

## Frye and Robert Burton

*Not previously published.*

*From my point of view the greatest book ever written at Oxford is the Anatomy of Melancholy. (Bible, 132)*

## I

In responding to a question by David Cayley about the use of the word “anatomy,” Frye reveals the very high estimate he has of Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*:

The word *anatomy* in Shakespeare’s day and a little later meant a dissection for a synthetic overview. One of my favorite books in English literature—there are times when it is actually my favorite—is Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Of course, there were four humors then, but for Burton there was only the one, melancholy. That was the source of all mental and physical diseases in the world. So he writes an enormous survey of human life. It ranks with Chaucer and Dickens, except the characters are books rather than people. It was both an analysis of the causes and cures and treatment of melancholy and a kind of synthetic overview of human nature before it gets melancholy. On a much smaller scale there was Lyly’s *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, which has given us the word *euphuism*, meaning that if you’re too bright and don’t know enough you can get into trouble. That use of the term *anatomy* was one that I thought exactly fitted what I was doing.” (*Interviews*, 936–7)<sup>1</sup>

The title *Anatomy of Criticism* is obviously indebted to Burton, but the title was assigned to the book late in the publication process. John Ayre reports that Frye’s earliest working title for the book was *A Defense of Poetics* (253), though this is not a title Frye ever uses in his notebooks or diaries of the time. When he sent the manuscript off to Princeton in June 1955, it was called *Structural Poetics: Four Essays*. After Princeton issued a contract four months later, Frye’s editor at Princeton, Benjamin Houston, asked him to consider changing the title and adding a conclusion and a glossary. Frye assented, suggesting that the book be called *Structure as Criticism*. But after the editorial staff at Princeton registered its strong opposition to that, he eventually settled on *Anatomy of Criticism*, one of the thirteen titles that Houston had offered as possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

It seems likely that Frye first encountered Burton’s *Anatomy* in Herbert Davis’s course on satire that he signed up for during his second year at Emmanuel College (1934–35).<sup>3</sup> Almost sixty years later—in *The Great Code*—Frye remarks: “I retain my special affection for the literary genre I have called the anatomy, especially for Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, with its schematic arrangements that are hardly those of any systematic medical treatment of melancholy, and yet correspond to something in the mind that yields a perhaps even deeper kind of comprehension. Such books as Burton’s have an extraordinary pulling power: I understand very well what Samuel Johnson meant by saying that Burton’s was the only book that got him out of bed earlier than he wanted to” (*Great*, 15).<sup>4</sup>

## II

Frye's interest in the anatomy as a form of prose goes back to his teenage years. He reports that during the summer after his third year at Victoria College—the summer of 1932—“an embryonic anatomy theory began to shape itself in my notes” (*Fiction*, 28).<sup>5</sup> By the time he came to write “An Inquiry into the Art Forms of Prose Fiction” (*Student*, 383–400), he had Burton's *Anatomy* firmly in his possession. The date of this paper is uncertain, but it seems likely it was written for Davis's satire course (1934–35), just mentioned. Frye's ideas on the anatomy continued to gestate during his Oxford years (1936–37, 1938–39): in a 1937 letter, he wrote to Helen Kemp that he had read his “anatomy paper” to his Merton College tutor Edmund Blunden” (*Correspondence*, 693). This paper was doubtless “An Inquiry into the Art Forms of Prose Fiction,” or a version of it.<sup>6</sup> Then in 1942, ten years after the “anatomy theory” had begun to take shape, Frye produced his first major published essay, “The Anatomy in Prose Fiction” (*Educated*, 23–38), in which Burton plays a central role. This is followed eight years later by “The Four Forms of Prose Fiction” (*ibid.*, 77–89), part 3 of which is devoted to the anatomy. Meanwhile, Frye was teaching Burton's *Anatomy* in English 2i: English Poetry and Prose, 1500–1660. “The Four Forms” in turn got incorporated into the fourth essay of *Anatomy of Criticism*, where Frye's “discovery” of the prose form received much wider attention. In short, Frye developed his ideas about the anatomy over the course of some twenty years. His discovery was assisted by Dryden's account of Varronian and Menippean satire in his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693), selections of which Frye quotes in “The Anatomy in Prose Fiction” (*ibid.*, 25–6).

In “An Inquiry into the Art Forms of Prose Fiction” Frye sees the anatomy as related to fiction and drama but differing from them in its effort to build up an argument or attitude. It is similar to the essay in its interest in ideas: the essay develops an idea, while the anatomy interweaves a number of ideas. Because *anatomy* is a literary term, it can apply to any kind of writing in any field that has survived because of its literary value. Anatomies reveal the interests or outlooks of the author, as in satires and Utopias or other abstract, conceptual, or generalized attitudes to human personality or society. Such interests are prior to the strict requirements of philosophy or psychology. Anatomies always reveal an intellectual interest, and they display their authors' erudition. They begin, Frye writes, in the Renaissance with Cornelius Agrippa's *Vanity of the Arts and Sciences*, followed by Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae*, More's *Utopia*, and Castiglione's *Courtier*. On the continent, the culminating development is Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and in England Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (*Student*, 390–1).

