

# DR REASON AND DR EXPERIENCE: CULPEPER'S ASSIGNATION OF PLANETARY RULERS IN THE ENGLISH PHYSITIAN

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*The English Physitian* (1652), commonly known as Culpeper's Herbal, is the most famous work of the leading translator of medical texts into English in the seventeenth century, Nicholas Culpeper (1616–1654).<sup>1</sup> The herbal sold without illustrations for three pence, found its way into the homes of a large section of the English reading public and, it has been claimed, had more influence over the practice of medicine in England for the hundred years following his death than the writings of the famous William Harvey, demonstrator of the circulation of the blood, or of Thomas Sydenham, the 'English Hippocrates'.<sup>2</sup>

Culpeper's Herbal is distinctive not only for making easily available in the vernacular sound knowledge on the uses of native plant medicines, but also in its consistent correlation of these plants with the seven planets of pre-modern astrology. In *The English Physitian Enlarged* (1653)—an augmented version released within a year of the first edition to distinguish the work from the numerous pirated editions which were printed, and the template for most later editions down to the present day—there are 328 separate entries of plant descriptions, all but six of which are apportioned a planetary ruler.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-eight

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *The English Physitian: Or, an Astrologo-Physical Discourse of the Vulgar Herbs of This Nation: Being a Compleat Method of Physick* (London: Peter Cole, 1652). Reference will be made to the expanded edition *The English Physitian Enlarged* (London: Peter Cole, 1656) in my possession, a reissue of the first 1653 edition. Quotations taken from the preface of this version match those of *The English Physitian* (1652). For Culpeper generally, see Benjamin Woolley, *The Herbalist: Nicholas Culpeper and the Fight for Medical Freedom* (London: HarperCollins, 2004); Graeme Toby, *Culpeper's Medicine: A practice of Western Holistic Medicine* (London: Singing Dragon, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> F.N.L. Poynter, 'Nicholas Culpeper and his Books', *Journal of the History of Medicine* 17 (1962): pp. 152–67.

<sup>3</sup> The six herbs without a planetary ruler are: nailwort (Whitlow grass) p. 170, oats p. 284 [i.e., p. 184 but misprinted], parsley piert [p. 288], meadow rue p. 324, rye p. 327 and blackthorn p. 357.

plants are correlated with both a planet and a zodiac sign. Some of the plant entries have a dominant astrological theme woven into the description of the herbs' medicinal actions, and these are proportionately more frequent among the new entries which augmented the original text. Therefore, references here will be made to this enlarged edition.

This study will explore the basis on which the assignments of a particular planet to each native herb were made. Why was Culpeper so assiduous and thorough in this matter? How was the knowledge of the correspondences to be employed? What sources did he draw on for his assignments and do their correspondences of herbs and planets match his own? How does Culpeper himself explain the attributions? In histories of herbals, Culpeper's 'astrological botany' has been derided or condemned as 'a travesty rather than a reflection of the ancient astrological lore' but with little actual analysis applied to the detail of the astrological content.<sup>4</sup> This is what will be undertaken now.

*Why did Culpeper assiduously categorise the herbs according to the planets?*

*The English Physitian* and its enlarged version of the following year were the culmination of original output and among the final writings undertaken by Culpeper, who died within six months of publication of the latter.<sup>5</sup> He had commenced his writing career with the controversial release of his translation from Latin of the pharmacopoeia of the College of Physicians, *A Physical Directory* (1649).<sup>6</sup> His main astrological work appeared two years later: *Semeiotica Uranica; Or, An Astrological Judgment of Diseases from the Decumbiture of the Sick* (1651).<sup>7</sup> In the same way that Culpeper produced a new work in the vernacular by translating the physicians' *Pharmacopoeia* and appending his own commentary, so the *Semeiotica Uranica* was based on astrological works by the twelfth-century biblical scholar and philosopher Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089/92–1164/67) and the more recent but obscure Natalis Durret, recorded as having been a 'professor of

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<sup>4</sup> Agnes Arber, *Herbals, Their Origin and Evolution: A Chapter in the History of Botany, 1470–1670*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. VIII; Eleanour Sinclair Rohde, *The Old English Herbals* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971 [1922]), pp. 163–67.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Rhineland McCarl 'Publishing the Works of Nicholas Culpeper, Astrological Herbalist and Translator of Latin Medical Works in Seventeenth-Century London', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* Vol.13 (1996): pp. 225–76.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A Physical Directory* (London: Peter Cole, 1649).

