‘ET SPES ET RATIO STUDIORUM IN CAESARE TANTUM’: ROBERT BURTON AND PATRONAGE

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In The Anatomy of Melancholy (first published in 1621), Robert Burton, Christ Church student and Latin playwright, described his monarch’s behaviour at the Bodleian Library during a progress to Oxford in late August 1605:

King JAMES 1605, when he came to see our University of Oxford, and amongst other Ædifices, now went to view that famous Library, renued by S’ Thomas Bodley, in imitation of Alexander, at his departure brake out into that noble speech, If I were not a King, I would be an University man.1

Burton took his anecdote of James’s self-presentation here as philosopher-king from the official account written by Oxford’s public orator Isaac Wake, Rex Platonicus, which Burton owned.2 Wake describes a scholarly king ‘wandering at length and diligently through the library’ (‘Bibliothecâ [...] diu sedulóque perlustratâ’), ‘imitating that choice of Alexander the Great both in intention and voice’ (‘& animo, & voce eam Alex. Magni imitaretur optionem’), who declares, finally, that ‘if he had not been James, he could have been a scholar here’ (‘si Iacobus non fuisset, posset hic esse Academicus’ (p. 187). Wake’s James imagines himself as a willing prisoner of the Bodleian: ‘I could have been led as a prisoner, and if I had had the choice, I would have longed to be shut up in this prison, and bound with these chains’ (‘captivus ducar, si mihi optio daretur, hoc cuperem carcere conclusi, his catenis illigari’). James of course was very interested in academic learning, both before and after his accession in


2 Isaac Wake, Rex Platonicus: sive, de potentissimi principis Jacobi Britanniarum regis, ad illustissimam academiam Oxoniensem, adventu (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1607). All references to Wake are from the 1607 edition.
1603, and his odd metaphor was probably interpreted by his audience as rueful, perhaps even genuine. But while Wake’s account is clearly panegyric, both in the Anatomy and in his Latin plays Burton ruminated more doubtfully on the relationship between scholarship and politics, and on the uneasy association between the scholar and the monarch as patron.

Burton’s preoccupation was nothing new: the opening declaration of Juvenal’s seventh satire – ‘Et spes et ratio studiorum in Caesare tantum’ (Caesar alone is both the hope and purpose of studies) – shows that this particular relationship had already preoccupied satirists for over a millennium and a half. However, Burton offers the fullest discussion yet, and cites Juvenal’s line, significantly, in the section of the Anatomy that discusses one of the primary ‘causes’ of melancholy, ‘Love of Learning, or overmuch study’, where Burton seems to incorporate Juvenal’s words into panegyric for James:

Et spes, et ratio studiorum in Caesare tantum: as he said of old, we may truly say now, he [James] is our Amulet, our Sunne, our sole comfort and refuge, our Ptolomy, our common Maecenas, Jacobus munificent [munificent James], Jacobus pacificus [James the peace-maker], mysta Musarum [priest of the Muses], Rex Platonicus: Grande decus, columnque nostrum [lofty ornament and our pillar]: A famous Scholler himselfe, and the sole Patron, Pillar, and sustainer of Learning (I, 320).

Yet a reading of this passage as uncomplicated panegyric jars with Burton’s explorations elsewhere of how the pursuit of royal favour can affect scholarship; his citation of Juvenal, particularly, needs to be considered against his meditations on what happens to an academic institution when all of its scholars are bent on winning such favour. Although the king is equated with Maecenas, the first-century patron of Virgil and Horace, the other terms in this list of associations – ‘Sunne’, for example, as a familiar metaphor for royal dominance – posit James as an Augustus rather than a mere Maecenas, as a ruler whose ideology can govern literary production rather than merely as a rich benefactor who sponsors authors. By referring to the title of Wake’s ardently pro-monarchical panegyric, Rex Platonicus, Burton implies that the King controlled the narratives of his own progress

3 See W.B. Patterson, King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jane Rickard, Authorship and Authority: the Writings of James VI and I (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

movements (as at the Bodleian) and communicated his own terms for self-presentation as a philosopher-king. Although Burton’s anecdote of the Bodleian visit might seem like fond reminiscence, a closer investigation both of Burton’s experience of James at Oxford and of his representation of patronage in his subsequent writing reveals attitudes that are far from simple.