The extension of the word *anatomy* from its literal zoological context (dissection of the body; first used in English in this sense in 1540) to its figurative sense of an analysis of nonanatomical things goes back a long way. The OED notes that Aristotle used *ἀνατομή* for logical analysis. Today, of course, the use of *anatomy* in the sense of detailed analysis or examination is widespread. A title search for “anatomy of” in WorldCat turns up more than 31,000 book references. Burton gives “honorable precedents” for his *Anatomy*, citing Anthony Zara's *Anatomy of Wit* (orig. *Anatomia ingeniorum et scientiarum*, 1615), and in a note he lists three more “anatomies”: *The Anatomy of Popery*, *The Anatomy of Immortality*, and Angelus Sala's *Anatomy of Antimony* (1609) (*Anatomy of Melancholy*, 16). Anatomies became something of a fad in the sixteenth century,<sup>7</sup> and during Burton's lifetime (1577–1640) at least twenty-one other “anatomies” appeared.<sup>8</sup> Although the immediate end of the anatomy is dissection or analysis, its ultimate end is synthesis. It “depends far more [than the novel] on rhythmic integration; it is essentially a synthetic form of art, as the emphasis is thrown on construction rather than analysis” (*Student*, 394).

Frye was in his early twenties when he wrote “An Inquiry,” and the features of the anatomy outlined there were not substantially altered in his subsequent treatments of the form, culminating in his expanded definition of the genre in the *Anatomy*. What does appear in his subsequent treatments

is an effort to trace the beginning of the anatomy back beyond the Renaissance to the Classical Menippean satire, which is a kind of subspecies of the anatomy. But as Frye reflected on the features of the anatomy from 1934 to 1957, his several discussions do introduce variations in his accounts of these features.<sup>9</sup> Here is a summary account of those features, along with a brief commentary on Burton from each of Frye's four treatments of the anatomy:

A. "An Inquiry into the Art Forms of Prose Fiction" (1934–35)

Features of the anatomy

1. individualistic
2. generalized characters and narrative; story and character subordinated to argument or attitude
3. ordered arrangement of a subject or point of view; presents a thesis
4. a synthesis of ideas
5. whatever its disciplinary thrust, survives through literary value
6. builds up author's attitude to a subject (*Religio Medici* or *Areopagitica*) or works out author's attitude to society (satire or Utopia)
7. displays erudition

Burton's *Anatomy*

"[T]he anatomy in England reached its culmination with Burton. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is not a book of Burton; it is Burton's book; the complete expression of his personality. Needless to say, all the characteristics of the anatomy we have noted are in it: Utopian scheme, erudition, view of mankind through the generalized technique provided by the theory of humours, ordered presentation of a subject, and the rest, except that what we find partial in other anatomists we find complete in him. It is perhaps noteworthy that the anatomy in its largest and most highly developed and concentrated forms tends to become *the* book of its author rather than one of many; Burton, Rabelais, perhaps Sterne, being examples. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is divided like a prelude and fugue; the prelude, the introduction of Democritus to the reader, being free in style, and the anatomy being capable of exhaustive analysis on a general threefold scheme. The metaphor is not altogether an irresponsible one, for both the anatomy and the contemporary fugue in music are, in different arts, the working out of the implications of a given subject and the organizing of them into a rhythmic unit" (*Student*, 392).

B. "The Anatomy in Prose Fiction" (1942)

Features of the anatomy

1. sets ideas, generalization, theories, dogmas over against the life they are intended to explain
2. a professional, scholarly, clerical "criticism of life"
3. bookish and filled with quotes from anatomist's predecessors
4. stylized, stereotyped characters
5. analogous to the dialectic method
6. develops the quality of creative detachment
7. skeptical about religious ideas
8. attacks social conventions
9. encyclopaedic farrago; compendium of erudition
10. frequent use of obscenity; riotous chaos

Burton's *Anatomy*:

“[N]ot until Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* did the Menippean satire become an integral part of English literature” (*Educated*, 34)

The connection of this book with the encyclopedic farrago is obvious enough, but the absence of any *cena* setting, dialogue, or narrative might lead us to suspect Burton’s literary claims. A closer examination will soon undeceive us. Burton’s title of ‘Democritus Junior,’ borrowed from Erasmus, marks his Menippean ambitions clearly enough, and in the love-melancholy section, the most revised and expanded of all, quotations from Athenaeus, Lucian, Erasmus, and Agrippa pour off his pen. His introduction contains a Utopia: his digressions illustrate scholarly distillations of the main features of the tradition: the digression of air, of the marvellous journey; the digression of spirits, of the ironic use of the occult; the digression of the miseries of scholars, of the clerical satire. His lists of diseases and manias are not exactly obscene, but they contain enough of the material of obscenity to achieve much the same artistic effect as the catalogues of torcheculs and epithets of codpieces in *Gargantua*. The long lists of articles of diet take us back to Athenaeus, and there is a good deal, such as the string of consolatory phrases in the *Remedies of Discontents* section, which reflects only the magpie impulse to collect we have found to be related to the form. In all cases, of course, the method is that of the exhaustive catalogue of conflicting authorities also used by Rabelais.

