. Current interest in the potential health benefits of cultural and leisure activities, and ideas of mental capital, are anticipated in Burton's broad and inclusive approach. In celebrating 400 years of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, this exhibition uses treasures from the Bodleian's collections to consider how reading Burton still resonates with – and can inform – contemporary mental health research.

This exhibition is generously supported by the Guy and Elinor Maynell Charitable Trust.

## Portrait of Robert Burton

He was by many accounted a severe student, a devourer of authors, a melancholy and humerous person; ... I have heard some of the Ancients of *Christ Church* say that his company was very merry.

ANTHONY À WOOD, *LIFE OF ROBERT BURTON*, *ATHENAE OXONIENSES*, 1691

Robert Burton (1577–1640) was a priest and bachelor of divinity, who lived his entire adult life as a scholar at Christ Church, Oxford. Though theology was his professional subject, he was, he wrote, 'fatally driven upon this rock of melancholy, and carried away by this by-stream'. His life's work and only book was *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), which he compulsively

revised and expanded for five further editions before his death.

Though melancholy was a serious and sometimes fatal illness, it was also characterized by ambivalence: 'naught so sweet as melancholy', as Burton wrote in a poem. Melancholy was a humour which was also humorous. The pseudonym of Democritus under which he wrote the *Anatomy* names the 'laughing philosopher' of the ancient world. Contemporaries testified to Burton's wit and conviviality, and studying melancholy brought him, and his readers, entertainment and witty recreation. In this smiling portrait, we can see represented both Burton's bookishness and his wit.

Portrait of Robert Burton by Gilbert Jackson, 1635.

With the kind permission of the Kings Hall and College of Brasenose.

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# Robert Burton, Melancholic

I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. DEMOCRITUS  
JUNIOR TO THE READER

Heaven is ... a great book, whose letters are the stars, ... wherein are  
written many strange things for such as can read.  
ANATOMY I.2.I.4

I was fatally driven upon this rock of melancholy, and carried away by  
this by-stream, which, as a rillet, is deducted from the main channel of  
my studies, in which I have pleased and busied myself at idle hours, as a  
subject most necessary and commodious.  
ANATOMY, DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR TO THE READER

Early in the *Anatomy*, Burton tells his readers they can trust him. Other writers 'get their knowledge by Bookes', he says, but 'I mine by melancholising. *Experto crede Roberto*': believe Robert, who has experienced this. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, as well as a scholarly study which compiles an extraordinary range of ancient and modern sources, was also a document of suffering testimony, and a kind of self-cure, a way of keeping busy and absorbed.

In devoting himself to the subject, Burton entered on a fashionable topic: melancholy was in vogue in the early 17th century, and associated not just with illness but with wit, insight, and literary inspiration. It was also endemic: 'who is free from melancholy?', Burton asks. In reading the *Anatomy*, readers will also learn about themselves, since as Burton writes 'Thou thyself art the subject of my discourse'. The *Anatomy* was intended to be therapeutic not just for the writer, but for the reader.

1. Burton compulsively expanded the *Anatomy*: the posthumous sixth edition (1651) was over 500,000 words long. From the third edition, it carried an engraved title page showing types and cures of the disease, and portraits of Burton and the ancient philosopher Democritus, Burton's pseudonym. Democritus is depicted in contemplation, with, in the background, splayed carcasses of animals anatomized in a futile attempt to find the seat of melancholy.

Antiq.d.E.1638.2

Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1638)

2. Dürer's symbolic engraving of 1514 is the most famous Renaissance rendition of melancholy. For Aristotle and Renaissance humanists, melancholy was associated not just with illness but with genius, insight, and inspiration. Contemporary psychiatry also recognises a link between mental illness and creativity. Dürer's figure sits in the classic melancholic posture of head on hand, abandoning the instruments of practical activities for contemplation.

Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, engraving, 1514

The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

3. At 5.40pm on 18 June 1597, a 20-year-old man called Robert Burton consulted the professional astrologer Simon Forman about his melancholy. Forman's horoscope suggested that 'he carieth death vpon him ... & will die suddenly'; but this Burton visited him four further times that summer, and (if he really was the future author of the *Anatomy*) lived for a subsequent 43 years.

MS. Ashmole 226

Horary consultation 18 June 1597

4. Anthony à Wood described Burton as 'a curious calculator of Nativities'. In the opening pages of a notebook in which Burton kept texts on astrology and notes on the art, he cast his own horoscope. It told him he was born under the sign of Saturn, the patron planet of melancholy.

40R.9 Art.

Manuscript in Burton's hand dated 1603 inside a printed book, containing several items, first of which is Ptolemy, 16th century



# The Melancholic Humour

These four humours have some analogy with the four elements, and  
to the four ages in man.

ANATOMY I.I.2.2

Melancholy, cold and dry, thick, black, and sour, begotten of the  
more feculent part of nourishment, and purged from the spleen

ANATOMY I.I.2.2

To anatomise this humour aright, through all the members of this  
our Microcosmus, is as great a task, as to ... find out the quadrature  
of a circle.

ANATOMY, DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR TO THE READER

Melancholy, Choler, Blood and Phlegm. For Burton and his contemporaries, following the ancient theories of Hippocrates, health consisted in the balance of these four humours, and illness arose from their excess or lack. They were connected to the four elements, and through them the human body was framed as a microcosm of the whole world: connected with the animal kingdom, the seasons, planets, and signs of the zodiac.

An excess of black bile – the substance ‘melancholy’ – gave rise to melancholy the disease. The Renaissance saw the relation between mind and body as porous, so that an excess of a bodily fluid could cause unhappiness. Burton’s simplest definition called melancholy a state

of fear and sorrow 'without any apparent occasion': causeless anxiety and sadness. In this, it corresponds to modern ideas of 'depression', an illness characterised by low mood and loss of enjoyment, pleasure, and energy. Melancholy's manifestations were as various as the people who displayed them, ranging from chronic wind and constipation to delusions and uncontrollable laughter.

5. Burton consulted a vast range of sources for the *Anatomy*, ancient, medieval, and contemporary. Melancholy had been a topic of fascination for medical writers since the ancient Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen, whose works were translated by Arabic scholars and then into Latin in Medieval Europe. This manuscript about melancholy by the 11th-century Constantinus Africanus was donated to the Bodleian in Burton's lifetime. Burton quoted a printed version in the *Anatomy*.

MS. Laud Misc. 567

Medical miscellany including Constantinus, *De melancholia*. England, first half of the 12th century. Given by Archbishop Laud, 1633.

6. Timothy's Bright's book was the most substantial English treatise on melancholy before Burton – it is mentioned fifteen times in *The Anatomy*, and Shakespeare may have used it in the composition of *Hamlet*. Addressed to Bright's unnamed 'melancholick friend', the book explains the physiology of melancholy, offers advice for managing the condition and distinguishes it from an afflicted conscience.

Vet. A1 f.10

Timothy Bright, *A treatise of melancholy* (London, 1586)

7. For the Renaissance, a system of correspondences linked the microcosm of the human body to the macrocosm of the wider world. Thomas Walkington's *Optick glasse of humors* (1601) aimed to explain the humours so that readers could manage their own constitution. The engraved frontispiece for this edition shows, through a diagram of concentric circles, how a melancholic constitution (bottom left), being cold and dry, corresponded with old age, winter, the north wind, the element earth, and Saturn.

8° B 17(2) Med.

Thomas Walkington, *The optick glasse of humors* (Oxford, 1631?)

8. Melancholy and melancholizing – a word Burton coined – were fashionable in the Renaissance. Young men appeared about town and on stage in the melancholic's recognisable costume and postures: especially black clothes, a flop-brimmed hat, an inclined head, folded arms. This is one of the books which Burton bequeathed to the Bodleian – an example of 'Ridicularia', ridiculous or funny books, which aimed to cheer the reader through laughter. It is a poem satirizing a figure of fashionable melancholy, similarly depicted on Burton's frontispiece as the 'Inamorato'.