The two plays Burton wrote for performance at Oxford during the first two decades of the seventeenth century are less well-known than the *Anatomy*, but significantly advance our understanding of Burton’s representations of learning. The reception of Burton’s first play, *Alba*, demonstrates how the scholar could fail to impress royalty, and his second, *Philosophaster*, offers savage satire on how the desire for monetary gain through patronage could cripple an authentic desire for wisdom. *Alba* was written for performance during James’s 1605 visit to Oxford; it is not extant, but we can reconstruct plot details from contemporary accounts and dramaturgical sources. *Philosophaster* (‘False philosopher’) does exist, and was staged in 1618, although it was probably written a decade earlier. Both plays were performed in Christ Church hall, central site of Oxford drama during the reigns of Elizabeth and James.\(^5\) The monarch and his role as a patron of scholars looms large not only over the production of Burton’s 1605 play but also over the content of *Philosophaster*, which is marked by speculation on the proper function of the scholar.

It is my suggestion that Burton’s thinking on this subject was prompted in part by his own first-hand experience as a participant in the 1605 visit. Burton had been involved in literary endeavours of a sort that might have led – and did lead, for others – to royal favour. Progress visits to the universities often resulted in favour for the more prominent scholars: a speech delivered by Tobie Matthew, then an MA student at Christ Church, for example, so impressed Elizabeth I during her 1566 visit to Oxford that she made Matthew her chaplain in ordinary.\(^6\) We do not know whether Burton became involved in the 1605 visit because this was required of him as someone who had recently proceeded to the MA degree (in early


June) or whether he was eager for praise and preferment, but we can fairly assume that personal ambition, in some form, spurred his involvement. Burton’s participation was concerted. As well as writing and attending rehearsals for *Alba*, Burton also contributed a poem to the Christ Church anthology written to commemorate the visit, *Musa Hospitialis Ecclesiae Christi*. Several other poets in the *Musa Hospitialis* anthology make the connection between the King and patronage explicit, as in a poem by Edward James, a Christ Church Master of Art, which begins ‘Regemque Patronumque suum centenus alumnus | Excipit’ (a hundred students receive their King and patron (f. B3r)). Patronage and panegyric are central to the anthology and most of its contents are as uncontroversial as Edward James’s offering. Burton’s poem, however, although panegyric of a kind, is far less straightforward; under the title ‘*De Sole Venere & Mercurio in virgine coniunctis quo tempore Rex Ecclesiam Christi ingressurus est*’ (On the conjunctions of the Sun, Venus and Mercury in Virgo when the King is about to enter Christ Church (f. D2r)), he connects the members of the royal household with the planets. Based on what we know of the king’s literary tastes at the start of his reign, the conceit is surprising. Although we do not know how the King responded to Burton’s poem, or for certain whether he noticed it, it is likely that he read it; as a poet himself, James would probably have been sensitive to nuances of meaning in the poetry of others, and we know that he was hypersensitive when his own actions were mapped onto the heavens, as Keith Thomas has noted. James, highly suspicious of judicial astrology, had gone as far as to call it ‘the Divels schoole’ in *Daemonologie* (1597). Burton’s conceit, then,
might be called ill-chosen, particularly compared with how carefully his contemporaries accommodated the king’s prejudice, satirising characters who subscribe to astrological beliefs. In the Latin comedy *Ignoramus*, for instance, performed during James’s 1615 visit to Cambridge, the eponymous common lawyer attributes his circuitous behaviour to his star sign of Cancer,\(^{11}\) and other plays such as Thomas Tomkis’s Cambridge comedy *Albumazar* (also performed for James in 1615) similarly mock astrology and the occult – and, incidentally, tobacco-smoking, another one of James’s dislikes – expressly to accord with the monarch’s tastes. Not so Burton’s poem, and although he owned two copies of *Musa Hospitalis*, he does not refer to his own contribution to the anthology when he discusses the 1605 visit. Never shy of using anecdotes from his own life to animate the *Anatomy*, Burton’s omission is striking, and extends, as we shall see, to his other involvement in the 1605 visit, in the play *Alba*.