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica; Or, An Astrological Judgment of Diseases from the Decumbiture of the Sick* (London: Nathaniell Brookes, 1651).

sciences and mathematics' and a protégé of Cardinal the Duke of Richelieu.<sup>8</sup>

Culpeper draws on Ibn Ezra's medical-astrological *Sefer Ha-Me'orot* (The Book of Lights), which he would have known by its sixteenth-century Latin title *De luminaribus seu de diebus creticis*, for the introductory section on the critical days of a disease and its astrological interpretation,<sup>9</sup> and Durret's *De crisium mysterio tractatus* from his *Novae motuum celestium ephemerides Richelianae* (1641).<sup>10</sup> The focus of Culpeper's work is medical prognosis using astrology to provide an answer to the sick person's inquiry 'What is wrong with me and what will happen?'<sup>11</sup> Since the *Pharmacopoeia* described the Galenic simples and compound prescriptions of seventeenth-century England, and taking note of the positions of the stars was one of the observations that a physician in Tudor and Stuart England could make in relation to the patient consulting him,<sup>12</sup> the subject matter of these works of Culpeper's was hardly different from orthodox medical theory and practice at that time. While Galen himself had the considerable technical ability to calculate the positions of the heavenly bodies, he did not consider them responsible for the commencement and course of diseases, but rather the climatic conditions which derived from their positions in the heavens.<sup>13</sup> Seemingly, among those medical sects into which Galen had divided ancient medicine, there was

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<sup>8</sup> Avner Ben-Zaken, 'The Heavens of the Sky and the Heavens of the Heart: the Ottoman Cultural Context for the Introduction of Post-Copernican Astronomy', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 37 (2004): pp. 6–7. Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica*, pp. 1, 15. Culpeper described 'Avenezra' as a physician and astrologer.

<sup>9</sup> Shlomo Sela, ed. and trans., *Abraham Ibn Ezra on Elections, Interrogations and Medical Astrology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011): pp. 451–83.

<sup>10</sup> Ben-Zaken, 'The Heavens of the Sky', pp. 2, 7; Chanita Goodblatt, 'The Presence of Abraham Ibn Ezra in Seventeenth-Century England', *ANQ*, 22, no.2 (2009): pp. 18–19; Renate Smithuis, 'Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Works in Hebrew and Latin: New discoveries and exhaustive listing', *Aleph* 6 (2006): pp. 239–338; *Novae motuum celestium ephemerides Richelianae...Authore N.Durret Montebrisono* (Paris: sumptibus authoris, 1641).

<sup>11</sup> Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1987), pp. 222–24.

<sup>12</sup> Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Vivian Nutton, 'Greek Medical Astrology and the Boundaries of Medicine', in *Astro-Medicine: Astrology and Medicine, East and West*, eds. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, *Micologus' Library* 25 (Florence: SISMEL, 2008), p. 21.

little concern with astrology.<sup>14</sup>

Evidence from later Arabic medicine also featured the application of astrology to medical diagnosis and prognosis. In a book on astrological medicine by Yūḥannā ibn al-Ṣālt, there is consideration of the lunar and astral influences on generation and corruption, the correlation of signs and planets with humours and diseases, the apportioning of significations of the angles of a decumbiture to a patient, disease and therapeutic mode in the style of Dorotheus of Sidon, the election of an appropriate day for treatment and the observation of constellations forbidding the prescribing of medicines.<sup>15</sup> However, two of the most famous Arabic physicians, Avicenna and Averroes, refuted astrology altogether, while al-Rāzī included only a short section on the influence of the stars on the crises of illness.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear, then, that in the Greco-Arabic tradition the alliance of astrology with medicine was not fully accepted and, where it was employed, it did not normally extend to the identification of specific remedies for a given case. Instead, the medical art of prescribing was left open to allow the physician-astrologer to take into account all the relevant signs, physical and celestial, before determining the treatment.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the only mention of medicinal agents in the *Semeiotica Uranica*, based as it was on the work of Ibn Ezra and Durret, occurs in the one example of the diagnostic and prognostic method from Culpeper's own practice, where he counters a French physician's mis-prescribing of the exotic purgative scammony (*Convolvulus scammonia*) with a standard clyster or enema whose ingredients go unmentioned.<sup>18</sup> The other example cases in the book, translated from Durret's medical horoscopes attributed to the famous Italian physician

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<sup>14</sup> Nutton, 'Greek Medical Astrology', pp. 18–19. According to Nutton, the Empiricists were not concerned with the causes of disease but with which medicines were effective once and may work again in a similar case, while the Methodists grouped all disease presentations into three categories of manifestations and the course of the stars synchronous with any one presentation were so distant as to be irrelevant.

