ROBERT BURTON

From The Anatomy of Melancholy

From Exercise Rectified

But amongst those exercises or recreations of the mind within doors, there is none so general, so aptly to be applied to all sorts of men, so fit and proper to expel idleness and melancholy, as that of study: “Study is the delight of old age, the support of youth, the ornament of prosperity, the solace and refuge of adversity, the delight of the household,” etc., find the rest in Tully, Pro Archia Poeta. What so full of content as to read, walk, and see maps, pictures, statues, jewels, marbles, which some so much magnify, as those that Phidias made of old so exquisite and pleasing to be beheld, that, as Chrysostom thinketh, “if any man be sickly, troubled in mind, or that cannot sleep for grief, and shall but stand over against one of Phidias’s images, he will forget all care, or whatsoever else may molest him, in an instant?” There be those as much taken with Michael Angelo’s, Raphael de Urbino’s, Francesco Francia’s pieces, and many of those Italian and Dutch painters, which were excellent in their ages; and esteem of it as a most pleasing sight to view those neat architectures, devices, escutcheons, coats of arms, read such books, to peruse old coins of several sorts in a fair gallery; artificial works, perspective glasses, old relics, Roman antiquities, variety of colors. A good picture is false veritas et muta poesis and though (as Vives saith) artificialia delectant, sed max fastidimus, artificial toys please but for a time; yet who is he that will not be moved with them for the present?

To most kind of men it is an extraordinary delight to study. For what a world of books offers itself, in all subjects, arts, and sciences, to the sweet content and capacity of the reader? In arithmetic, geometry, perspective, optics, astronomy, architecture, sculpture, painting, of which so many and such elaborate treatises are of late written; in mechanics and their mysteries, military matters, navigation, riding of horses, fencing, swimming, gardening, planting, great tomes of husbandry, cookery, falconry, hunting, fishing, fowling, &c., with exquisite pictures of all sports, games, and what not? In music, metaphysics, natural and moral philosophy, philology, in policy, heraldry, genealogy, chronology, &c., they afford great tomes, or those studies of antiquity, &c., et quid subtillus Arithmeticis inventionibus, quid jucundius Musicis rationibus, quid divinius Astronomicis, quid rectius Geometricis demonstrationibus?

1. Part II, Sect. 2, Mem. 4. Burton’s book is elaborately subdivided into Parts, Sections, and Members; these are more formal than real, since he clearly writes whatever occurs to him next.
2. Tully is Cicero, the oration that in behalf of Archias the poet. In general, the footnotes for this selection will make no effort to follow Burton through the incredible mazes of the Bodleian library and his own memory.
3. St. John Chrysostom, an early Christian saint famous for his eloquence; Burton cites from his 12th oration.
4. “False truth and silent poetry.”
5. Juan Luis Vives, 16th-century Spanish humanist: Burton cites from his commentary on De Anima.
6. “And what is subtler than arithmetical discoveries, what more pleasant than musical harmonies, what more divine than astronomical or more certain than geometrical demonstrations?” From Girolamo Cardano, 16th-century Italian physician-philosopher. The tower at Bologna and the steeple at Strasburg are about as real to Burton as the imaginary lever with which Archimedes said he could move the earth.
sure, what so pleasant? He that shall but see that geometrical tower of Garezenda at Bologna in Italy, the steeple and clock at Strasburg, will admire the effects of art, or that engine of Archimedes, to remove the earth itself, if he had but a place to fasten his instrument; Archimedis Cochlea,7 and the rare devices to corrivate waters, musical instruments, and trisyllable echoes again, again, and again repeated, with myriads of such. What vast tomes are extant in law, physic, and divinity for profit, pleasure, practice, speculation, in verse or prose, &c.! their names alone are the subject of great volumes, we have thousands of authors of all sorts, many great libraries full well furnished, like so many dishes of meat, served out for several palates; and he is a very block that is affected with none of them. Some take an infinite delight to study the very languages wherein these books are written, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Chaldee, Arabic, &c. Methinks it would please any man to look upon a geographical map, suavi animum delectatione allicere, ob incredibilem rerum varietatem et jucunditatem, et ad pleniorem sui cognitionem excitare,8 chorographical, topographical delineations, to behold, as it were, all the remote provinces, towns, cities of the world, and never to go forth to the limits of his study, to measure by the scale and compass their extent, distance, examine their site. Charles the Great, as Platina writes, had three fair silver tables, in one of which superficies was a large map of Constantinople, in the second, Rome neatly engraved, in the third an exquisite description of the whole world, and much delight he took in them. What greater pleasure can there now be, than to view those elaborate maps of Ortelius, Mercator, Hondius, &c.? To peruse those books of cities, put out by Braunus and Hogenbergius? To read those exquisite descriptions of Maginus, Munster, Herrera, Laet, Merula, Boterus, Leander, Albertus, Camden, Leo Afer, Adricomius, Nic. Gerbelius, &c.! Those famous expeditions of Christoph. Columbus, Americus Vespucius, Marcus Polus the Venetian, Lod. Vertomannus, Aloysius Cadamustus, &c.? Those accurate diaries of Portuguese, Hollanders, of Bartison, Oliver à Nort, &c., Hakluyt’s Voyages, Pet. Martyr’s Decades, Benzo, Lerieus, Linschoten’s relations, those Hodaeporicons of Jod. a Meggen, Brocard the monk, Bredenbachius, Jo. Dublinius, Sands, &c., to Jerusalem, Egypt, and other remote places of the world? Those pleasant itineraries of Paulus Hentzerus, Jodocus Sincerus, Dux Polonus, &c., to read Bellonius’s observations, P. Gillius his surveys; those parts of America set out and curiously cut in pictures by Fratres a Bry. To see a well-cut herbal, herbs, trees, flowers, plants, all vegetables expressed in their proper colors to the life, as that of Matthiolus upon Dioscorides, Delacampius, Lobel, Bauhinus, and that last voluminous and mighty herbal of Beslar of Nuremberg, wherein almost every plant is to his own bigness. To see birds, beasts, and fishes of the sea, spiders, gnats, serpents, flies, &c., all creatures set out by the same art, and truly expressed in lively colors, with an exact description of their natures, qualities, &c., as hath been accurately performed by Aelian, Gesner, Ulysses Aldrovan-dus, Bellonius, Rondoletius, Hippolytus Salvianus, &c. ***