4° L 71(4) Art.

Samuel Rowlands, *The Melancholie Knight* (London, 1615)

9. The four humours are still with us in everyday language, if not in scientific use. We describe people as melancholic, or sanguine. In Burton's time, this extended beyond a person's temperament to their physical appearance. As we see in this later text on physiognomy, hair was particularly informative. Lacking the warmth required for growth, those with a melancholic temperament might exhibit a receding hairline.

Vet. A5 d.686/3

Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy* (London, 1789)

10. The *Anatomy's* title page showed various animals associated with melancholy: deer, storks, swans, hares – and cats. Cats are timid and solitary. They avoid water. They were often represented as black and gloomy to reflect their underlying humour. Edward Topsell, author of the earlier works compiled in this bestiary of 1658, notes that cats are often the familiars of witches, and therefore dangerous to body and soul.

RR. x. 341

Edward Topsell, *The history of four-footed beasts and serpents* (London, 1658)

# The Advancement of Learning

[The brain] is the most noble organ under heaven, the dwelling-house and seat of the soul, the habitation of wisdom, memory, judgment, reason, and in which man is most like unto God

ANATOMY I.I.2.4

The theory of the four humours enjoyed almost two thousand years of scientific and cultural dominance. Burton was however living in Oxford at a watershed moment, a time of dramatic shifts in medical and scientific method and knowledge. Disciplines like medicine, natural philosophy, and astronomy had been based on commentary on the ancients and philosophical reasoning, but across the 17th century, greater emphasis was placed on observation, experiment, and the use of instruments like the telescope and microscope. The resultant advances in anatomy, physiology, and epidemiology began to contradict humoral theory and ultimately caused its demise.

11. Francis Bacon was the figurehead of the 'advancement of learning', the title of one of his books and a phrase Burton used in the *Anatomy*. Bacon argued against reliance on ancient authority, and instead issued a rallying cry to return to 'the things themselves'.

He proposed a method based on observation and experiment which was a forerunner to modern scientific method. The frontispiece to this posthumous translation of a Latin work shows the visible and intellectual worlds shaking hands while the ship of knowledge returns laden from its voyages of information gathering.

Antiq.d.E.1640.1

Francis Bacon, *Of the advancement and proficience of learning* (Oxford, 1640)

12. The increasing practice of anatomy in the 17th century irrevocably changed understandings of human physiology. An annual anatomy lecture was founded in Oxford in 1625. William Harvey's discovery that blood circulated in the body, rather than being absorbed by the flesh and organs, was the result of careful dissection of humans and animals. His discovery was the most significant in 2000 years of physiology, and its slow acceptance showed that the foundation of the humoral theory was false.

RR. w. 168(1)

William Harvey, *Exercitatio anatomica de motu cordis et sanguinis in animalibus* (Frankfurt, 1628)

13. "The Bill of Mortality is increased... which makes us all sad", noted Samuel Pepys during the plague of 1665. This bill from 1666 shows as causes of death 'grief',

'lunatick', 'hang'd and made away themselves', as well as more common plague and consumption. The 17th century saw the beginnings of statistical approaches to populations and illness, in the work of Oxford physicians like William Petty. Today, the counting of cases, deaths, and recovery tells us about the nature and distribution of disease. Randomised trials show which treatments work, and which do not. The Bills are a forerunner of modern epidemiology, and captivated the population in times of plague in a similar way to Covid-19 data today.

Arch. A d.35/3

Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, *A general bill of all the christnings and burials from 18 of December 1666* (London, 1666)

14. In the medieval and early modern periods, the brain was understood to operate through the 'faculties' of memory, reason, and imagination, located in specific parts of the skull, which worked on the information supplied by the senses, transferred into the brain via 'spirit'. Robert Fludd – Burton's Christ Church contemporary and a friend of Harvey's, whose theories were eccentric even in his own day – here represents his model of how the physical and spiritual worlds interact via the brain.

P 2.14 Med.

Robert Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia* (Oppenheim and Frankfurt, 1617)



15. Thomas Willis, an Oxford physician who revolutionised understanding of the brain, and who studied at Christ Church in Burton's final years, was the first person to use the word 'neurology'. He theorized the importance of the cerebral cortex, comparing the numerous ridges and folds to the flatter cortices of other animals. Christopher Wren provided illustrations of the brain which are almost accurate enough for textbooks today.

4° Q 7 Med.

Thomas Willis, *Cerebri anatome* (London, 1664)

# Physician, Patient, Physic

What can be more ignominious and filthy (as Melancthon well inveighs) “than for a man not to know the structure and composition of his own body, especially since the knowledge of it tends so much to the preservation, of his health, and information of his manners?”

ANATOMY 1.1.2.4

Only thus much I would require, honesty in every physician, that he be not over-careless or covetous, harpy-like to make a prey of his patient

ANATOMY 2.1.4.1

Inveterate Melancholy, ... may be hard to cure, but not impossible for him that is most grievously affected, if he but willing to be helped.

ANATOMY 2.1.1.1

A melancholic in Burton's time might seek cure through an astonishing variety of remedies and methods, ranging from the learned and authoritative to the folk, or popular: medicines, surgery, bloodletting, prayer, changes in lifestyle (like diet, sleep, exercise, socializing), herbal remedies, amulets, charms. The range of disciplines or practices which sought to treat melancholy was equally broad. Physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, astrologers, the clergy, and folk healers all played a role, and feature in the *Anatomy*. Different constituencies sometimes entered into conflict over the

status of their knowledge and learning. Despite marked differences, Burton's various approaches to melancholy bear similarities with our 'stepped care' approach to depression today, in which lifestyle changes are sought – perhaps via social prescribing - before moving to more intensive therapy. Then as now, the patient's individuality is recognized, and treatment tailored to the individual.

Panel image

One second of spontaneous brain activity recorded using the MEGIN TRIUX Neo MEG scanner at the Oxford Centre for Human Brain Activity. The scanner records brain activity once every millisecond using 306 magnetic field sensors located outside the head.

16. Sometimes called the first psychiatric textbook, this later work by Willis describes concepts such as 'Melancholy', 'Mania', 'Delirium', and 'Hysteria'. Willis writes that he "cannot yield... that melancholy doth arise from a Melancholick humour". He instead recognises it as a syndrome of signs and symptoms, and attributes the cause to "the vice or fault of the brain": what we now call neural functioning.

RR. w. 159

Thomas Willis, *De anima brutorum* (Amsterdam, 1672)

17. Before Vesalius, human anatomy was based on the works of ancient physicians, particularly Galen. Galen's work, based on the dissection of animals, was often inaccurate. In the early 16th century, at the University of Padua, Vesalius began to challenge inherited Galenic maxims by dissecting human bodies, sometimes publicly, and describing and illustrating what he saw. The publication of his work revolutionized the teaching of anatomy across Europe.

B 1.16 Med.

Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (Basel, 1543)

18. In the later 16th and 17th centuries, following Vesalius, public dissections of executed criminals became commonplace. The first Oxford anatomy lectures were delivered by Burton's friend Thomas Clayton; Burton may have been in attendance. The teaching of the new anatomical knowledge was supported by books like the layered flapbook of Johannes Remmelin, which was translated into English in 1670.

Arch. A b.16

Johannes Remmelin, *An exact survey of the microcosmus* (London, 1670)

## Stethoscope

A symbol for, and key part of the ritual of seeing a doctor, the stethoscope would be unrecognisable to Burton. Despite this, Burton's contemporary Robert Hooke described heart sounds and wondered whether they could be used to "discover the motion of internal parts". This particular stethoscope belongs to Dr Joseph Butler, a psychiatrist working at the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit in Oxford, and the curator of this section of the exhibition.