<sup>15</sup> Felix Klein-Franke, *Iatromathematics in Islam: a Study on Yuhanna ibn al-Salt's book on Astrological Medicine* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Manfred Ullmann, *Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 112; Erwin H. Ackerknecht, *Therapeutics from the Primitives to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Hafner Press, 1973), p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Note for example the absence of discussion concerning actual remedies to be used in the chapters on Western astrological medicine from Galen to Pico della Mirandola in *Astro-Medicine*, eds. Akasoy, Burnett and Yoeli-Tlalim, pp. 17–142.

<sup>18</sup> Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica*, pp. 58–69.

Girolamo Cardano (1501–76), the Spanish Jesuit philosopher Benedictus Pererius (1535–1610), Thomas Bodier, physician and author of *De ratione et usu dierum criticorum* (1555), Giovanni Magini (1555–1617), the Italian astronomer and mathematician who wrote *De astrologica ratione ac usu dierum criticorum seu decretiorum* (1607), and that of a certain John Baptista Triandula, also contain no specific indications for particular herbs or medicaments.<sup>19</sup>

Culpeper's assiduous linking of herb to ruling planet in *The English Physitian* suggests a different orientation, outside that of the mainstream of Greco-Arabic medicine. Clues exist in some of his other works. Since his working life as a writer only lasted seven years at most, Culpeper's output was prolific; he must have worked on several texts at once and he had cause to engage an amanuensis in the last few years before his death.<sup>20</sup> One of the texts he worked on in 1651–2 was a translation of the new dispensatory of the College of Physicians, which had been published in 1650.<sup>21</sup> In Culpeper's English edition—which was issued in 1653, most likely between the dates of publication of *The English Physitian* and its enlarged version—he inserted some new material into the catalogue of simples to help the reader apply his understanding of Culpeper's *Key to Galen and Hippocrates, their method of Physick* to the medicinal herbs listed.<sup>22</sup> Thus the physicians' materia medica was analysed in terms of their manifest qualities (whether heating or cooling, drying or moistening and to what degree), their therapeutic properties such as an astringent or analgesic action and, significantly, the part of the body to which each was assigned.<sup>23</sup>

In introducing the section on assignments of herbs to parts of the body

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<sup>19</sup> These horoscopes are only mentioned in *Semeiotica Uranica* (p.143) and not translated and reproduced until the second edition, i.e., *An Astrological Judgment of Diseases* (1655) because, Culpeper wrote, he lacked in 1650–51 the relevant ephemerides to generate accurate horoscopes.

<sup>20</sup> Tobyn, *Culpeper's Medicine*, pp. 14, 63. I have reckoned on a writing period between 1647–54; *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> McCarl, 'Publishing the Works of Culpeper', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 13 (1996): pp. 225–76. See the chronology of publication of Culpeper's works on pp. 263–76.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis: or, The London Dispensatory* (London: Peter Cole, 1653), pp. 187–325 [incorrect pagination]. Culpeper's *Key to Galen and Hippocrates, their method of Physick* had first been appended to the third edition of his translation of the old *Pharmacopoeia* (1650) and was now transferred into the new one.

<sup>23</sup> Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*, pp. 35–54.