In short, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is not a medical treatise which has accidentally survived in literature because of its style: it is not a freak of fantastic erudition; it is not a scholar’s crib or vademecum. It is exactly the same kind of encyclopedic survey of a mad world we have found *The Praise of Folly* and *The Vanity of the Arts and Sciences* to be, except that it is longer and more comprehensive. Not a single feature of our form is missing from it: not even the dialogue, for quotations from books can speak as eloquently of the confusion of the wise as table talk. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is as truly prose fiction as a tale of Poe or a novel of Thackeray. Hooker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity* and Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* may be works on theology and philosophy of great literary merit; but *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is literature itself, and it is high time that Burton was dragged into the central and commanding literary position he ought to hold. He is our greatest prose artist between Malory and Swift; his book is to Elizabethan prose what *The Faerie Queene* is to its poetry; he put the most comprehensive criticism of life into one book that English literature had seen since that Chaucer whom he delights to call ‘our English Homer’” (*Educated*, 34–5).

#### C. “The Four Forms of Prose Fiction” (1950)

Features of the anatomy

1. deals with people as mental attitudes (humours)
2. concerned with abstract ideas and theories
3. sees evil and folly as diseases of the intellect
4. loose-jointed narrative form
5. relies on free play of intellectual fancy and humorous observation that produces caricature
6. conceives of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern
7. contains violent dislocations of narrative logic
8. piles up an enormous mass of erudition

Burton’s *Anatomy*:

“This creative treatment of exhaustive erudition is the organizing principle of the greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift, Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Here human society is studied in terms of the intellectual pattern provided by the conception of melancholy, a symposium of books replaces dialogue, and the result is the most comprehensive survey of human life in one

book that English literature had seen since Chaucer, one of Burton's favourite authors. We may note in passing the Utopia in his introduction and his 'digressions,' which when examined turn out to be scholarly distillations of Menippean forms: the digression of air, of the marvellous journey; the digression of spirits, of the ironic use of erudition; the digression of the miseries of scholars, of the satire on the *philosophus gloriosus*. The word 'anatomy' in Burton's title means a dissection or analysis, and expresses very accurately the intellectualized approach of his form. We may as well adopt it as a convenient name to replace the cumbersome and in modern times rather misleading 'Menippean satire'" (*Educated*, 86).

#### D. *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957)

Features of the anatomy

1. intellectualized and extroverted form
2. dominant role of theoretical interest
3. stylized characters that represent mental attitudes they express
4. loose-jointed narrative form
5. relies on free-play of intellectual fancy
6. contains humorous observation that produces caricature; thus, tends toward satire

Burton's *Anatomy*. In *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye incorporates the paragraph above about Burton's *Anatomy* from "The Four Forms of Prose Fiction" (*Anatomy*, 291–2).

### III

The anatomy as a form of prose fiction is much less extensive than, say, the novel or the romance, but as Frye continued to spot anatomies and anatomists over the years the class expanded substantially, as we see in the followings lists:

#### Works Designated as Anatomies and Writers as Anatomists by Frye

Agrippa, Cornelius, *Vanity of the Arts and Sciences* (1530)  
 Amory, Thomas, *The Life of John Buncl* (1756–66)  
 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* (2nd cent. C.E.)  
 Berkeley, George, *Siris* (1744)  
 Blake, William, *Island of the Moon* (1784)  
 Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (ca. 524)  
 Browne, Sir Thomas, *Religio Medici* (1642); *Urn Burial* (1658)  
 Burton, Robert, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621)  
 Butler, Samuel, *Erewhon* (1872); *Erewhon Revisited* (1901)  
 Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871)  
 Castiglione, Baldassare, *The Book of the Courtier* (1528)  
 Earle, John, *Microcosmography* (1628)  
 Erasmus, Desiderius, *In Praise of Folly* (1511); *A Fish Diet* (1526)  
 Flaubert, Gustav, *Bouvard et Pecuchet* (1881)  
 Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World* (1932); *Chrome Yellow* (1921); *Antic Hay* (1923); *Point Counter Point* (1928)  
 Kingsley, Charles, *The Water-Babies* (1863)  
 Landor, Walter, *Imaginary Conversations* (1824)