19. The *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* was a list of officially sanctioned medication first published by the Royal College of Physicians in 1618. It emerged from the learned physicians' concern that apothecaries – workers of remedies who did not have medical degrees – were becoming too powerful. Published in Latin, it asserted the specialized learning of the physicians and their control of prescribing. Nicholas Culpeper's English translations, beginning in 1649, threatened to disseminate professional knowledge to a broader audience and dilute the physicians' power and prestige.

Vet. A3 f.2078

Nicholas Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (London, 1667)

## Medication

Unlike Burton's physic, antidepressant effectiveness is supported by the data combined from many hundreds of clinical trials. How antidepressants improve mood is unclear, but their pharmacology has led to suggestions of chemical imbalances in the brain causing depression; a theory not dissimilar to Burton's understanding of humoral imbalance leading to Melancholy.

20. One medieval and early modern mode of diagnosis was to scrutinize, and even taste, a patient's urine. This early 16th-century book shows uroscopy in practice, as a group of learned physicians consult over a glass of urine, while the diagram on the right shows how to interpret its different colours and detect an excess of melancholy. With the new medical theories and increasing empiricism of the 17th century, however, uroscopy declined in significance; Burton says that it is 'all out uncertain, varying so often according to several persons', and 'not to be respected'.

D 1.21(3) Art.Seld.

Johannes de Ketham, *Fasciculus medicinae* (Venice, 1513)

## Urine

Urinalysis remains an informative investigation. A 'dipstick' like this might identify a urinary tract infection—a common cause of delirium. In urine, a broad range of mind-altering substances can be identified. Sugar concentration, now and in Burton's time was a highly sensitive method for diagnosing diabetes, a condition more common in those experiencing severe mental illness.

21. Humoral theory postulated that the blood carried the other three humours around the body, allowing them to be absorbed into the flesh and enter the organs. Bloodletting was thus a means of rebalancing the humours by purgation and drawing off excess. It was practised by surgeons or 'chirurgeons', who could use phlebotomy – cutting – or leeches. They would not only pay attention to where on the body they drew blood, but also to astrology, the time of day, and the age of the patient.

H 1.10 Med.

Helkiah Crooke, *Μικροκοσμογραφία: a description of the body of man* (London, 1631)

## Blood

For Burton, phlebotomy was an important therapy. Today it remains important, as an investigation. Blood tests are used to identify the electrolyte, hormone and vitamin imbalances that can lead to depressive symptoms and identify the body-wide complications of mental illness and the side effects of medications used to treat it.

22. Learned physicians – those with medical degrees – had to defend their discipline against mountebanks and quacks: fraudulent practitioners who would proffer false cures for profit. They also dismissed those whose knowledge was less institutionally sanctioned. Burton himself worried that he would face censure as a divine who had ‘meddled with physic’. Folk healers came in for particular disdain. In the frontispiece to James Primerose’s *Popular Errours* (1651), an angel holds back a wise woman at a sickbed, so that the learned physician can treat his patient.

Antiq.f.E.1651.4

James Primerose, *Popular error. Or the errours of the people in physick*  
(London, 1651)



23. Chiromancy, the skill of divining a person's nature and future from the lines on their hand, was in the medieval period and Renaissance a mainstream medical investigation, based on the authority of earlier authors. Often used by poorer members of the population, when the more affluent might consult an astrologer, debates about chiromancy's veracity abounded in Burton's time as in the present day.

MS. Douce 45

Latin medical texts with a treatise on chiromancy, made in England, 15th century: 'In the right hand of a man is seen his fortune'.

24. Burton believed that no physician could practise without astrology. The influence of the stars was part of medical learning, and affected an individual's susceptibility to disease, prognosis, and the timing of treatment. There were also consulting astrologers who might address medical as well as personal problems. Here (top right) astrologer Richard Napier mapped the position of the stars to dispense therapeutic advice for this patient who was "full of melancholy".

MS. Ashmole 415

Richard Napier, January 19, 1605

25. Then as now, people in mental distress sought comfort from their faith. For Burton, prayer is a necessary intervention for melancholy. Here, the clergyman William Chilcot (1698) adapts ten sermons he had delivered from the pulpit into a printed treatise 'useful for *Melancholy Persons*'. Without religion, he writes, Melancholy is 'hardly ever cur'd'.

(OC) 141 k.145

William Chilcot, *A practical treatise concerning evil thoughts* (Exeter, 1698)

# Diet Rectified

Laurentius approves of many fruits, in his Tract of Melancholy, which others disallow, and amongst the rest apples, which some likewise commend, sweetings, pearmaines, pippins, as good against melancholy.

ANATOMY 1.2.2.1

There is not so much harm proceeding from the substance itself of meat, and quality of it, in ill-dressing and preparing, as there is from the quantity, disorder of time and place, unseasonable use of it, intemperance, overmuch, or overlittle taking of it.

ANATOMY 1.2.2.2

In the 1600s, people thought that what they ate influenced their health and mood. Diet was one of the six 'non-naturals' understood to affect the temperament of the individual. In the *Anatomy*, Burton used his sources to make a detailed list of the types of food that caused melancholy – and unfortunately, many things we love to eat are included. Happily, moderation was a key factor, and even 'melancholic' foods could be eaten as long as excess was avoided. Burton also suggested some things we could eat safely, like apples, and recommended certain herbs to treat melancholy. Similarly today, we are reminded not to eat too much, and there is evidence that certain herbs are good for us. Revolutionary modern

discoveries in neuroscience provide a basis for Burton's association between diet and melancholy: we have identified bacteria in our gut that can help our mental health. By supporting good gut bacteria with certain foods – including apples – you can support brain health.

26. Burton provided synoptic tables showing the outline of each of the three partitions of his book. Here, in the table preceding the second partition, on cures, we can see the subdivisions of 'Diet Rectified', with typically Burtonian copiousness. On the right-hand side, Burton provides partial lists of good nutrition, with his habitual '&c' – et cetera – suggesting that his lists could go on.

*Such meats as are easy of digestion, ...  
Bread of pure wheat, well baked.  
Water clear from the fountain.  
Wine and drink not too strong &c.*

NN 17 Th.

Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1624)

27. Current scientific evidence supports Burton's view that too much meat is bad for you. Studies have shown that a diet rich in meat and dairy, with few vegetables, causes a build-up of the *Bilophila* bacteria: this causes

painful swelling of the gut (inflammation) which can then affect the brain. However, Burton's recommended diet was more limited than necessary, especially when he claimed that pulses, beans, and fruit should be avoided. When gut bacteria such as *Lactobacilli* digest the fibres in pulses and vegetables, the fermentation process produces chemicals that are good for our brain.

28. Luigi Cornaro's "A Treatise on a Sober Life" was first published in Italian in 1550, and achieved immense popularity across Europe. It described Cornaro's own lifestyle of moderation – including eating only 12 ounces of food daily. It was taken as a guide to longevity, since Cornaro himself lived to around 100. This translation was published in Cambridge and aimed at students. Cornaro describes how well he felt when fasting, but that 'of a cheerfull and merrie man I became melancholie and cholerick' after 10 days of increasing his intake by two ounces.

Douce L 2

Luigi Cornaro, Leonardus Lessius and Nicholas Ferrar *Hygiasticon: or, the right course of preserving life and health unto extream old age* (Cambridge, 1634)

29. Burton cited early modern debates over the eating of fruit: some authorities insisted none should be eaten, but others were in favour. Burton inclined to the latter, allowing 'apples corrected for wind'. The album known as 'The Tradescants' Orchard', illustrates the appeal of orchard fruit in the first half of the 17th century. Apples of any variety contain not only healthy vitamins, but also fibres in their skin that good bacteria feast on – and when they are happy, so is your brain!

