If any man except against the matter or manner of treating of this my subject, and will demand a reason of it, I can allege more than one. I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, “no better cure than business,” as Rhasis holds: and howbeit \textit{stultus labor est ineptiarum}, to be busy in toys is to small purpose, yet hear that divine Seneca, better \textit{aliud agere quam nihil}, better do to no end than nothing. I writ therefore, and busied myself in this playing labour, … to escape the ennu of idleness by a leisurely kind of employment … and so turn leisure to good account.

…I When I first took this task in hand, …, and as he saith, I undertook the work from some inner impulse, this I aimed at, \textit{vel ut lenirem animum scribendo}, [or] to ease my mind by writing; for I had \textit{gravidum cor, foedum caput}, a kind of imposthume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of, and could imagine no fitter evacuation than this. Besides, I might not well refrain, for \textit{ubi dolor, ibi digitus}, one must needs scratch where it itches. I was not a little offended with this malady, shall I say my mistress Melancholy, my Egeria, or my \textit{malus genius} [evil genius]? And for that cause, as he that is stung with a scorpion, I would expel \textit{clavum clavo} [a nail with a nail], comfort one sorrow with another, idleness with idleness, \textit{ut ex vipera theriacum} [as an antidote out of a serpent’s venum], make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease.

I can show no state of life to give content. The like you may say of all ages; children live in perpetual slavery, still under that tyrannical government of masters; young men, and of riper years, subject to labour and a thousand cares of the world, to treachery, falsehood, and cozenage…; old are full of aches in their bones, cramps and convulsions…; dull of hearing, weak-sighted, hoary, wrinkled, harsh, so much altered as that they cannot know their own face in a glass, a burden to themselves and others; after seventy years, “all is sorrow” (as David hath it), they do not live but linger. The they be sound, they fear diseases; if sick, weary of their lives…. One complains of want, a second of servitude, another of a secret or incurable disease of some deformity of body, of some loss, danger, death of friends, shipwreck, persecution, imprisonment, disgrace, repulse, contumely, calumnny, abuse, injury, contempt, ingratitude, unkindness, scoffs, flouts,
unfortunate marriage, single life, too many children, no children, false
servants, unhappy children, barrenness, banishment, oppression, frustrate
hopes and ill success.

From the section Love of Learning, or overmuch Study. With a Digression of the Misery
of Scholars, and why the Muses are Melancholy in:
301-303.

Marsilius Ficinus … puts melancholy amongst one of the those
five principal plagues of students, ‘tis a common moll unto them all, and
almost in some measure an inseparable companion…. For (as Machiavel
holds) study weakens their bodies, dulls the spirits, abates their strength
and courage; and good scholars are never good soldiers, which a certain
Goth well perceived, for when his countrymen came into Greece, and
would have burned all their books, he cried out against it, by all means
they should not do it; “Leave them that plague, which in time will
consume all their vigour, and martial spirits.” The Turks abdicated
Corcutus, the next heir, from the empire, because he was so much given to
his book: and ‘tis the common tenent of the world, that learning dulls and
diminisheth the spirits, and so per consequens produceth melancholy.

Two main reasons may be given of it, why students should be
more subject to this malady than others. The one is, they live a sedentary,
solitary life, …, free from bodily exercise, and those ordinary disports
which other men use; and many times if discontent and idleness concur
with it, which is too frequent, they are precipitated into this gulf on a
sudden; but the common cause is overmuch study: “Too much learning”
as Festus told Paul) “hath made thee mad.” … Marsilius Ficinus … gives
many reasons “why students dote more often than others.” The first is
their negligence: “Other men look to their tools; a painter will wash his
pencils; a smith will look to his hammer, anvil, forge; a husbandman will
mend his plough-irons, and grind his hatchet if it be dull; a falconer or
huntsman will have especial care of his hawks, hounds, horses, dogs, etc.;
a musician will string and unstring his lute, etc; only scholars neglect that
instrument (their brain and spirits I mean) which they daily use, and by
which they range over all the world, which by much study is consumed.”
… The second is contemplation, “which dries the brain and extinguisheth
natural heat; for whilst the spirits are intent to meditation above in the
head, the stomach and liver are left destitute…. ” … Hear Tully, …,
“Whilst others loitered, and took their pleasures, he was continually at his
book”; so they do that will be scholars and that to the hazard (I say) of
their healths, fortunes, wits, and lives. … How many poor scholars have
lost their wits, or become dizzards, neglecting all worldly affairs and their
own health, esse and bene esse [being and well-being], to gain knowledge
for which, after all their pains, in this world’s esteem they are accounted
ridiculous and silly fools, idiots, asses, and (as oft they are) rejected, contemned, derided, doting, and mad! … Of if they keep their wits, yet they are esteemed scrubs and fools by reason of their carriage…. Because they cannot ride a horse, which every clown can do; salute and court a gentlewoman, carve at table, cringe and make congees, which every common swasher can do, … they are laughed to scorn, and accounted silly fools by our gallants. Yea, many times, such is their misery, they deserve it: a mere scholar, a mere ass.