Culpeper referred to the different opinions of ancient physicians. Some rejected, he wrote, 'any specifical vertues at all in medicines, or any congruity to certain parts of the body' – if a herb strengthened or harmed the brain it must do the same to all parts of the body – but they were 'ignorant of the influence of the heavens'; others recognized that certain herbs possessed 'distinct operations upon distinct parts of the body' and this 'by an hidden quality' but lacked a knowledge of astrology to explain this quality; and a third group steered a middle course by agreeing that the effect of a herb was on the whole body but could strengthen a particular part 'because the substance of the medicine agrees with the substance of that part which it strengthens...and the substance of all parts of the body are not alike'.<sup>24</sup> Culpeper judged that this last argument had some weight to it but fell short of recognizing 'a certain truth, the sympathy and antipathy in the creation is the cause both of all diseases and also of the operations of all medicines'.<sup>25</sup>

Complementing this material, Culpeper placed a new two-page introduction in the 1653 *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*, a 'Premonitory Epistle To The Reader'.<sup>26</sup> Here Culpeper linked the universe created by God as one united body to the body of Man as macrocosm-microcosm; he deduced that the three realms of the physical elements, the stars and God (the elementary, celestial and intellectual worlds within this universe) must have their counterparts in the human body and asserted that, since disease was understood to be natural, the stars should have some influence on the body. In this respect he could write of a celestial Moon and its corresponding microcosmic Moon regulating certain aspects of the human body. The theme of three was reiterated by the argument that 'if there be a trinity in the deity (which is denied by none but Ranters), then must there be a trinity also in all his works, and a dependency between them' namely 'that every inferior world is governed by its superior'. Culpeper proved these points by citing scripture on the rulership of the day by the Sun and of the night by the Moon, and by reasoned argument where he contended that elementary bodies are subject to constant change and must therefore be in nature passive; whereas the stars are unchanging and so in nature active, effecting alterations over time in the elementary worlds by their celestial motions and configurations. He concluded that 'he and he only is a physician who knows which of these qualities [in the world of elements] offends, by which of the celestial bodies it is caused, and how safely and speedily to remedy it. All the rest that practise physick are but mountebanks'. Development in the intellectual world, through fearing God,

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, C1r-v.

proclaiming his glory and studying his great books, 'the book of the scripture' and 'the book of the creatures' would in its turn bring wisdom that would free the human soul from the necessity of celestial causation.<sup>27</sup>

Culpeper had already shown which organs and functions in the body were associated with each planet in his *Astrologo-Physical Discourse of the Human Vertues in the Body of Man* that first appeared in print in his *Ephemeris for 1651*.<sup>28</sup> Now, in *The English Physitian* Culpeper provided the correspondences between planets and medicinal herbs. Citing in the preface from Romans 1.30 'the invisible things of Him from the creatures of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse' and a poet's couplet 'because out of thy thoughts God should not pass, his image stamped is on every grass', Culpeper suggested that in the Book of the Creatures, i.e., the study of nature, signs of the planetary correspondences of herbs are readily apparent. He had made such a study, though with no help from the authors he had read on the subject, and his herbal contained the fruits of his discoveries:

I knew well enough the whole world and everything in it was formed of a composition of contrary elements, and in such a harmony as must needs show the wisdom and power of a great God. I knew as well, this creation, though thus composed of contraries, was one united body, and man an epitome of it. I knew those various afflictions in Man in respect of sickness and health were caused naturally by the various operations of the microcosm; and I could not be ignorant, that as the cause is, so must the cure be; and therefore he that would know the reason of the operations of herbs must look up as high as the stars. I always found the disease vary according to the various motions of the stars; and this is enough one would think to teach a man by the effect where the cause lay. Then to find out the reason of the operation of herbs, plants etc. by the stars went I, and herein I could find but few authors, but those as full of nonsense and contradiction as an egg is full of meat; this being little pleasing and less profitable to me, I consulted with my two brothers, Dr. Reason and Dr. Experience and took a voyage to visit my mother Nature, by whose advice, together with the help of Dr. Diligence, I at last

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, C1v.

<sup>28</sup> Culpeper's publisher Peter Cole inserted this *Discourse* into subsequent posthumous editions of the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*: Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (London, 1654), A1r–B1v. Possible reasons for the *Discourse* not appearing in the 1653 *Pharmacopoeia* include technicalities of printing—this edition is in small quarto format while the 1654 one is in quarto—may be Culpeper's illness, which had worsened at this time, and the publisher's rationalisation of his Culpeper material only after the author's death.

obtained my desires, and being warned by Mr. Honesty a stranger in our daies to publish it to the world, I have done it.<sup>29</sup>