MS. Ashmole 1461

'The Tradescants' Orchard': 66 full-page watercolours of garden fruits, with ripening dates, c. 1620s, traditionally associated with the Tradescant family.

30. Burton would have dined communally with his fellow academics at Christ Church. He complains in the *Anatomy* that such meals were too frequent, only five, rather than a healthier seven, hours apart. This recipe book by the New College cook Ralph Ayres shows that in the early 18th century a college diet was still substantial, with dishes that Burton might well have recognized, but not approved. The recipes are meat-heavy: even Christmas mince pies contained actual meat. Burton's concerns about meat may have been inspired by the stomach troubles caused by the rich, meat-based menus of his college and social class.

MS. Don. e. 89

The recipe book by Ralph Ayres, cook of New College, Oxford, here in a manuscript copy dated 1721.

31. In the treatment of melancholy, Burton recommended a herb called borage (or starflower), a traditional cure which appeared on the *Anatomy's* title page, and in this herbal of 1597. Borage was – and still is – an important plant in the Oxford physic garden: Burton may have been a member of the committee which oversaw its establishment in 1621. Studies have shown that borage does indeed have medicinal properties, and may reduce swelling or inflammation because it contains a lot of gamma-linoleic acid (GLA). Another study has shown that this molecule grows a type of bacteria which seems to alleviate stress.

L 1.5 Med.

John Gerard, *The herball, or Generall historie of plantes* (London, 1597)

# Sleeping and Waking

‘Waking, by reason of their continual cares, fears, sorrows, dry brains, is a symptom that much crucifies melancholy men, and must therefore be speedily helped’

ANATOMY 2.5.1.6

Nothing better than moderate sleep, nothing worse than it, if it be in extremes, or unseasonably used.

ANATOMY 1.2.2.7

Sleep was one of the Galenic ‘non-naturals’ which, since the ancient world, had been understood as lifestyle circumstances which could help or hinder wellness. Burton understood the intimate and reciprocal relationship between sleep and mental health. As in all things, he recommended moderation – against the received opinion ‘that a melancholy man cannot sleep overmuch’. His key argument was that in order to achieve good-quality sleep one has to be in the right mental state. In this way, sleep disruption could be considered a symptom of the restless, melancholic mind, yet Burton also viewed it as an important cause of melancholy. Indeed, he boldly suggested that improving sleep may be a ‘sufficient remedy of itself without any other physic’. Modern scientific evidence supports Burton’s belief that restorative sleep is central for brain function, and for emotional equilibrium in particular, with the important implication that sleep should be a therapeutic target for improving mental health.



Through the lens of art, poetry, and historical records, these exhibits examine the afterlife of some of Burton's key ideas, including the nature and function of sleep, first-person accounts of sleep disturbance and depression, and humankind's perennial attempts to optimize sleep. They also invite you – the sleeper – to reflect on your own relationship with sleep.

32. Nightmares and 'incubus' – sleep paralysis – were associated with melancholy, and much of Burton's advice is designed to procure the conditions for peaceful sleep. Goya's image 'The sleep of reason produces monsters' shows a man asleep at his desk, beset by bats, owls, and cats, all night animals associated with melancholy. It suggests the belief, shared with Burton, that in sleep reason's shackles on the imagination are set loose, leading to monstrous apparitions.

Douce Prints d.25

Francisco Goya, *Los caprichos* (Madrid, 1799)

33. As with everything, Burton recommends moderation in sleep. Regularity in sleeping was, and is, crucial to health. With the advent of industrialisation, regular sleep – and especially early rising – appeared to confer additional advantages in facilitating efficiency and

productivity. The *Early Rising Society* formed in Brighton in the 1830s shows a commitment to following (and indeed monitoring) a defined sleep schedule, non-adherence to which was punishable by financial penalty. Although this was in aid of productivity, modern sleep science suggests that both regularizing and advancing sleep and rise-times may serve to lessen depressive symptoms.

John Johnson Collection: Daylight Savings

Early Rising Society (Brighton, 1833)

34. Melancholy was associated with musing, contemplation, and fantasy, 'building castles in the air', as Burton put it in his prefatory 'Abstract of Melancholy'. But such musing, especially when wakeful in bed, could be pernicious. The association between inspiration, wakefulness, and melancholy can be found in poetry throughout history.

Gerard Manley Hopkins in one of his 'terrible sonnets', focuses on the experience of anguished night-time waking:

*I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.  
What hours, O what black hours we have spent  
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!  
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.*

MS. Bridges 61

Gerard Manley Hopkins, fair-copy autograph manuscript 'I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark', 1888

35. Anne Finch, who experienced melancholy, writes vividly about sleep and night-time in a poem called *The Spleen* – which was both a bodily organ associated with black bile, and a synonym for melancholy.

*On Sleep intruding do'st thy Shadows spread,  
Thy gloomy Terrors round the silent Bed,  
And crowd with boding Dreams the melancholy Head.*

Johnson e.3146

Anne Finch, *The spleen: a Pindaric ode* (London, 1709)

36. Burton makes various suggestions for how to be lulled into peaceful, restorative sleep. All parents know the importance of that transition from wakefulness for young children, whose predominant state is sleep – as much as 18 hours per day in the first months of life – reflecting the critical role of sleep for early brain development. In William Blake's poem, *A Cradle Song*, a lullaby, a mother derives great joy from the sight and sounds and happiness of her sleeping child. The poem's emphasis on the word 'sweet' echoes Burton's.

Arch. G e.42

William Blake, *Songs of innocence* (London, 1789)

37. What do you do if you are having trouble sleeping? Burton recommended a range of approaches, from various herbal and medicinal remedies, to prayer, reading, music, specific dietary recommendations, clean bed-sheets, and even the fat of a small mouse applied to the soles of the feet. Humankind has always sought ways to improve sleep. This advert from the 1900s promotes the electropathic belt as a treatment for insomnia – amongst other ailments.

John Johnson Collection: Patent medicines box 17(13)

Harness' Electropathic belts (London, 1893?)

38. Burton recognised the importance of being in the right mental state for sleep and importantly having the right environmental conditions. In the 19th century *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* appeared in Punch Magazine in cartoon form. They focus on the bed-time rituals of a husband and wife, not conducive to a 'secure and composed mind'. Each night Mrs. Caudle waits for her husband to come to bed before chiding him for minor aberrations that occurred that day; he of course had little escape from the bedroom – a fact Mrs. Caudle understood very well.

John Johnson Collection: Trade in prints and scraps 12(5)

Douglas Jerrold, 'Mrs. Caudle's curtain lectures', from Punch magazine (London, 1845)

# Exercise Rectified

Nothing so good but it may be abused: nothing better than exercise (if opportunely used) for the preservation of the body: nothing so bad if it be unseasonable, violent, or overmuch.

ANATOMY 1.2.2.6

Opposite to exercise is idleness (the badge of gentry) or want of exercise, the bane of body and mind, the nurse of naughtiness, stepmother of discipline, the chief author of all mischief, one of the seven deadly sins, and a sole cause of this and many other maladies

ANATOMY 1.2.2.6

Fishing is a kind of hunting by water, ... and if so be the angler catch no fish, yet he hath a wholesome walk to the brookside, pleasant shade by the sweet silver streams; he hath good air, and sweet smells of fine fresh meadow flowers, he hears the melodious harmony of birds, he sees the swans, herons, ducks, water-hens, coots, &c., and many other fowl, with their brood

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

Whosoever he is therefore that is overrun with solitariness, or carried away with pleasing melancholy and vain conceits, and for want of employment knows not how to spend his time, or crucified with worldly care, I can prescribe him no better remedy than this of study, to compose himself to the learning of some art or science.