If the poem’s conceit was unfortunate, but perhaps buried among others in the anthology, *Alba* was a disaster. One particularly poignant aspect of its failure is that clearly some effort had been made to appeal to the king’s tastes: the title, derived from Latin, Celtic and Gaelic terms, referring to Scotland and later to Great Britain, and etymologically related to the more familiar ‘Albion’, suggests that the play was set in the British Isles and expressly intended to invoke the new king’s geographical provenance, as was fashionable early in James’s reign. *Macbeth* (1606)\(^{12}\) is perhaps the most famous instance, and other dramatists during the 1605 visit had also played on this ‘Britishness’ of James: Matthew Gwinne’s tableau of welcome, *Tres Sibyllae*, performed at St John’s College on the king’s entrance, which has been associated with *Macbeth* in its focus on the king’s genealogy,\(^{13}\) welcomes James with the resonant ‘To you whom one Britain, previously divided, worships, greetings’ (‘Quem, diuisa prius, colit vna Britannia, salue’).\(^{14}\) The inclusion of morris dancers in *Alba*,

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\(^{14}\) *Records of Early English Drama* (hereafter *REED*): Oxford, ed. by John R. Elliott and Alan H. Nelson (University); Alexandra F. Johnston and Diana Wyatt (City), 2 vols (The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2004), I, 315: added to Gwinne, *Vertumnus*, f. H3r.
moreover, associated then as now with indigenous traditions of entertain-ment, also suggests that Burton's play was intended to fit within a theatrical programme, however hazily delineated, intended to appeal to the new king. Yet this effort to appeal failed. Sir Thomas Bodley gave a lukewarm précis (‘Their tragedie and Comedies were very clerkly penned, but not so well acted, and somewhat ouer tedious’), while the play was lacerated by the Cambridge Fellow Philip Stringer:

The Comedie began between 9. and 10., and ended at one, the name of yt was Alba, whereof I never saw reason, it was a pastorall much like one which I have seene in Kinges Colledg in Cambridge, but acterd farr worse, in the actinge thereof they brought in 5. or 6. men almost naked which were much disliked by the Queene and Ladies, and alsoc manye rusticall songs and daunces, which made it seeme verye tedious in soe much that if the Chauncelors of both the Universtyes had not intreated his Ma|stie earnest-lye, he would have bene gone before half the Comedie had bene ended.

A badly acted, tediously danced, derivative pastoral that outraged the queen and made the king beg to leave: the Cambridge man Stringer might be expected to be biased (‘much like one [...] in Cambridge, but acterd farr worse’), but even the Oxford panegyricists struggled to praise Alba. Wake describes it as a ‘Comœdia faceta’ (witty comedy) and expresses a hope that it will be printed – which never happened – but Wake’s account seems oddly defensive in tone when he undermines the declaration that ‘every-thing pleased everybody’ by excluding ‘those who did not understand or were seeking sleep rather than wit’ (‘omnia placebant omnibus, nisi qui aut non intelligerent, aut somnium potius quam sales appeterent’).

Alba’s extant costumes and properties list suggests an eclectic cast of characters: Apollo, a sea god, Nestor, ‘1. loose Heremites gowne’, ‘6. Suites for morrice dancers all lyke with garters of bels’, and so on. One costume refers to the part for which Burton had particular responsibility: ‘1. longe

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16 From the extant costume and properties list for the performance, it seems likely that the ‘men almost naked’ were the so-called ‘sylvanes’ in the play: ‘3 suites of greene close to the bodye for sylvanes’ are itemised in the list, and there are also some satyrs’ costumes mentioned which were probably not particularly respectable either, as well as ‘Item one suite of goates skinnes for Pan’: see Stringer, CUL MS Additional 34, f. 35; transcribed in REED: Oxford, I, 298-99.
17 Wake, Rex Platonicus, p. 48; cf. Anthony Nixon, Oxfords Triumph (London: Ed. Allde for John Hodgets, 1605), sig. B3r: ‘his Majestie, the Queene, and Prince, with the Noblemen, had a Comedie played before them in Latine in Christ Church Hall, which continued the space of three houres and more’.
black beard and hayre vncurled for à magitian’. In a letter to his brother William, written two weeks before Alba was performed, Burton wrote happily that: ‘That parte of the Play which I made is very well liked, especially those scenes of the Magus.’ Setting aside for a moment Burton’s unfounded optimism, this creation of a magus figure is an early indication of his interest in the performance of intellectual authority with which the character type – from Marlowe’s Faustus to Shakespeare’s Prospero – was conventionally associated. In his second play, Philosophaster, written shortly after Alba, but not performed for another decade, due perhaps to Alba’s lack of success, Burton develops this preoccupation further. Burton himself never referred again to the antipathetic reception of Alba: of the events of 1605, he describes only James’s visit to the Bodleian, and makes no mention of his own active involvement. This silence becomes more pointed when we consider that Burton does not seem to have been comparably reticent about his other play. He mentions Philosophaster in the Anatomy (I, 325, note s), but it is as though he wished to eradicate all memory of Alba.

