



Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading 'The Anatomy of Melancholy'

Mary Ann Lund

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The Anatomy of Melancholy, first published in 1621, is one of the greatest works of early modern English prose writing, yet it has received little substantial literary criticism in recent years. This study situates Robert Burton's complex work within three related contexts: religious, medical and literary/rhetorical. Analysing Burton's claim that his text should have curative effects on his melancholic readership, it examines the authorial construction of the reading process in the context of other early modern writing, both canonical and non-canonical, providing a new approach towards the emerging field of the history of reading. Lund responds to Burton's assertion that melancholy is an affliction of body and soul which requires both a spiritual and a corporal cure, exploring the theological complexion of Burton's writing in relation to English religious discourse of the early seventeenth century, and the status of his work as a medical text.

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