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

Exercise was another of the 'non-naturals' which could be used or abused to cause health or illness. For Burton, the benefit of all things in moderation was central to his conclusions about exercise, both physical and mental. He identified that the imbalance of a "sedentary, solitary life ... free from bodily exercise", but over-exercised in study, in combination with discontent and idleness, might explain why students are more at risk of melancholy than others.

Burton was writing in a time when sports – popular among the ancients – including swimming and tennis were again becoming fashionable. For Burton, the secret was to exercise, just up to the point of raising a sweat but no more. His idea of exercise incorporated more than physical exertion: the absorption of attention in an activity, and sociability, also played a role.

Contemporary research continues to investigate how exercise might benefit mood. There are direct physiological benefits to aerobic exercise, but this alone does not seem to help depression. Burton might have been right about the importance of social and outdoor aspects. Team sports and cycling might be more protective than other forms of exercise.

39. In his subsection on 'Exercise Rectified', Burton moves on from physical exertion to mental activity as a remedy for melancholy: 'study' undertaken for pleasure in a task, delight in learning, and absorption of attention. He offers pages of examples of what this might be, from drawing and collecting to mathematical calculations, examining maps or paintings, making instruments and devices, needlework, or gardening.

Professor John Geddes tells us:

I built this bicycle wheel during the COVID19 pandemic lockdown in 2020. Working from home, I was able to find the time for this manual activity which provided pleasure and solace against the social withdrawal and inactivity mandated during lockdown.

Bicycle wheel made during lockdown by Professor John Geddes, Dept. Psychiatry, University of Oxford. [DCR Wheels 24/25 disc 28h rim, DCR Wheels hub, Sapim CX-Ray spokes, Campagnolo rotor, Campagnolo Super Record 11 speed 12-25 cassette, Peaty's Chris King tubeless valve]

40. David Loggan moved from London to Oxfordshire in 1665 to avoid the plague and was appointed "public sculptor", or engraver, to the University of Oxford in 1669. In 1675 he produced *Oxonia illustrata*, including engravings of all of Oxford's colleges, halls, and university buildings. In his engraving of Merton College, we can see in the layout of the college's buildings the incorporation

of exercise and outdoor recreation within the activities expected of students and scholars. Today, as well as space for scholarship and teaching, there are gardens and a real tennis court.

Gough Maps 58

David Loggan, *Oxonia illustrata* (Oxford, 1675)

41. Thomas Cogan's *Haven of Health* was a vernacular health manual aimed specifically at students, including a '*Preservative from the Pestilence*' – the plague – '*with a short censure of the late sickness at Oxford*'. Cogan was a physician and Fellow of Oriel (1563) and then High Master at Manchester Grammar School in 1574. Cogan strongly endorsed the positive effects of moderate exercise – outdoors if possible and particularly tennis. He also had a lot to say about exercising the mind: 'As man doth consist of two parts, that is, of body and soule, so exercise is of two sorts, that is to say, of the bodie and of the minde.'

Tanner 185 (2)

Thomas Cogan, *The haven of health* (London, 1584)

42. Books aimed at the general population are not a new idea! This little book was published in 1650 and approaches health under various headings



such as exercise, diet and sleep. Sections such as 'violent exercise bad' reinforce ideas of moderation. Disappointingly, we also learn 'drinking cold beer after exercise bad'.

(OC) 151 o.242

Humphrey Brooke, *Ἐγχειρίδιον Or a conservatory of health* (London, 1650)

43. This illustrated instruction manual was originally published in Latin in 1587, and translated into English in 1595. It attempted to teach the art of swimming through text and pictures. There were no public swimming pools in Burton's time; instead, 'wild swimming' was the norm. During the COVID pandemic, with swimming pools closed, there was an upsurge in wild swimming in rivers, lakes, and oceans – with many people reporting rapid benefits to their mental health and wellbeing.

Mal. 646 (1)

Everard Digby, *A short introduction for to learne to swimme* (London, 1595)

44. Burton's account of exercise was mostly concerned with outdoor pursuits including hunting, hawking and fishing – indicating again that it wasn't all about generating sweat, and that benefit came not only from

movement, but also from environment and company. Walton's iconic text portrays fishing as a contemplative pastime, providing a respite from the stresses of the everyday world and a place for comradeship – a most Burtonian view.

Douce W 53

Isaak Walton, *Compleat Angler or the Contemplative man's recreation* (London, 1668)

45. The myth that Leonardo da Vinci invented the bicycle was debunked in 1997, when it was shown that the apparent sketch found in his papers had been 'enhanced' by a monk in the 1960s. But if he had, we are sure that Burton would have enjoyed cycling in the same way he recommends swimming – like those keen cyclists of the first half of the 20th century (before cars took over the roads) including Sylvia Pankhurst, Mahatma Gandhi, and Edward Elgar. The sense of freedom and escape provided by cycling returned during the COVID19 lockdowns with record sales of bikes.

John Johnson Collection: Bicycles, box 16

*Bicycles Annual* (London, 1881)

# Air Rectified

To walk amongst orchards, gardens, bowers, mounts, and arbours,  
artificial wildernesses, green thickets, arches, groves, lawns,  
rivulets, fountains, and such like pleasant places, ... brooks, pools,  
fishponds, between wood and water, in a fair meadow, by a river  
side ... must needs be a delectable recreation.

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

The country hath his recreations ... that life itself is a sufficient  
recreation to some men... Diocletian, the emperor, was so much  
affected with it, that he gave over his sceptre, and turned gardener.

...

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

Air was a medical idea for Burton: one of the six Galenic non-naturals, it named climate, geographical location, weather, and the quality of light and ventilation as a contribution to an individual's health or illness. In *Air Rectified*, one of the most expansive sections of the *Anatomy*, Burton rattles through all these topics and more: weather, climates, geography, cosmology, astronomy, and astrology. But his medical advice focuses with particular enthusiasm on change of air, and the use of the outdoors and greenspaces.

46. The pleasures of an enclosed garden are found in many cultures. Islamic or paradise gardens traditionally contain a *Charbagh* or four-fold layout, divided by walkways or flowing water, with a water feature in the centre. In addition to being places of religious value, these gardens were built to represent paradise. They used flowing water, scented plants, an abundance of fruit trees, and the creation of shade to invoke a sensory and meditative experience, but were also used as gardens of pleasure, for food, and as a meeting and social space.

MS. Ouseley Add. 170, fol. 1b

Painting of a Paradise Garden, Mughal India, c. 1580

47. Melancholics were known to seek out solitude in green spaces, especially by water. This 16th-century map shows the Oxford in which Robert Burton lived. Burton's college, Christ Church, can be seen at the top centre of the map. The city has been transformed in the intervening 400 years, but much of the green space remains. Burton had the daily opportunity to walk through Christ Church meadow, or along the River Thames; contemporary anecdotes describe him going down to the river to laugh at the ferrymen.

Ralph Agas, *Oxonia antiqua instaurata* (1732)

Gough Maps Oxfordshire 4

48. In this 17th-century gardening manual John Parkinson, apothecary to King James I, instructs the reader on the best methods of cultivating a flower garden. He describes how to protect tulips from frost by planting them deep, how to grow vegetables and make herbal remedies, and how to manage a productive orchard. Burton illustrates the anti-melancholic effects of greenspace not just by being in it, but by learning from it and using it, whereby even the study of it, through 'great tomes of husbandry, cookery, falconry, hunting, fishing, fowling, &c.', brings relief to the melancholic man.

Douce P subt. 42

John Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole, paradisus terrestris* (London, 1656)

49. During the Covid pandemic people have turned to the garden as an outlet for uncertainty and anxiety. John Laurence's 18th-century manual on gardening illustrates that using gardening as a therapeutic tool is universal and enduring. What are the underlying mechanisms of this 'green' therapy? Is it the joy of growing that first ripe strawberry? Or the meditative repetition of digging, or even weeding? In the *Anatomy*, Burton draws on many examples of using greenspace as a balm for melancholy; including gardening, tending orchards, animal husbandry and even fishing.