Philosophaster is set in the Spanish town of Osuna, which contained a university represented as proverbially bad by Cervantes and Góngora. The university is beset by six ‘philosophastri’ who hatch a scheme to dupe the townsfolk. In stark epistemological contrast, two serious scholars, Polumathes (‘learner of everything’) and Philobiblos (‘book lover’), arrive in search of wisdom: having travelled all over Europe, they have found no wise men – ‘Sapientes vero nulli’ (I. 5. 358). Philosophaster presents us with a university town where self-promotion matters more than scholarship, and through his representation of patronage-seekers and false expertise, Burton considers how scholars can function in a world that prizes materialism and self-advancement over study. To this end, his six philosophasters vividly personify pushy academic careerism. In the play’s fourth act, for instance, Simon Acutus, a sophist, asks the lead philosophaster Polypragmaticus how he might become ‘illustrius’: ‘How may I become well-known, and like you, a friend and ally to notables, rulers,

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19 I am grateful to Dr Alejandro Coroleu and to Dr Joaquín Pascual Barea for pointing out this satirical connection, and to the latter in particular for directing me towards the relevant Spanish literary sources.
20 All citations from Burton’s play are taken from Philosophaster, ed. and trans. Connie McQuillen (Binghampton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts Society, 1993).
important men, and the duke himself?’ (‘Quî fiam illustris, dynastis, heroibus, ipso duci | Ae quà ac tu notus familiaris et socius’ (IV. 2. 1278-79)). Polypragmaticus replies with a manifesto of how the scholar who wants to ‘get on’ should behave, dependent on relentless – and carefully judged – self-promotion; he argues that connections, whether nepotistic or sycophantic, are all that the ambitious scholar needs.

That Burton was already articulating a certain cynicism towards patronage a couple of years after the royal visit of 1605 seems clear, and the forms of self-aggrandising scholarship that Polypragmaticus advocates remind us of Burton’s efforts for James’s first visit to Oxford. First, Burton’s involvement in Alba, a public performance before the royal family: ‘You must go to the theatre, speak in public meetings where the entire university, the whole region, can see you and hear you speak. Or go before the duke himself’ (Agendum in Theatris, in publicis comitiis | Perorandum, vbi te tota Academia, tota regio | Tum possit videre, tum proloquentem audiat, | Aut coram ipso Duce (IV. 2. 1285-88)). Second, the act of writing a poem dedicated to a royal patron and the Musa Hospitialis anthology: ‘Dedicate your book to some hero [an ironical heros in the Latin], you’ll rise beyond belief in his praise, even if he is a silly fop’ (‘Librumque inscribes heroi alicui, | In cuius laudem insurges supra omnem fidem, | Licèt ille bardus sit’ (IV. 2. 1303-04)). The first line of Burton’s poem in the Christ Church anthology had referred to the ‘Cyllenus heros’ (Mercury) as a cipher for Prince Henry: when choosing his philosophaster’s words, ‘Librumque inscribes heroi alicui’, was Burton thinking of his own poem’s opening? In any case, it does not seem likely that Burton could describe the careful choice of subject matter to delight a prospective patron without considering his own poem in the 1605 Christ Church collection and the disastrous reception of Alba.