Lucian, *Sale of Lives*; *Symposium*; *Alexander the False Prophet*; *Kataplous*; *Charon* (2nd cent. C.E.)  
 Lull, Ramon, *Blanquerna* (1283–84)  
 Lyly, John, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578)  
 More, Sir Thomas, *Utopia* (1516)  
 Macrobius, *Saturnalia* (5th cent. C.E.)  
 Peacock, Thomas Love, *Headlong Hall* (1816); *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829); *Crochet Castle* (1841)  
 Petronius, *Satyricon* (1st cent. C.E.)  
 Sidney, Sir Philip, *Arcadia* (1581–84)  
 Southey, Robert, *The Doctor* (1834–47)  
 Stubbes, Philip, *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583)  
 Swift, Jonathan, *The Battle of the Books* (1704); *Gulliver's Travels* (1726); *A Tale of a Tub* (1704)  
 Voltaire, François Marie Arouet de, *Candide* (1759); *Diatribes of Dr. Akakia* (1753); *L'Ingénu* (1767)  
 Varro  
 Walton, Izaak, *The Compleat Angler* (1653)  
 Wilson, John, et al., *Noctes Ambrosianae* (1822–35)

*Short form*: dialogue or colloquy, as in Erasmus, Voltaire; *cena* or symposium

### Hybrid Forms

#### Novel–Anatomy

Borrow, George, *Lavengro* (1851); *The Romany Rye* (1857)  
 Briffault, Robert Stephen, *Europa* (1935)  
 Bunyan, John, *Grace Abounding* (1666)  
 Disraeli, Benjamin  
 Eliot, George, later novels  
 James, Henry, *The Ambassadors* (1903)  
 Lawrence, D.H., *The Plumed Serpent* (1926)  
 Meredith, George, *The Egoist* (1879)  
 Peacock, Thomas Love  
 Sterne, Laurence, *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67)  
 Proletarian novels of the 1930s

#### Romance–Anatomy

Melville, Herman, *Moby Dick* (1851)  
 Rabelais, François, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–35)

#### Confession–Anatomy

Carlyle, Thomas, *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34)  
 Kierkegaard, Søren, *Either-Or* (1843)  
 Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de, *Essays* (1580–95)

#### Novel–Romance–Anatomy

Cervantes, Miguel de, *Don Quixote* (1605–15)

#### Novel–Confession–Anatomy

Proust, Marcel, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27)

#### Romance–Confession–Anatomy

Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (2nd cent. C.E.)

#### Novel–Romance–Confession–Anatomy

Joyce, James, *Ulysses* (1922)

### Congeners

Works, including poems, not strictly anatomies by one or more of Frye's definitions of the form but which have certain family resemblances to the Menippean satire or anatomy:

Barclay, John, *Euphormionis Satyricon* (1603)  
 Bellamy, Edward, *Looking Backward* (1888)  
 Borrow, George, *The Bible in Spain* (1843); *Wild Wales* (1862)  
 Browning, Robert, *Sludge the Medium* (1864)  
 Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678–84)  
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80)  
 Doughty, Charles Montagu, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1843)  
 Dryden, John, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681); *MacFlecknoe* (1682); *Religio Laici* (1682)  
 Erasmus, Desiderius, *Adagia* (1500); *Colloquies* (1516)  
 Fletcher, Phineas, *The Purple Island* (1633)  
 Gellius, Aulus, *Attic Nights* (2nd cent. C.E.)  
 Galsworthy, John, *The Forsythe Sage* (1922)  
 Mann, Thomas, *Joseph and His Brethren* (1933–43)  
 Martianus Capella, *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (5th cent. C.E.)  
 Morris, William  
 Pithou, Pierre, et al., *Satire Menippée* (16th cent.)  
 Plato, *Symposium* (ca. 385–380 B.C.E.)  
 Rolland, Romain, *Jean-Christophe* (10 vols., 1904–12)  
 Romans, Jules, *Men of Good Will* (14 vols., 1932–46)  
 Voltaire, François Marie Arouet de, *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764)  
 Wells, H.G.

### IV

Burton represented for Frye the kind of “slightly nutty fantasy” that had been a characteristic of Oxford's eccentric bachelors for centuries: “when one examines,” he wrote in 1972, “the great imaginative productions of Oxford, such works as *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *Alice in Wonderland*, one sees . . . a hyperlogical fantasy which teeters on the brink of normal mental processes. That, of course, throws a flood of light on a number of other Oxford geniuses, such as Pater and Hopkins” (*Education*, 470). But Burton represented for Frye much more than an example of Oxford's *genius loci*. He was also attracted to Burton because of his verbal exuberance, his style (including the easygoing lilt of his musical rhythm), his encyclopedism, his sense of humor, and his creative and pensive melancholy. Burton's *Anatomy* for Frye was inexhaustible in its breadth and depth, and it became another of those many books, such as Frazer's *Golden Bough* or Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, that have undergone in time a change in genre. In Burton's case, what began as a medical treatise evolved into a literary one. This is not a function of its style, although Frye describes the features of Burton's style in some detail, but the result of the features it shares with other Menippean satires.