19185 e.43

John Laurence, *The Clergy-Man's Recreation: Shewing the Pleasure and Profit of the Art of Gardening* (London, 1714)

## Case 9 – Greenspace

Although our ordinary air be good by nature or art, yet it is not amiss, as I have said, still to alter it; no better physic for a melancholy man than change of air, and variety of places,

ANATOMY 2.2.3.1

But the most pleasant of all outward pastimes is ... to make a petty progress, a merry journey now and then with some good companions, to visit friends, see cities, castles, towns

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

A good prospect alone will ease melancholy

ANATOMY 2.2.3.1

Burton advises us to seek out and live in places with good climates, as these produce a “merry nation”. Temporary relief can even be found – one just needs to take in a good view, breathe in fresh air, and avoid bad weather. For Burton, greenspace is not only for passive consumption; there are benefits to using, and learning from, our green world.

Psychiatry’s interest in the therapeutic nature of greenspace has ebbed and flowed during the ensuing four centuries. Therapeutic greenspaces were a feature of the ‘moral treatment’ introduced in the 18th century, which moved patients from squalor in ‘insane houses’ to country houses, giving them gardening and working on

allotments as therapy. Its use fell into decline in the age of the asylum and the discovery of psychiatric drugs, but it is now seeing a resurgence as society starts to look towards more holistic ways of care.

50. As one of the most instantly recognizable holiday advertisements of all time, 'The Jolly Fisherman' encouraged thousands of holidaymakers to take the new three-shilling excursion fare from Kings-Cross station in London to the seaside. Why is the seaside synonymous with health and relaxation? Four hundred years ago there were no piers, fair rides, or candyfloss to enjoy. For Burton, it is the change of air that brings temporary relief from melancholy, and the best air is the "sharp purifying air, which comes from the sea".

John Johnson Collection: Posters John Hassall  
*Skegness is so bracing!* (London, 1908)

51. This letter, from Lord Clarendon to his wife Katharine, was written during his visit to Balmoral Castle in 1856 by invitation of Queen Victoria. From his writing, the Scottish air, the beauty of his surroundings, and the range of outdoor pursuits have quite clearly had a

rejuvenating effect on Lord Clarendon – and according to his wife in later correspondence, made him feel twenty years younger!

Letter from the Foreign Secretary George Villiers, 4th earl of Clarendon, to his wife Katharine lady Clarendon, Balmoral, 2 September 1856  
MS. Eng. c. 2086, fol. 141

52. Humphrey Repton used innovative pop-up books to show clients detailed before and after views of their estates. Like many English landscape gardeners, Repton aimed to blur the boundary between the cultivated garden and untamed nature, creating sweeping vistas and views, with natural lakes and forests. Robert Burton also recognized this need for the natural world to be within sight (even if you don't own your own estate). His cures for melancholy include having access to a nice view, letting air into the house, and perfuming rooms with roses, violets, and sweet-smelling flowers.

Don. b.22

Humphry Repton, *Sketches and hints on landscape gardening* (London, 1794)

53. Burton urges the reader to seek out beautiful and interesting places, and 'To see the pleasant fields, the crystal fountains, And take the gentle air amongst the mountains.' But what, if like Burton himself, you don't travel? Burton says that he 'never travelled but in map or



card', exercising his fascination with distant places only through representations. Myrioramas were a popular parlour game in the 19th century. They contained a set of cards painted with landscapes and exotic destinations. These cards could be combined and rearranged in any order, creating a myriad of different scenes and panoramas.

Opie E 5

John Clarke, *Myriorama* (London, between 1824 and 1832)

54. 'One of the chief joys of watching [birds] in prison was that they inhabited another world than I'. John Buxton, Peter Conder and others were part of an extraordinary birdwatching club, formed at Oflag VI-B Prisoner of War Camp near Warburg in Germany during World War II. The POW birdwatchers collected thousands of observations on the nesting habits of the common redstart, rooks and jackdaws, writing on notebooks and scraps of paper sometimes given to them by the German guards. Even in the most difficult circumstances these men were able to use the study of nature as a therapeutic tool.

MS. 14967/2

Peter Conder, ornithologist diaries written in Germany, May 1944 – February 1945

55. This sermon by Charles Lamotte, chaplain to Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales, argues that the strongest proof of God's existence is nature and the natural world. Lamotte gives three examples of why this might be. First, because nature provides us with bountiful sustenance, which God has provided through the *Vegetable World*. Second, nature is able to provide the *good and happiness of mankind*. Third, through its provision of *health*, through exercise and herbal remedies. How could such beauty and complexity, Lamotte asks, be anything other than example of 'the great power and wisdom of their maker'?

John Johnson Collection: Horticulture 1

Charles Lamotte, *The greatness of God's works in the vegetable world* (Stamford, 1740)

# Spiritual Physic

Burton was a clergyman, and religion was at the heart of his conception of melancholy and of mental health. His inclusion of 'religious melancholy' as a species of the disease in the Anatomy was an innovation. He identifies and challenges dysfunctional practices and beliefs, from obsessive and compulsive behaviours around prayer, to crippling anxiety about salvation.

56. Burton saw a crucial role for prayer in relation to melancholy and times of crisis. As well as his solitary prayers, Burton's life as a priest and a Student (Fellow) at Christ Church would have involved daily rhythms of morning and evening prayer, and he would have led services according to set forms. Burton left to the Bodleian several books of prayers issued 'by authority' for specific occasions, including this one of 1625, issued for use in times of plague and as thanksgiving for being spared it.

40 P 4(7) Th.

*A short Forme of Thankesgiuing to God For staying the contagious sicknesse of the Plague* (London, 1625)

57. One of the subsections of the *Anatomy* addressed '*Spirits, bad Angels, or Devils, and how they cause Melancholy*', through delusions, encouragement of pride, false conviction of religious inspiration, or through stoking religious despair, convincing the melancholic of their damnation. This late medieval text on the *Art of Dying* counsels the reader how to resist the devil's temptation of vainglory and overconfidence in one's own faith.

Douce 75

*Ars Moriendi* (Leipzig, after 1500)

58. Burton's priestly duties included praying by daily reading of the Old Testament Psalms, a book of sacred poetry which expressed all the changing perspectives of an individual's relation to God and the world around them. Burton often quoted from it in the *Anatomy* to illustrate despair or repentance. This Arabic collection of Islamic psalms, attributed to the great-grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), addresses a range of human experiences, from seeking spiritual redemption, to financial worries and challenging relationships. *Du'ā' Makārim al-Akhlāq*, a psalm on the perfection of character, contains mirrors for self-reflection and behavioural self-analysis (starting on the lower left).

MS. Arab. e. 229

al-Ṣaḥīfath al-Sajjādiyyah, an 18th-century copy of the oldest extant collection of Islamic psalms.

59. Burton was much concerned with helping his readers find peace within the bombardment of stimulation and anxiety that the turbulence of life cast up. In this illustration to a Persian poem by Jāmī, the serenity of the Sufi master Abū Turāb Nakhshabī resting in the midst of a battle evokes calm on both sides, with all soldiers moved into bowing in meditative reflection. Similarly, mindfulness therapies can create a peaceful space, helping mental conflict to be calmed and the inner battlefield to fall silent, even for a short while.

MS. Elliott 149, fol. 147a

Poems by Jāmī (1414 –92), made in Persia, 2nd half of the 16th century.