Strikingly, too, the play’s genuine scholars use the same metaphor that James had used at the Bodleian – as a willing prisoner fastened to the books – but Burton gives the image a very different resonance. Instead of binding the monarch to the university, book chains fasten corpses to their desks: Polumathes states that he has visited Oxford, ‘and its furnished library’, but he ‘saw no living wise men there, but many dead ones, badly held with chains’ (‘Et instructam illorum bibliotecam, tum in eâ | Mortuos multos inueni, sed catenis malè habitos, | At viuum illic sapientem vidi neminem’ (I. 5. 373-75)). We remember how James had expressed a wish to be bound ‘in chains’ (catenis) as a ‘captivus’ of the Bodleian Library: in the world of Philosophaster, only the dead are chained to the library,
satirically associating scholarship with physical atrophy (Burton makes a similar point in the *Anatomy* about the sedentary, unhealthy nature of academic life). Burton lifts the conceit of chained books and dead scholars from Giovanni Pontano’s criticism of the university of Genoa in his dialogue *Antonius* (c. 1482) but redirects it at his own *alma mater*, and even though the metaphor is meant at one level to be comic, at the same time Burton’s echo of James’s speech cannot be accidental. So how are we to read this conceit? On the one hand, Burton might be offering a wryly pessimistic picture of the curriculum at Jacobean Oxford, but he might also be lamenting a current state of decrepit scholarship, with no ‘vivum sapientem’, but only ‘mortuos’ – defunct scholars. It is tempting to speculate that there’s a dig here at a king who during his reign exercised unprecedented influence over the running of the universities; he feared the fragmentation of uniformity there, and cracked down uncompromisingly on religious dissent and placed many of his favourites in prominent positions. Burton was by no means politically radical but his representation of a moribund Oxford does imply – even if the implication is veiled by satire – that he was concerned about the state of the contemporary university. When we compare *Philosophaster*, a comedy, with Burton’s discussion of contemporary scholarship in the *Anatomy*, we see that even the play’s jokes point towards a concern about university education.

Burton ends the play on a tentative note. The scholars promise to reform the damaged university, but it is clear that this improvement will be arduous, and that it lies in some indistinct future. It is at this point that we return to the part of the ‘Digression of the Misery of Scholars’ that incorporates the line from Juvenal’s seventh satire, ‘Et spes et ratio studiorum in Caesare tantum’, and, again, to embed these words properly within their context, it is worth looking at what Burton argues at a slightly earlier stage of the ‘Digression’:

To say truth, ’tis the common fortune of most Schollers, to be servile and poore, to complain pittifully, and lay open their wants to their respectlesse patrons [...] which is too common in those dedicatory Epistles, for hope of gaine, to lye, flatter, and with hyperbolicall eulogiums and commendations, to magnifie and extoll an illiterate unworthy idiot, for his excellent virtues (I, 309).

Burton is clear to state that he does not include James or (in revisions of the *Anatomy* after the king’s death) his son and successor Charles I among their number. In the post-1625 versions, Burton writes ‘he [James] is now
gone, the Sunne of ours set’ he writes, although ‘We have such an other [Charles] in his roome [...] and long may he raigne & flourish amongst us’ (I, 320-21). But the praise for the Stuarts seems to be tempered by the fact that, although Burton ‘may not deny but that we have a sprinkling of our gentry, here and there one, excellently well learned’ (I, 321), he does not mention any such model patrons by name, addressing generally but not specifically such individuals: ‘you that are worthy Senatours, Gentlemen’ (I, 321). Quoting Book One of the *Aeneid*, moreover, Burton also implies that although ‘Apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto’\(^{21}\) (a few swimmers can be seen in the massive whirlpool (I, 321)), none of the ‘swimmers’ listed by name are domestic: ‘those *Fuggeri* in Germany, *Du Bartas, Du Plessis*’ (I, 321). In any case, it is clear that for Burton, exceptions to those ‘Rich men [who] keepe these Lecturers, & fawning Parasites, like so many dogges at their tables’ (I, 323) are few.

For his peroration Burton switches to Latin, forcing home his criticism of false scholarship; if we understand composition in Latin to aim a piece of writing towards an erudite readership (as Burton states elsewhere in the *Anatomy*\(^{22}\)), Latin is the appropriate language in which to lecture fellow scholars and to take the ‘Digression’ into the realm of polemic. *Philosophaster* represents a world where scholars must grub about for financial reward, and it is this world that Burton invokes in the *Anatomy*’s Latin attack on self-aggrandising scholarship. He makes clear the connection between drama and argument by criticising ‘Philosophasters – who have no art – are licensed in Arts’ (Philosophastri licentiantur in artibus, artem qui non habent (I, 325)), and then referring to his own play: ‘Not so long ago, I strung them up in *Philosophaster*, a Latin comedy’ (‘Hos non ita pridem perstrinxi, in *Philosophastro* Comœdiâ latinâ’ (I, 325, note s)). These philosophasters, Burton continues, ‘fill the pulpits’ and ‘burst into the homes of the nobility’ (‘Hi sunt qui pulpita complent, in ædes nobilium irrepunt’). The patronage relationship grants them license to do so: in the terms of Burton’s argument, these ‘philosophastri’ are the ‘Lecturers, & fawning Parasites’ privileged over genuine scholars. When we set *Philosophaster* against Burton’s discussion of the contemporary academy in the *Anatomy*, it does not seem adequate to view the play as a free-floating