Several similarities between Frye and Burton suggest themselves. Both were clergymen. Both spent their entire professional lives in a single university. Both had very bookish minds. Both had a keen sense of humor.<sup>10</sup> And both saw their work, in Montaigne's phrase, as consubstantial with themselves,<sup>11</sup> each being possessed by what Frye calls a “dream of all one's work forming a single structure,” “a speaking or written double of himself” (*Late*, 555). Burton continued to revise

and expand the original 1621 version of his book. He issued five different editions during his lifetime, and a sixth, published after his death, incorporated further additions and emendations. Frye's "single structure" was somewhat different. He produced a number of separate books, but they all took their place in an eight-part framework he called his ogdoad, a dream that gave a schematic direction to his life's work. Both, moreover, were given to what Frye calls "verbal outline": "the quality I so admire in Burton and struggle for myself is verbal *outline*, a verbal analogy of powerful sketching that contains a great mass of facts" (*Third*, 25). Finally, both Burton and Frye suffered from melancholy. In response to David Caley's question about whether he had experienced melancholy, Frye replied: "To the extent that I was poor and very much thrown back on myself, yes. But there are two sides to that, the side of alienation and the side of self-reliance. If there's nobody else but yourself, you have to depend on yourself. Burton has a long episode on miseries of scholars, which I certainly reacted to at one time" (*Interviews*, 937).

In a 1962 address to the American Psychiatric Association, "The Imaginative and the Imaginary," Frye examines the theme of melancholy in *Hamlet*, the "most fascinating" play of the Renaissance, and then he turns to Burton, whom he is fond of quoting at length. Here we can let them both speak (at some length), Frye's own quotations from Burton describing first the lover's mistress and then a case of hysteria:

Not only the most fascinating play of the period [*Hamlet*], but its greatest prose work (in England), has melancholy for its theme. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is an exhaustive analysis of the causes, symptoms, treatment, and cure of melancholy, with two enormous appendices on love melancholy and religious melancholy. Burton was an Oxford don, and his chief amusement is said to have been going down to the Isis river and listening to the bargemen swear. The story may be true, or it may have been invented by someone who noticed that the qualities of Burton's prose, with its vast catalogues, piled-up epithets, Latin tags, allusiveness, and exhaustive knowledge of theology and personal hygiene, are essentially the qualities of good swearing. Burton assumes rather than discusses the connection of melancholy with creative power: being a scholar himself, like Hamlet, he associates it rather with the scholarly temperament, and includes a long digression on the miseries of scholars. On religious melancholy his position is simple: one can best avoid it by sticking to the reasonable middle way of the Church of England, avoiding the neurotic extremes of papist and puritan on either side. But in love there is no reasonable ground to take, for its very essence is illusion. On this point we had better let Burton speak for himself:

Every lover admires his mistress, though she be very deformed of herself, ill-favoured, wrinkled, pimpled, pale, red, yellow, tanned, tallow-faced, having a swollen juggler's platter face, or a thin, lean, chitty face, have clouds in her face, be crooked, dry, bald, goggle-eyed, blear-eyed, or with staring eyes, she looks like a squis'd cat, hold her head still awry, heavy, dull, hollow-eyed, black or yellow about the eyes, or squint-eyed, sparrow-mouthed, Persian hook-nosed, have a sharp fox-nose, a red nose, China flat, great nose, *nare simo patuloque*, a nose like a promontory, gubber-tushed, rotten teeth, black, uneven, brown teeth, beetle-browed, a witch's beard, her breath stink all over the room, her nose drop winter and summer, with a Bavarian poke under her chin, a sharp chin, lave-eared, with a long crane's neck, which stands awry too, *pendulis mammis*, "her dugs like two double jugs," or else no dugs, in that other extreme, bloody-fallen fingers, she have filthy, long unpared nails, scabbed hands or wrists, a tanned skin, a rotten carcass, crooked back, she stoops, is lame, splay-footed, "as slender in the middle as a cow in the waist," gouty legs, her ankles hang over her shoes, her feet stink, she breed



lice, a mere changeling, a very monster, an oaf imperfect, her whole complexion savours, an harsh voice, incondite gesture, vile gait, a vast virago, or an ugly tit, a slug, a fat fustilugs, a truss, a long lean rawbone, a skeleton, a sneaker (*si qua latent meliora puta*), and to thy judgment looks like a mard in a lanthorn, whom thou couldst not fancy for a world, but hatest, loathest, and wouldest have spit in her face, or blow thy nose in her bosom, *remedium amoris* to another man, a dowdy, a slut, a scold, a nasty, rank, rammy, filthy, beastly quean, dishonest peradventure, obscene, base, beggarly, rude, foolish, untaught, peevish, Irus' daughter, Thersites' sister, Grobian's scholar; if he love her once, he admires her for all this, he takes no notice of any such errors or imperfections of body or mind, *Ipsa haec Delectant, veluti Balbinum polypos Agnae* ["Or is even charmed, like Balbinus with Hagne's mole," Horace, *Satire III*]; he had rather have her than any woman in the world.<sup>12</sup>