Although Culpeper's explanation for the 'reason of the operation of herbs' is couched mainly in religious allusions, the macrocosm-microcosm link and the three worlds indicate the influence of Neoplatonic ideas that were part of the cosmology of Paracelsian medicine. That Culpeper was interested in the harmonisation of Galenic medicine and its materia medica of herbal simples and Paracelsian medicine which emphasised God-given healing powers and the use of pharmaceutical forms in which the stronger herbal remedies could be prepared for safe use by his reading public is affirmed by another translation he was preparing, *A New Method of Physick, or A short View of Paracelsus and Galen's Practice* (1654).<sup>30</sup> The author was an obscure German Physician from Spitzburg, Simeon Partliz, who attempted to reconcile Galenic and Paracelsian medicine 'ex doctissimorum medicorum, tum dogmaticorum, tum Hermeticorum scriptis', according to the title-page of the original 1625 Latin text.<sup>31</sup> The translation had apparently been ready for the press as early as 1651, when Culpeper must have started work on *The English Physitian*.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Culpeper lists among his sources for the herbal 'a manuscript', which he credits in his comments on Aqua mellis, the quintessence of honey of Paracelsus, in the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* to a certain Mr. Charles Butler of Hampshire.<sup>33</sup>

In England in the 1650s there was a renewed interest in Paracelsian medicine stirred by the arrival and subsequent translation of the works of the Flemish chemical physician Jan Baptist van Helmont (1580–1644), which encouraged translations of more works by Paracelsus.<sup>34</sup> The former 'Elizabethan compromise' in which English practitioners studied the new chemical remedies as additions to the pharmacopoeia but rejected the mystical, Hermetic aspects of Paracelsian philosophy was now overturned in a more violent conflict with the cruel practices

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<sup>29</sup> Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, C1r-v.

<sup>30</sup> F.N.L. Poynter, 'Nicholas Culpeper and the Paracelsians' in *Science, Medicine and Society in the Renaissance: Essays to Honor Walter Pagel*, ed. Allen G. Debus (London: Science History Publications, 1972), pp. 201–20. Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (Basel: Karger, 1982), p. 333.

<sup>31</sup> Simeon Partliz, *Medici Systematis Harmonici...*(Frankfurt: Aubrius, 1625).

<sup>32</sup> Tobyn, *Culpeper's Medicine*, pp. 64–65.

<sup>33</sup> Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (1653), p. 184.

<sup>34</sup> Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (New York: Oldbourne, 1965), p. 181.



and crude compounds of Galenic medicine.<sup>35</sup> Culpeper had written as early as 1649 that 'your best way to learn to still chymical oyls is to learn of an alchymist'.<sup>36</sup> Yet he himself was 'more attracted to the transcendental than to the practical side of Paracelsian doctrine, for it accorded well with his devoutly religious outlook'.<sup>37</sup> W.R., the anonymous author of the biographical sketch of Culpeper's life, wrote that he had 'bent his inclinations from the time that he was but ten years of age to...studies of astrology and occult philosophy' and asserted that he occupied a position where 'he was not only for Galen and Hippocrates, but he knew how to correct and moderate the tyrannies of Paracelsus'.<sup>38</sup> Culpeper's Herbal is evidence of his interest in both these competing medical philosophies.

*How was the knowledge of the correspondences to be employed?*

The planetary assignments in *The English Physitian* were to be used to help his readers identify which herbs were required in the treatment of any condition, by recourse to Galenic principles of treatment by opposites with respect to the herbs' medical indications and to astrological significations derived from a decumbiture or horoscope cast for the moment the sick person fell ill or consulted the astrologer. In order to facilitate the latter judgment, Culpeper included an example horoscope in the final chapter of his herbal, 'The Way of Mixing Medicines according to the Cause of the Disease and the part of the Body afflicted', which he deemed the key to the whole work.<sup>39</sup>

Of the five herbs Culpeper selected from indications in this horoscope as necessary to treat the condition of the sick person, two were to be used for their sympathetic virtues, healing like with like, and three by antipathy to the disease. Moreover, the herbal assigned to three of the stated herbs both a planet and a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Culpeper, *A Physical Directory*, p. 317.

<sup>37</sup> Poynter, *Nicholas Culpeper and the Paracelsians*, p. 219.