comedy unanchored by epistemological substance; instead, an impulse more critical than comic animates the two works, as the author is moved to articulate a deeper concern about university education.

The Anatomy constantly shifts between autobiography, fiction, citation and anecdote, and one of Burton’s central rhetorical guises is that of a satirist. For the most part, this satirical persona wryly mocks the world’s folly – Burton writes the book under the pseudonym ‘Democritus Junior’, after all – but on occasion he adopts an angrier voice: ‘I did sometime laugh and scoffe with Lucian, and Satyrically taxe with Menippus, lament with Heraclitus, sometime againe I was petulanti splene cachinno [full of spleen and impudent laughter] and then againe, urere bilis jecur, [when my liver started to burn with bile], I was much moved to see that abuse which I could not amend’ (I, 5). Spleen and bile are never more present in the Anatomy than when Burton discusses the contemporary universities, and it is at such moments that Burton is at his most Juvenalian. Oxford is not Rome, of course, but ‘Democritus Junior’ finds enough wrong with his contemporary academy to be as roused by it as Juvenal’s speaker had been by the squalid and corrupt city by the Tiber. Burton spent most of his life at Oxford, but his love for the university is complicatedly mixed up with a lament for its less loveable aspects. One of the main sources of the wrong, for Burton, is the fact that ‘spes et ratio studiorum’ still rest on Caesar: the Jacobean era, with its overproduction of university graduates and the king’s rampant favouritism, as well as the Stuart government’s increased control over university appointments and clerical livings, posed new challenges for scholars at the time. Just as the hopes expressed for university reform seem nebulous at the end of Philosophaster, so in the ‘Digression’, Burton can propose no concrete alternatives to the current situation within the university, as an ‘abuse which [he] could not amend’. But by identifying and anatomising the problem, perhaps the hope is that others will be able to solve it.

Both Isaac Wake and Burton compare James with Alexander, and it is worth considering this more fully in relation to Burton’s representation of scholarship and patronage. Both writers mention that James acted ‘in imitation of Alexander’, declaring that he would rather be a scholar than a king, and by the early seventeenth century, through widespread reading of Plutarch’s ‘Life of Alexander’, the view that ‘of his owne nature [Alexander] was much geue[n] to his booke, & desired to read much’ (as
translated in North’s Plutarch) was generally held. Both Wake and Burton develop this idea to include the figure of Aristotle, Alexander’s tutor. But while Wake praises the King for his keen understanding of the staged academic debates by suggesting that James combines the best of Alexander and Aristotle – ‘you would have thought he was Alexander the Great, you would have thought he was the greater Aristotle speaking’ (‘Magnum putares Alexandrum, eundem loquentem majorem crederes Aristotelem’ (p. 97)) – Burton uses the Aristotle/Alexander relationship very differently. Although he acknowledges its archetypal significance (‘How deare to Alexander was Aristotle?’ (I, 320)), unusually for the period he tends not to idealise the relationship, and so we have to read any mention of Aristotle and Alexander very carefully to understand its wider implications for Burton’s argument. We find one such instance immediately before the description of James’s visit to the Bodleian. Here, Burton argues that study is a significant ‘Cure’ for melancholy, whether the discipline be ‘mathematics, theoretic or practic parts’ or poetry: he cites the Italian mathematician and philosopher Girolamo Cardano, that ‘honorificum magis est et gloriosum hæc [i.e. mathematica] intelligere, quam provinciis praesesse, formosum aut ditem juvem esse’ (it is more honourable and glorious to understand mathematics than to rule over provinces, to be beautiful, rich or young (II, 87)). He then cites the ‘pathetical protestation’ of another Italian scholar, Julius Caesar Scaliger, that he had rather be the author of twelve verses in Lucan, or such an ode in Horace, than emperor of Germany’ (II, 88). So Burton suggests here that government, youth and riches are ephemeral, while academic expertise both endures and cures illness. This is not his last word on the subject – elsewhere, in the ‘Digression on the Misery of Schollers,’ he had claimed that scholarship causes illness – but the exaltation here of learning over temporal wealth is at least one argument that Burton intends his reader to ponder.