. . . . [In Burton's time] scientific and occult explanations could be given of the same phenomena, and hysteria and hallucination might be explained either as mental disorders or as caused by witchcraft or diabolical suggestion. Burton gives a good deal of attention to such matters, though with a detachment toward them unusual in his age. He has read all the books about devils and witches, and has gathered from them that there is more theorizing than solid knowledge of the subject. He drops a hint that belief in their existence is convenient for an organized priestcraft, and continues:

Many such stories I find amongst pontifical writers, to prove their assertions; let them free their own credits; some few I will recite in this kind out of most approved physicians. Cornelius Gemma, *lib. 2 de nat. mirac. cap. 4*, related of a young maid, called Katherine Gualter, a cooper's daughter, *anno* 1571, that had such strange passions and convulsions, three men could not sometimes hold her; she purged a live eel, which he saw, a foot and a half long, and touched himself; but the eel afterwards vanished; she vomited some twenty-four pounds of fulsome stuff of all colours, twice a day for fourteen days; and after that she voided great balls of hair, pieces of wood, pigeon's dung, parchment, goose dung, coals; and after them two pound of pure blood, and then again coals and stones, of which some had inscriptions, bigger than a walnut, some of them pieces of glass, brass, etc., besides paroxysms of laughing, weeping and ecstasies, etc. *Et hoc (inquit) cum horrore vidi*, "this I saw with horror." They could do no good on her by physic, but left her to the clergy.<sup>13</sup>

Burton is aware that he is describing a case of hysteria; what he is not sure of is whether it was the doctor or the patient who had it, and the reader is left with the feeling that Burton regards hysteria as a highly contagious illness. (*Educated*, 424–7)

While Frye clearly takes great delight in reproducing Burton's exuberant catalogues, does he see *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as also yielding instruction? Even more, does it have any instrumental value medically or psychologically? Does it have therapeutic significance? Frye's answer is yes. In "Rencontre" he writes, "Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* adopts the position of a university lecturer, the conductor of a vast orchestra of 'authorities' which he can call up one by one. He pretends to be analyzing the causes, symptoms, and cures of the disease known as melancholy, but his attitude to his audience is a rhetorical one: he is out to persuade more than to expound. That is, having written one of the most delightful books in the language, he knows that reading that book would be a much better cure for melancholy than most of the remedies he prescribes. So he links himself with the

ethical tradition of rhetorical prose" (*Literature*, 54). In "Literature as Therapy" Frye raises the possibility, at least, that reading Burton may indeed be cathartic: "Burton does not say that literature is a therapy for melancholy, except in a wider context of recreation generally. On the other hand, he begins his book by saying that he wrote the book because he was melancholy himself. In other words, it was a form of autotherapy that inspired him to write it. The other reason for writing it is that *we* are: everybody suffers from melancholy. Consequently, the book itself may have a therapeutic value" (*Secular*, 467).<sup>14</sup>

## V

The question naturally arises, What does it mean to say that Frye's *Anatomy* belongs to the same category as Burton's *Anatomy*? Frye's book is obviously not a work of prose fiction, but it does contain a number of characteristics of the anatomy as a literary form: it is an intellectualized form and thus focuses on *dianoia* rather than *ethos*; it builds up integrated patterns; it has a theoretical interest; it embraces a wide variety of subtypes; it displays considerable erudition; its schematic form is an imaginative structure, born of an exuberant and creative wit; and whatever dramatic appeal it has comes from the dialectic of ideas. Frye's *Anatomy* is of course not Menippean satire, which combines fantasy and morality often with the deprecating quality as found in, say, Lyly's *The Anatomy of Wit*, but embedded in its Utopianism is a clear moral attitude. If Frye, as an implied author, might appear to be obsessed with his entire intellectual project, he does not qualify as a *philosophus gloriosus* or a learned and pedantic crank—often the object of satire in the anatomy.

The main difference between Frye's *Anatomy* and other anatomies, however, is in their differing final causes. Frye always insisted that the lines between the critical and the creative should not be sharply drawn, and he remarks in one of his *Anatomy* notebooks, "In poetics we often have to speak poetically" (*Anatomy Notebooks*, 172). But for all of its aesthetic appeal—its creativity and ingenuity, its wit and stylistic charm, its inventive taxonomies—the *Anatomy* remains a work of criticism, in spite of those, such as M.H. Abrams and Frank Kermode, who claim otherwise, mistaking, it seems to me, the means for the end.<sup>15</sup> The *Anatomy* comes to use primarily in what Frye would later call second-phase language, the continuous prose of abstraction and reason and of analogical and dialectical thinking. Its aim is the analysis of literary conventions and the synthesis of these into comprehensive order.

Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* was ostensibly a medical discourse. In Frye's terminology, it was centrifugal, meaning that it referred to something outside itself. Today it is read less for instruction into the cures of the psychiatrically sick than for its delight, and so it has become centripetal like other works of literature. Readers of the future will determine whether Frye's *Anatomy* follows the course of Burton's. So far, more than a half-century after its publication, it is still read primarily as a work of literary theory, and most of its applications have been in the interest of description, explanation, and interpretation. This is not to gainsay its wit and eloquence, the aesthetic appeal of its formal structure, and its engendering of delight. But none of these things is the final cause of a book Frye saw as *a new criticism* that went beyond *the New Criticism*.

In conclusion, it is perhaps worth noting that Frye is an anatomist in another sense—as a writer of fiction himself. He had a number of fantasies about becoming a fiction writer and in fact wrote a substantial portion of a more or less realistic novel. But the anatomy tradition shows through in eight pieces of short fiction he wrote, six of which he published over a five-year period beginning in 1936. These hardly qualify as short stories, at least in the main tradition of that form as practiced by Chekov and Maupassant or James and Mansfield.<sup>16</sup> The genre is admittedly difficult to define, and in *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye's analysis of the genre amounts mostly to pointing out the forms that are shorter versions of his four forms of fiction: the tale, of the kind that Poe wrote, is a

short form of romance; the short story, a terse form of the novel; the essay, a short version of the confession; and the dialogue or colloquy, a brief Menippean satire or anatomy. This means that the dialogue or colloquy, which Frye sometimes refers to as the *cena*, is, like the anatomy, an extroverted and intellectualized form. His stories are fundamentally brief anatomies. He has no interest in character development and very little in plot: *ethos* and *mythos* are displaced almost completely by *dianoia*. The point of Frye's little anatomies, four of which he called "dialogues,"<sup>17</sup> is to *make* a point. He remarked to David Cayley, that he was attracted to satire at an early age and that when he wrote the stories he "knew more about ideas than . . . about people," adding that "[i]f somebody like Borges had been known to me at the time, I would have tried to pick up that kind of tradition (*Interviews*, 938). As a young person, Frye immersed himself in Shaw, with his theater of vital ideas and his comic and ironic tone. While the Blakean vision replaced the Shavian one as the point around which his literary universe revolved, he never discarded the ironic and satirical mask.

In 2002 Thomas Wright named Burton's *Anatomy* as the first of his top five cult writers, one of the characteristics of cult writing being that it inspires other writers, such as Borges. A year before, on the occasion of Burton's *Anatomy* having been released as a *New York Review of Books* Classic, Nicholas Lezard declared it "the best book ever written." While Frye eschewed value judgments, he nevertheless could not hide his admiration for Burton's masterpiece, and it could be that Frye's longstanding and repeated attention to Burton caused him, like it did Samuel Johnson, to get out of bed earlier than he wanted to.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Eight years earlier Frye said something quite similar to the editors of *Acta Victoriana*: "Well, 'anatomy' in the seventeenth century meant a kind of dissection and it also extended itself to becoming the name of a literary form. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is one of my favourite books. It is ostensibly a medical treatise on the disease of melancholy, but actually it's an artistic reaction to the human experience. Similarly with Lyly's *The Anatomy of Wit*, which has a slightly deprecating quality, meaning that it's closer to satire. It's the use of a scientific term by literature to summon up the idea of something analytic yet at the same time comprehensive that I had in mind when writing the *Anatomy of Criticism*" (*Interviews*, 531–2).

<sup>2</sup> The correspondence with Houston is in the Northrop Frye Fonds, Victoria University Library, 1988 accession, box 61, file 1. Neither Frye nor Princeton University Press was apparently aware that Henry Hazlitt had already used an almost identical title, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933). Hazlitt (1894–1993), a well-known public intellectual, wrote his own *Anatomy* when he was literary editor of *The Nation*. In spite of the differences between the sensibilities and approaches of the two critics, some passages from Hazlitt sound almost Frygean.

<sup>3</sup> Ayre reports that it was in this course that Frye "launched into" Burton's book (107). Frye probably read the two-volume edition published by J.M. Dent in 1932 (Everyman's Library). This, in any event, is the edition with Frye's annotations now in the Northrop Frye Library at Victoria University.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson's remark is recorded in Boswell 1:389.

<sup>5</sup> Frye was 19 at the beginning of the summer of 1932; he turned 20 on 15 July.

<sup>6</sup> The record of the essays that Frye wrote for Blunden is incomplete, and most of those essays are not extant, but during the first year he wrote papers on Chaucer, Wyatt, and Fulke Greville, and he appears to have written essays on Sidney and Lyly as well. For his second-year tutorials (1938–39) he read papers on Crashaw and Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, Herrick, Marvell, and Cowley, on the Dark Ages, on the character book, on *King Lear*, and on the history of the language. After his first

year, at Merton Frye wrote to Roy Daniells that “Blunden is so much like God—very inspiring to talk to as long as you do the talking” (*Selected Letters*, 19). And Frye did a great deal of talking. If his estimate of producing 5,000 to 6,000 words per week is accurate, his steady output resulted in about 100,000 words altogether. Frye sent the papers he had written during his first year to Pelham Edgar, who in turn passed them along to Roy Daniells. Neither they nor his second-year papers have ever turned up.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent study of Renaissance anatomies, see Hodges.