It is a disease of the soul on which I am to treat, and as much appertaining to a divine as to a physician, and who knows not what an agreement there is betwixt these two professions? A good divine either is or ought to be a good physician, a spiritual physician

ANATOMY, DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR TO THE READER

For Burton, rather than focus on how superstition or the torments of an over scrupulous conscience might link religion to the causes and symptoms of melancholy, he saw the role of religion in cure. His vivid accounts of human experience illustrate the healing power of spirituality, if used correctly. The Anatomy ends with a disarmingly simple message: rather than embracing anxiety about salvation, do your best now and don't worry about a future beyond your control.

60. The dangers of an overactive mind are one of the reasons that Burton associates melancholy especially with students and scholars, who are often solitary. Buddhist images in a Thai folding book illustrate themes of mindfulness, meditation and reflective study, all in a communal context. The relational aspect of meditating in a group is a feature of modern mindfulness-based psychotherapies, including the role of a guide who facilitates self-discovery. Benefits of group dynamics

are increasingly recognized as important for managing mental health.

MS. Pali a 27(R)

Thai Buddhist manuscript of chanting practices in Pali on bark paper, 18th century.

61. Burton frequently cites Ecclesiastes in the *Anatomy*, sometimes for its remarks on the vanity of the world, sometimes for its claims that to everything, there is a season, and sometimes for advice. As part of Biblical wisdom literature, *Kohelet*, as it is known in the Hebrew tradition, has been a source for personal development across the ages. There is particular focus on identifying thinking patterns – specifically negative thoughts consisting of vain or futile preoccupations, both hidden and manifest.

MS. Canonici Or. 42

Pentateuch with Haftaret (selections from the books of Prophets) and Five Scrolls, Moura (Portugal), 1470

62. Psalm 88 cries out to and against God: 'Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles', the speaker begs, while asking 'Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?' Like Job's complaints in his affliction, the Psalm stays in relation to the Divine even

in loneliness and desolation. The approach has important parallels to modern psychotherapy, whereby there is an honest acknowledgement of reality as it is, rather than as the person may wish it to be.

MS. Oppenheim Add. 8° 10

Hebrew Bible: Book of Psalms, Spain, late 15th century

63. The dialogue between Arjuna and his guide Krishna in Hindu scripture can be viewed as a metaphor for the therapeutic encounter in modern psychological approaches to managing depression. Such interactions prompt self-evaluation, particularly in relation to moral conundrums and ethical dilemmas. The overall call is to mindful awareness and selfless action.

MS. Fraser Sansk. 41a

Bhagavad Gita. 18th-century paper scroll, to be carried as an amulet.

64. This venerated text is open at Stanza 116, which advocates meditation and reflection in order to perceive subtle realities: for instance, directly perceiving how the Spirit or Self is distinct from its gross, subtle and causal bodies, and that it is a portion of the one Spirit of the Universe (Brahma).

MS. Ind. Inst. Sansk. 72

Shikshapatri, believed to have been donated in 1830 by Lord Swaminarayan to Sir John Malcolm, then governor of Bombay.



For all the physic we can use, art, excellent industry, is to no purpose  
without calling upon God.

ANATOMY 2.I.2.I

Burton's ideas resonate with current research in Faith Informed Therapy at the Department of Psychiatry at Oxford. This approach utilizes contact points between religion and psychotherapy. The items chosen for display illustrate how faith communities over millennia have employed religious concepts and practices to manage mental health, with specific focus on alleviating rumination and worry, while encouraging living with presence and purpose.

65. The Book of Job in the Hebrew Bible tells the story of a prosperous and fortunate man whose faith is tested in catastrophic losses, of his wealth, health, family, and friends. In the midst of Job's preoccupation with his woes and loss of faith, God speaks to him from a whirlwind, unlocking the shackles that kept his mind locked in rumination, awakening his sense of God's power, and leading him to repentance and renewed prosperity. William Blake's image of Job's awakening has powerful connections with modern psychotherapy, empowering the individual through a renewed sense of self and reframing perspectives.

William Blake, Illustrations of the Book of Job (London, 1825)

By Permission of the President and Fellows of Trinity College, Oxford.

“Wine and music rejoice the heart”... a roaring-meg against melancholy, to rear and revive the languishing soul

ANATOMY 2.2.6.3

Mirth and merry company may not be separated from music

ANATOMY 2.2.6.4

Burton viewed music as a powerful cure for melancholy. He cites multiple sources in support of the use of music, highlighting its ability to enhance mood in even the most severely affected individuals. He recognized the mood-inducing effects of music and the paradoxically positive role this could play.

66. *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs of sadness and pietie* was William Byrd's first publication of consort songs. These were popular songs usually performed by a solo voice accompanied by instruments. Byrd added words to other instrumental parts to enable these to become part songs. In the preface to the book Byrd outlines all the reasons that people should sing: 'If thou bee disposed to pray, heere are *Psalmes*. If to bee merrie, heere are *Sonets*. If to lament for thy sins, heere are songs of sadnesse and *Pietie*.'

(OC) 85 d.8

William Byrd, *Psalmes, sonets, & songs of sadnes and pietie* (London, 1588)

67. Before the Reformation, singers might typically perform from one shared choirbook, placed on a lectern. Later, printers produced part books and table books to help singers and instrumentalists perform music together in harmony at home. In table books, each part would be printed at a different angle so that performers around the table could see their own individual parts.

Arch. A c.14 (1)

John Maynard, *The XII wonders of the world* (London, 1611)

Many men are melancholy by hearing music, but it is a pleasing melancholy that it causeth; and therefore to such as are discontent, in woe, fear, sorrow, or dejected, it is a most present remedy: it expels cares, alters their grieved minds, and easeth in an instant

ANATOMY 2.2.6.3

68. *An Antidote against Melancholy* was a famous songbook which was repeatedly expanded and republished to become a six-volume edition. The title refers to the songs as 'pills' which will cure melancholy, making the music medicinal. Thomas D'Urfey, Henry Purcell and John Blow were among the composers who contributed ballads to the collection.

Douce P 690

*An Antidote against Melancholy: Made up in Pills. Compounded of Witty Ballads, Jovial Songs, and Merry Catches* (London, 1661)

69a – b. Small enough to carry in the pocket, books like these offer the reader merry tales and witty epigrams, to drive away melancholy. There is evidence that laughter has health benefits by reducing stress and is possibly anti-inflammatory. Despite the traditional association of comedians with mood disorders – the idea of the ‘sad clown’ – it has not been scientifically confirmed whether they are at greater risk. Burton saw music and mirth or laughter as intimately linked. He donated many works to the Bodleian in the category of ‘Ridicularia’, or laughable books.

Lawn f.853

William Marshall, *Recreation for ingenious head-peeces* (London, 1645)

Wood 259 (7)

William Winstanley, *The delectable history of poor Robin the merry sadler of Walden* (London, 1688?)

70. Recorders, like this 17th-century example, would have been a familiar sound when Burton was writing *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. They are amongst the more accessible musical instruments, and are widely used today in school settings to introduce children to the experience of creating music together. Participatory music is thought to enhance wellbeing via a number of different mechanisms: providing a means of emotional

expression and connection, relaxation, enabling the experience of emotional states without feeling overwhelmed, and as a source of catharsis.

Ivory recorder made by John Goddard of London, later 17th century.  
Bate Collection, University of Oxford

none so present, none so powerful, none so apposite as a cup of strong drink, mirth, music, and merry company.

ANATOMY 2.2.6.3

Burton highlighted the use of music in social contexts and the way in which music, food, and company come together with cheering effect. Burton also described the broader impacts of music on wellbeing, all familiar to this day: its multiple effects on soothing children at night, its role in treating insomnia, the use of song in the workplace, and its use by soldiers to allay the fear of death.

