

If you walk east down the central aisle of Christ Church Cathedral, you will find on your left-hand side, facing west, a monument to Robert Burton, the author of one of the most famous of English books, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621). It is not immediately obvious that the monument is to Burton, as the inscription—which Burton himself probably wrote—memorialises someone called ‘Democritus Junior’, that is to say the literary persona who addresses the reader in *The Anatomy*: ‘Democritus to the reader’. It is a striking translation of literary artifice into funereal fact: Burton was so confident of his reputation and authority in his college and his chapel that he could design a monument not to himself, but to his literary *alter ego*.

The Anatomy of Melancholy is the most bookish of books: its author remained in Christ Church for his whole adult life—‘I have lived a silent, sedentary, solitary, private life, *mihi et musis* in the University’—and he travelled the world ‘but in a Mappe or Card’. From 1624 until his death he also served as his college’s librarian, a post which in other colleges tended to rotate. It was this library, his own library, and the Bodleian library upon which he chiefly drew when compiling his encyclopedically learned *Anatomy*. Upon his death his own personal library of

1638, 1651. Indeed, printers at Edinburgh attempted to cash in on the book's success, and the 1638 edition actually comprises a book half-printed at Edinburgh, seized and suppressed before it was completed, carried unfinished as it was to London, and then sent to Oxford where the remainder was printed—and the result bound up and sold as an 'Oxford' book!³ Burton expanded his book massively in his lifetime, i.e. to the fifth edition, from about 350,000 to over 515,000 words. That is in modern terms about six doctoral theses back to back.

It is also notable that various fragments of the proof sheets of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* have been found used as waste paper in the bindings of several books in Oxford, especially of the fourth, 1632 edition. There are pieces of the fourth edition marked up by Burton himself with corrections in the binding of an All Souls book, a Queen's book, two books in Oriel, two in St John's—and one in New College.⁴

So it seems reasonable to suppose that one Oxford binder had in his workshop a

inscription is also rather useful, as, being placed on an end-paper coming just before the Burton fragments at the front of the book, it must post-date the act of binding, and therefore it is obvious that the books were bound first and then sold to the college for that sum; the inscription was presumably made by the purchasing librarian, and so we know to the very day when the college acquired this copy

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