<sup>38</sup> W.R. 'The Life of the Admired Physician and Astrologer of our Times, Mr. Nicholas Culpeper' in *Culpeper's School of Physick* (London: Peter Cole, 1659), Cc2v and C4v. A posthumous publication under Culpeper's name further connected him with Paracelsian medicine: *Mr. Culpeper's Treatise of Aurum Potabile* (London, 1656), but the true author of the treatise remains in doubt; see Toby, *Culpeper's Medicine*, pp. 33–36; Woolley, *The Herbalist*, p. 326; McCarl, 'Publishing the works of Nicholas Culpeper', p. 260, n. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, pp. 394–98.

zodiac sign. These double symbols allowed the selection of what should be a precisely attuned remedy for the organ affected in the given case or else a sharing of both sympathetic and antipathetic effect. As an example here, the 'tough phlegm and melancholy' diagnosed in the lungs through the symbol in the horoscope of Saturn in Cancer (a pernicious placing), could be removed by the use of sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*): this 'herb of the Sun and under the celestial crab may do very well'; because it was a sympathetic remedy for the lungs as indicated by the zodiac sign Cancer, it was antipathetical to the cold of Saturn through its solar nature and, as a herb hot and dry in the extreme, could cut and help expectorate the phlegm by the treatment of contraries.<sup>40</sup>

Since only thirty-eight of the 328 plants in the herbal were given a corresponding zodiac sign as well as a planetary ruler, such close working of the symbolism appears to have had a limited applicability. The assignments of zodiac signs as well as planets may have been a work in progress for Culpeper, a job that was never completed. These double correspondences, however, were not needed for the second aspect of Culpeper's application of astrology to medicine: the potentising of remedies to resolve the astrological cause of the disease by gathering or preparing each plant medicine under the right celestial conditions. As well as the practical concerns to select a herb in good condition and at the appropriate phase of growth according to the part required, it should be picked 'in what place they most delight to grow in' and at a time when its ruling planet is strongly activated in the zodiac, in harmonious alignment with the moon and in the hour of the planet which rules it.<sup>41</sup> Since the need of the remedy may have been pressing, Culpeper gave alternative instructions to avoid delay yet 'observe the like in gathering the herbs of other plan[e]ts and you may happen to do wonders'. Marsilio Ficino himself had emphasised the value of such preparations: 'at least do not neglect medicines which have been strengthened by some sort of heavenly aid, unless perhaps you would neglect life itself. For I have found by long and repeated experience that medicines of this kind are as different from other medicines made without astrological election, as wine is from water'.<sup>42</sup>

*What sources did Culpeper draw on for his attributions?*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp. 398, 319.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 381; Toby, *Culpeper's Medicine*, pp. 198–200 where the exact astrological instructions and examples for the herbal are cited.

<sup>42</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989), pp. 239–41.

How did Culpeper arrive at his assignments of planets to herbs? Was it a result of his study of the book of nature or did he follow the work of another author? There is a list among the prefatory material in *The English Physitian* of 'authors made use of in this treatise', a simple list of many of the greatest names in the history of the transmission of knowledge of herbs in Greco-Arabic medicine, together with Culpeper's own close 'colleagues', Dr. Reason and Dr. Experience.<sup>43</sup> I have suggested elsewhere that these authors' names have been elided and gathered by Culpeper as he abbreviated chapters on English herbs from his central source for the herbal, the apothecary John Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum* (1640).<sup>44</sup> Neither Parkinson, nor any of the other authors of herbals, which make up the majority of the names listed, included astrological correspondences for the herbs they described. Culpeper was critical of this written tradition, anyway, complaining in his preface that:

...all the authors that have written of the nature of herbs gave not a bit of a reason why such an herb was appropriated to such a part of the body, nor why it cured such a disease... neither Gerard nor Parkinson nor any that ever wrote in the like nature ever gave one wise reason for what they wrote and so did nothing else but train up young novices in physick in the School of Tradition and teach them just as a parrot is taught to speak: an author saith so, therefore 'tis true. And if all that authors say be true, why do they contradict one another?<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *The English Physitian Enlarged*, C2v. More obscure names in Culpeper's list of authors are 'Pona', presumably Giovanni Pona who wrote a study of herbal simples growing in the region around Verona, entitled *Plantae, seu Simplicia, ut vocant, quae in Baldo monte, et in via ab Verona ad Baldum reperiuntur* (Basel: Zetzner, 1608), 'Pena', i.e., Pierre Pena who co-wrote with Matthias de L'Obel *Stirpium adversaria nova* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1570–71) and 'Bellus', presumably Onorio Belli (d. 1604), a Venetian doctor known for his correspondence with the Flemish botanist Charles de L'Escluse, *Ad Carolum Clusium aliquot epistolae de rarioribus quibusdam plantis agentes*, which was appended to L'Escluse's *Rariorum Plantarum Historia* (Antwerp: ex Officina Plantiniana apud Ioannem Moretum 1601).