71. From the medieval period to our own, ballads were a popular form of music, which circulated news, narrative, and lively and bawdy wit. Although predominantly transmitted orally, from the 16th century they also began to circulate in print. This ballad published in 1844 focuses

on the role of singing in the treatment of melancholy, and became a popular duet. The tune may be familiar to modern audiences from the end of Act 1 of Mozart's Magic Flute. This particular copy was hand-printed at the Bodleian Library's Bibliographical Press especially for the exhibition. Letterpress printing like this was the technology used to print the Anatomy, and involves composing individual metal letters into a page of type.

'Away with melancholy', a printed ballad (Oxford, 2021)

Original artwork created by Olivia Twist, 2021

72. This etching of 1818 captures the social role of music. Social contact is important in the maintenance of mental wellbeing and the social aspect of music was something Burton was keen to emphasise. Taking part in musical activities has been found to improve self-confidence, enhance social networks and provide social support. Like the ballad, this picture demonstrates the use of poetry and music as cures for melancholy. A number of studies have shown that music can improve depressive symptoms and reduce the risk of developing low mood.

John Johnson Collection: Music 1

*An amateur party* (1818)

Cardan calls a library the physic of the soul.

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

In the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton evokes the power of both writing and reading: in writing the *Anatomy* he eases his own mind; and reading is at its heart. It is a book made of readings of other books which also presents itself as therapy for the reader: an absorbing distraction for the distressed mind. In the 18th century, Dr Samuel Johnson turned to the *Anatomy* in his repeated depressions, declaring it was 'the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise'.

73. C. S. Lewis bought this copy of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* in July 1918. He was just 19, a soldier in World War I, and recovering from battle wounds. It is interesting that he turned to Burton in the midst of such trauma. Later, Lewis would call Burton's *Anatomy* 'a gossipy, formless book which can be opened anywhere'. It was one of his favourites for mealtime reading. Lewis liked to annotate his books: 'To enjoy a book ... thoroughly I find I have to treat it as a sort of hobby. ... I put a running headline at the top of each page: finally I index at the end all the passages I have for any reason underlined ...

one is making something all the time and a book so read acquires the charm of a toy without losing that of a book.'

Uncatalogued

C. S. Lewis's annotated copy of Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1907)

74. In this beautiful book, Jackie Morris, one of Britain's most talented contemporary artists and illustrators, pictures herself as an apothecary, encouraging us to 'take one story last thing at night before bed'. She has made two versions of the book; one 'silent', without text, so that the reader can create their own therapeutic writing around her paintings.

Jackie Morris, *The Unwinding: and other dreamings*' (London, 2020)

Jackie Morris, *The Silent Unwinding: and other dreamings*' (London, 2020)

75. In July 1960, C. S. Lewis – scholar, Christian apologist, and Narnia author – lost his wife Joy Davidman to cancer. Two years earlier she had seemed to miraculously recover. Lewis, who had lost his mother to cancer when he was just nine, was overcome with pain. *A Grief Observed* is his raw, honest account of confronting God as he struggled to understand his loss.



*No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.*

Dep. c. 763

C. S. Lewis, autograph fair copy of 'A Grief Observed' (published 1961).

76 a – b. In July 1822, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, aged 29, drowned when his small boat capsized in a storm off the Italian coast. In her grief, desolation and despair, his wife, Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*, started this 'Journal of Sorrow': 'White paper – wilt thou be my confidant? I will trust thee fully, for none shall see what I write.' The portrait shows Mary wearing blue-and-yellow pansies, the symbol of remembrance which she adopted after Shelley's death.

MS. Abinger d. 30

Mary Shelley, 'Journal of Sorrow', Oct. 1822.

Shelley relics (d)

Portrait of Mary Shelley by Reginald Easton, 1885–93

saith Seneca ... “To be at leisure without books is another hell, and to be buried alive.”

ANATOMY 2.2.4.1

‘Bibliotherapy’ (therapeutic reading) and ‘scriptotherapy’ (therapeutic writing about traumatic or painful experiences) have now entered the world of modern mental health care. There is strong interest and scientific research into in the power of reading and writing as therapy for ‘melancholy’, or ‘depressive disorder’ as we would now call it. This section considers authors and readers who have turned to the written page to ease their sorrow.

77. In this rough draft, Wilfred Owen is in the act of composing one of the most famous of his WWI poems. In it he shows the reader traumatic images of a man being gassed in the trenches. Owen said his subject was ‘the pity of war distilled’, and writing the poems was seen as potentially therapeutic by his doctor. Owen wrote this poem at Craiglockhart hospital in 1917.

MS. 12282/4

Wilfred Owen, one several manuscripts of ‘Dulce et Decorum est’. 1917

78. *The Hydra* was the magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital, Edinburgh, where poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were treated for the psychological damage of warfare, then called 'shell shock', now termed 'post traumatic stress disorder'. Writing about war trauma was encouraged by Owen's psychiatrist, Dr Arthur Brock, and some of his most famous poems were written there. Owen was one of the magazine's editors.

MS. 12282/35

*The Hydra*, No.1, November 1917.

79. In a letter to his mother from the World War I trenches, Harold Macmillan, later British Prime Minister, tells her what he is reading for solace, after bomb-making practice. What a person reads for comfort is a very individual matter. Macmillan's list includes Homer's *Iliad* 'to keep me civilized', the poems of Emily Brontë, and three Shakespeare plays.

MS. Macmillan dep. d. 1/1, fol. 54v.

Harold Macmillan, letter to his mother, 10 September 1915. 81.

On 10 September Macmillan described his practice bomb-making activities, and then lists his library which he thinks is 'wide and liberal'. It included:

*'The Bible*

*The Imitation of Christ*

*The Confessions of S. Augustine*

*The Iliad*

*Theocritus*

*Horace. Odes and Epodes.*

*Poet's Walk*

*Henry IV*

*Twelfth Night*

*The Winter's Tale*

*The Poems of Emily Bronte*

*Maxim Gorky's "Les Vagabonds"*

*The Shaving of Shagput (Meredith) Lalage's*

*Lovers (G. Birmingham)*

*The Ring and the Book*

*Ruskin's Sesame & Lilies & Crown of Wild Olive*

*I shall try to send back some which I have read and should like to preserve. I have written inside*

*France. Sept. 1915.*

*and they will be curious and (I hope) interesting tomes in the library which I trust will one day astonish Europe for its rare combination of elegance and learning.'*

80. Charles Dickens's humorous novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) was translated into Russian in 1850. This battered and bloodstained copy was found with a Russian soldier who fell in the Crimean War (1853–56) – he must have taken it to the battlefield as a comforting source of stress relief.

Arch. BB d.6

Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, trans. into Russian by Irinarkh Vvedensky (St Petersburg, 1850)

81. This painting of a young woman shows her absorbed in her book. The model, known as the convalescent, was repeatedly painted by the artist over a number of years. It is a powerful image of the healing power of reading.

Gwen John, 'The Convalescent' (c. 1919–1926)

The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Burton recommends reading in cases of melancholy. During 2021 we asked Bodleian audiences what they read through periods of lockdown. Responses included P.G. Wodehouse 'to lift the spirits', the travel books of Wilfred Thesiger and Robert MacFarlane, and the crime novels of Dorothy L. Sayers.

What have you found helpful to read whenever you have wanted comfort or to ease your mind? Tell us why it helped.

# **MELANCHOLY: A NEW ANATOMY**

was curated by a multi-disciplinary curatorial team of scientists and researchers from Oxford University.

## **Department of Psychiatry:**

Professor John Geddes; Gulamabbas Lakha; Dr Phil Burnet; Dr Joseph Butler; Dr Stephen Puntis; Dr Kate Saunders

## **Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences:**

Dr Simon Kyle

## **Faculty of English:**

Dr Richard Lawes; Dr Kathryn Murphy

**Be not solitary, be not idle**

*ANATOMY 3.4.2.6*