King James, 1605, when he came to see our University of Oxford, and amongst other edifices now went to view that famous library renewed by Sir Thomas Bod-ley, in imitation of Alexander at his departure brake out into that noble speech, If I were not a king, I would be a university man; “and if it were so that I must

7. Archimedes’ water screw.
8. “It allures the mind with profound pleasure, on account of the incredible variety and beauty of the subjects, and excites it to further knowledge.” From the preface to Mercator’s Geography.
be a prisoner, if I might have my wish, I would desire to have no other prison than that library, and to be chained together with so many good authors *et mortuis magistris* (and dead teachers).* So sweet is the delight of study, the more learning they have (as he that hath a dropsy. The more he drinks the thirstier he is), the more they covet to learn, and the last day is *prioris discipulus* (the student of the day before); harsh at first learning is, *radices amaræ* (bitter roots), but *fructus dulces* (sweet fruits), according to that of Isocrates, pleasant at last; the longer they live, the more they are enamored with the Muses. Heinsius, the keeper of the library at Leyden in Holland, was mewed up in it all the year long; and that which to thy thinking should have bred a loathing caused in him a greater liking. “I no sooner (saith he) come into the library, but I bolt the door to me, excluding lust, ambition, avarice, and all such vices, whose nurse is idleness, the mother of ignorance, and melancholy herself, and in the very lap of eternity, amongst so many divine souls, I take my seat, with so lofty a spirit and sweet content, that I pity all our great ones, and rich men that know not this happiness.”

*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. Provided always that this malady proceed not from overmuch study; for in such case he adds fuel to the fire, and nothing can be more pernicious; let him take heed he do not overstretch his wits, and make a skeleton of himself; or such inamoratos as read nothing but playbooks, idle poems, jests, Amadis de Gaul, the Knight of the Sun, the Seven Champions, Palmerin de Oliva, Huon of Bordeaux, &c. Such many times prove in the end as mad as Don Quixote. Study is only prescribed to those that are otherwise idle, troubled in mind, or carried headlong with vain thoughts and imaginations, to distract their cogitations (although variety of study, or some serious subject, would do the former no harm), and divert their continual meditations another way. Nothing in this case better than study.*

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9. From the letters of Daniel Heinsius. Burton in his last paragraph gets thoroughly entangled, for the people who can’t be cured by study include not only those who’ve already studied too much, but those who haven’t studied at all, who have read nothing but “playbooks, idle poems, jests.” In short, study is a good cure for anyone who’s cured by study, but not for anyone who isn’t.