<sup>8</sup> Anatomies that were published during Burton’s lifetime (1575–1640):

- Andrews, John. *Anatomie of Baseness* (1615)
- Almond, Oliver. *The Uncasing of Heresie, or the Anatomie of Protestancie* (1624)
- Anon., *The Anatomie of Sinne* (1603)
- Bell, Thomas, *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie* (1603)
- Donne, John. *An Anatomy of the World* (1611)
- du Moulin, Pierre. *Anatomy of Arminianism* (Eng. ed., 1620)
- Grahame, Simeon. *The Anatomie of Humours* (1609)
- Greene, Robert. *The Anatomie of Love’s Flatteries* (1584)
- . *Arbusto, the Anatomie of Fortune* (1584)
- Harington, Sir John. *Anatomy of a Metamorphosed Ajax* (1596)
- Lyly, John. *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578)
- Mayo, John, *The Anatomie of Pope Joane* (1597)
- More, John, *A Lively Anatomie of Death* (1596)
- Nashe, Thomas. *The Anatomie of Absurdity* (1589)
- Obendoerffer, Johan, *The Anatomie of the True Physician and Counterfeit Mountebanke* (1602)
- Pricket, Robert, *Times Anatomie* (1606)
- Rogers, Thomas, *Anatomie of the Minde* (1576)
- Sidney, Sir Philip. *Valour Anatomized in a Fancy* (1581)
- Stubbes, Philip. *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583)
- Underwood, Robert, *A New Anatomy* (1605)
- Woolton, John, *A Neve Anatomie of Whole Man* (1576)

Previous to 1575:

- Anon. *The Anatomy of a Hande in the Manner of a Dyall* (1544)
- Mainardo, Augustino, *Anatomi* (1561)
- Vicary, Thomas, *The Anatomie of the Bodie of Man* (1548)

<sup>9</sup> In both “*Rencontre*” and *The Well-Tempered Critic* Frye discusses Burton’s book, not as an anatomy, but as a form of rhetorical prose (*Literature*, 54; *Educated*, 424–7).

<sup>10</sup> For Frye on Burton’s sense of humor, see *Critical*, 333.

<sup>11</sup> In “Of Giving the Lie” Montaigne wrote, “I have no more made my book than my book has made me; ’tis a book consubstantial with its author” (*Essays*, bk. 2, chap. 18, par. 5). On Montaigne’s “consubstantiality”—the identity of one with one’s work—see *Late*, 88, 193, 196, 204, 555.

<sup>12</sup> Frye also quotes this passage in “The Nature of Satire” (*Educated*, 47–8).

<sup>13</sup> Frye also quotes this passage in “Literature as Therapy” (*Secular*, 466–7).

<sup>14</sup> By “recreation” Frye means that while Burton’s book contains little genuine information about the subjects of his various digressions, what it does is “recreate for us the entire seventeenth century” (*Secular*, 467).

<sup>15</sup> Abrams: Although the *Anatomy* “is not science, it is a thing no less valid or rare—it is wit, ‘a combination of dissimilar things, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike’

---

[Aristotle]. . . . Such criticism is animating; though only so, it should be added, when conducted with Frye's special *brio*, and when it manifests a mind that, like his, is deft, resourceful, and richly stored. An intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilars, Aristotle notes, is a sign of genius and cannot be learned from others. Wit criticism, like poetic wit, is dangerous, because to fall short of the highest is to fail dismally, and to succeed, it must be managed by a 'Truewit and not by a Witwoud" (196). Kermode: "I should call *Anatomy of Criticism* a work of sixth-phase Symbolism placed on the frontier of a purer Aristotelianism. Certainly it would be reasonable to treat this as a work of criticism which has turned into literature, for it is centripetal, autonomous, and ethical without, I think, being useful. As literature it has, if I may be permitted to say so, great value" (323). The most extensive cases for the *Anatomy* as an anatomy are argued by Louis Mackey, Hazard Adams, Minna Castrén, Eleanor Cook, Bert O. States, Harry Levin, and George Woodcock.

<sup>16</sup> There seem to have been other stories. In the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1993, box 3, file 11 is a three-page typescript entitled "Two Preludes," followed by Roman numeral I. The typescript includes all but the last few lines of the story that was published as "Prelude." What happened to the remainder of the typescript, which presumably included as second 'Prelude," is unknown. And we know from Frye's correspondence with his wife Helen that in 1938 he submitted at least two stories to the *Atlantic Monthly* (*Correspondence*, 800).

<sup>17</sup> The cover sheet preceding four of the stories in the Northrop Frye Fonds, 1991, box 37, file 5, is entitled 'Four Dialogues."