Following a list of others renowned for learning rather than for temporal power or wealth – Zeno, Chrysippus, Archimedes, Pindar – Burton alights on Aristotle and his pupil, arguing that Aristotle’s contri-
The anecdote about James’s visit to the Bodleian falls immediately after this assertion, and in a work as painstakingly structured as the Anatomy we have to consider the anecdote’s placing very carefully. Burton is not directly criticising the priorities that cause people to value monarchs (and therefore patrons) over scholars, but he is urging the reader sceptically to consider the relationship between the two.

Burton’s comparisons can be set against the opening section of the Anatomy, which sets out the Anatomy’s central purpose; here, Burton argues that the origins of melancholy are spiritual, and that its ‘chastisements’ can lead to greater self-awareness and knowledge of God: ‘these chastisements are inflicted upon us for our humiliation, [...] to make us knowe God and our selves, to informed, & teach us wisdome’ (I, 124). Adversity, Burton argues, pushes us towards God and more deeply into our own minds, and ultimately ‘it may be for [our] good’ (I, 124). One of Burton’s exempla of how suffering betters people is again of Alexander: ‘Great Alexander in the midst of all his prosperity, by a company of Parasites deified, & now made a God, when he saw one of his wounds bleed, remembered that he was but a man, and remitted of his pride’ (I, 124). The ‘company of Parasites’ surrounding the monarch recalls the ‘Lecturers, & fawning Parasites’ lamented in the ‘Digression’, and yet again, Burton makes his reader think about how a ruler fosters sycophancy, his example of Alexander ‘now made a God’ uncomfortably recalling the James who spoke ‘in imitation of Alexander’ in 1605.

As one of the most intellectually engaged of Jacobean writers on the topic of scholarship and patronage, it is not surprising that Burton was interested in James’s policies, and that he owned at least four of the King’s published works. His reading of the king’s speeches may have made him aware of the ambivalence the ‘Rex Platonicus’ expressed towards univer-

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sity scholarship elsewhere, particularly during meetings of Parliament, in orations that were later published and to which Burton would have had access. In a speech delivered at Whitehall in March 1607, for instance, James seems somewhat less impressed by academia than he did during his library visit in 1605, mocking the perceived tendency of university scholars to waste words: ‘Studied Orations and much eloquence vpon little matter is fit for the Vniuersities, where not the Subject which is spoken of, but the triall of his wit that speaketh, is most commendable’. Eager to present himself here as one offering ‘matter without curious forme, substance without ceremonie, trewth in all sinceritie’, academic discourse – figured in the cliché of pedantic, empty, prolix expression – becomes a convenient rhetorical antithesis for the King. Inevitably, James pitched his speech at the level of his audience: just as he had told the Oxford scholars what they wanted to hear in 1605 – that he loved and prized learning – so he could indulge in a moment of anti-pedantic satire at a meeting of Parliament, to an audience who may well have viewed contemporary scholars as hopelessly remote from political activity. Burton may well have encountered such sentiments as a reader of the king’s speeches, and although he never directly criticises James in the Anatomy, and in fact calls him ‘A famous Scholler himselfe’, the knowledge that the King maybe was not as keen to be chained up in the Bodleian as he pretended perhaps informed Burton’s own scepticism about a royal patron’s attitude towards scholarship. We might regard Burton’s privileging of the academy over plutocratic or aristocratic spheres of power as inevitable: the Anatomy is written ‘From my Studie in Christ-Church Oxon’ (III, 473), after all, and Burton’s speaker is always a scholar. But there is also a more subtle, topically resonant debate about patronage and the king’s responsibility to the university that runs throughout Burton’s writing.

25 See ‘A Speach to both the Hovses of Parliament, delivered in the Great Chamber at White-Hall, the last day of March 1607’, in King James VI and I: Political Writings, ed. by Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 159. The speech was published in 1607 and reprinted in the 1616 Workes (see Sommerville, p. 294, n. 819).