<sup>44</sup> Graeme Toby, 'An anatomy of *The English Physitian*', in *Critical Approaches to the History of Western Herbal Medicine*, eds. Susan Francia and Anne Stobart (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2014), pp. 87–103.

<sup>45</sup> *The English Physitian Enlarged* C1r-v. The original passage in the 1652 edition (A4v) is softer: 'In this art the worthies of our own nation Gerard, Johnson and Parkinson are

But among the authors are two notable astrologers, namely 'Avenaris' or Abraham Ibn Ezra (already discussed here), and the French physician and astrologer Antoine Mizauld (1510–1578), professor of medicine in Paris, doctor and astrologer to Marguerite de Valois, and author of numerous tracts on medical astrology and sympathy and antipathy in nature. That Mizauld was one of the authors with whose contradictory views Culpeper found fault is evident from the latter's discussion of the rulership of henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*):

I wonder in my heart how astrologers could take on them to make this an herb of Jupiter, and yet Mizaldus, a man of a penetrating brain, was also of that opinion as well as the rest. The herb is indeed under the dominion of Saturn, and I prove it by this argument: all the herbs which delight to grow in saturnine places are saturnine herbs...and whole cartloads of [henbane] may be found near the places where they empty the common jakes, and scarce a stinking ditch to be found without it growing by it. Ergo tis an herb of Saturn.<sup>46</sup>

However, there is no extensive list in Mizauld's works that I have consulted showing the correspondences between herbs and planets. His astrological works include lists of those diseases that planets might signify or of the organs of the body which they rule but not of the herbs to which they correspond.<sup>47</sup> The works on sympathy and antipathy source Pliny, Galen, Fracastoro, Cardan and other writers ancient and contemporary on observations of attractions and repulsions between animals, birds, fish, stones and plants or between these and the Sun and Moon as the physical determinants of day and night, light and darkness.<sup>48</sup> In his

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not to be forgotten, who did much good in the study of this art, yet they and all others that wrought of the nature of herbs gave not a bit of reason why...'

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pp. 124–25.

<sup>47</sup> *Antonii Mizaldi Monsluciani planetologia, rebus astronomicis, medicis, et philosophicis erudite referta* (Lyon: apud Mathiam Bonhomme, 1551) and *Aesculapii et Uraniae medicum simul et astronomicum ex colloquio conjugium, harmoniam microcosmi, cum macrocosmo, sive humani corporis cum caelo, paucis figurans, & perspicue demonstrans* (Lyon: apud J. Tornaesium, 1550). Other astrological works by Mizauld that I have consulted are: *Zodiacus, sive duodecim signorum coeli hortulus; Asterismi, sive Stellatarum octavi coeli imaginum Officina*; and *Planetae, sive planetarum collegium* printed in one volume (Paris: C. Cuillard, 1553).

<sup>48</sup> *Memorabilium aliquot naturae arcanorum sylvula, rerum variarum sympathias & antipathias...libellis duobus complectens. Autore Antonio Mizaldo Monsluciano* (Paris:

*Secrets de la lune* (1571), Mizauld reveals, for instance, that cucumbers visibly increase in size at full moon and that herbs gathered when the moon increases in light are of much greater efficacy and virtue than during her decrease in light or the dark of the Moon; and he repeats the traditional association between the twelve signs and the body from head to feet and the warning from the ancients not to perform surgery on a part of the body when the Moon occupies its associated zodiac sign.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Dr Reason had consulted with Dr Experience to determine a more accurate correlation of henbane with Saturn than Mizauld proposed, a correlation strengthened by the fact that henbane has narcotic and poisonous properties. Culpeper had already stated in the preface to his herbal that he knew by sight most of the plants he discussed, a practical knowledge and experience that had started in his childhood in the Sussex countryside. He challenged Mizauld a second time in the herbal, together with 'almost al astrologo-physitians' who held that plantain (*Plantago spp.*) was a herb of Mars:

They give a very simile of a truth for it too, viz. because it cures diseases of the head and privities which are under the houses of Mars, Aries and Scorpio. All diseases of the head coming of heat are caused by Mars, for Venus is made of no such hot mettle, or at least deals in inferior parts. The truth is it is under the command of Venus and cures the head by antipathy to Mars, and the privities by sympathy to Venus.<sup>50</sup>

In the herbal Mizauld is mentioned a third and final time, reporting that houseleek preserves from fire and lightning whatever structure they grow upon. The statement is coupled in one sentence with Culpeper's determination of the plant as a herb of Jupiter, seemingly as an explanation or qualification of the assignation. It is probable that whatever influence Mizauld's writings had on

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apud Jacobum Kerver, 1554) and the excerpted *Catalogi septem sympathiae et antipathiae...rerum aliquot memorabilium* (Paris: apud Jacobum Kerver, 1554). In the former, *Memorabilium aliquot*, p.60, Mizauld mentions henbane ('hyoscyamus'), writing: pigs which have eaten 'hyoscyamus' are torn by impending danger unless they immediately rinse themselves inside and out with copious amounts of water, as Aelius attests [sues sumpta herba hyoscyamo praesenti periculo convelluntur: nisi copiosa aqua statim se foris et intus proluerunt ut Aelianus attestatur].

<sup>49</sup> Antoine Mizauld, *Secrets de la Lune* (Paris: Frederic Morel, 1571), ch. IIII, pp. 12–13, ch. VIII pp. 20–21.

<sup>50</sup> Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, p. 300.

Culpeper's planetary assignments, it amounted to no more than a noted sympathy or antipathy in nature that Culpeper sometimes worked into his formal assignment of the symbolically appropriate planet (for houseleek, Jupiter as protector 'father Zeus' who carries a thunderbolt) to the herb in question. But since it appears – from the fact that out of three citations of Mizauld's correlations between macrocosm and microcosm in the herbal Culpeper did not accept two of them – that Mizauld may be one of the authors 'full of nonsense and contradiction', then we need to look closely not at Culpeper's list of authors but at his own qualifications of his planetary assignments. As he wrote in 1651: 'let every one that desires to be called by the name of artist have his wits in his head (for that's the place ordained for them) and not in his books'.<sup>51</sup>

*Culpeper's own explanations and qualifications*

I have analysed each entry in *The English Physitian Enlarged* for indications of Culpeper's reasoning concerning the herbs' astrological signatures. Nearly every attribution is found at the beginning of the section on medicinal virtues in each herb entry. An effect of the editing of Parkinson's lists of therapeutic actions and indications to compose the substance of the majority of Culpeper's descriptions of medicinal virtues is that an entry can appear to be a disjointed amalgam of Parkinson's list prefaced by Culpeper's assignment of a ruling planet. Often, however, the assignment is immediately qualified by comments which I have taken as evidence of Culpeper's reasoning for the assignment. A small number of entries, indeed, are thoroughly astrological in theme and have not been sourced from Parkinson's herbal.<sup>52</sup>

I have thus found that Culpeper's reasoning for the assignments falls into one of four groupings. In the first two groupings there is explicit indication of a central 'sympathetic' use of the herb either by way of a hidden power to strengthen the organs or faculties ruled by the planet assigned to it or, more obviously to the eye, by a doctrine of signatures that links the appearance of a herb – its colour, shape or key feature such as thorns – or where it grows to one of the planets. Examples are the sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*): 'the plant is venusian and breedeth seed exceedingly, and strengthens the spirit procreative' for sympathetic effect on the reproductive organs under Venus; and docks (*Rumex spp.*) for the doctrine of signatures: 'al docks are under Jupiter; of which the red dock which is commonly called bloodwort cleanseth the blood, and strengthens the liver; but the yellow

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<sup>51</sup> Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica*, p. 102.

<sup>52</sup> Tobyn, 'An anatomy of *The English Physitian*', pp. 98–99.

dock root is best to be taken when either the blood or liver is afflicted by choler'.<sup>53</sup>

In the second two groupings, an impression of antipathetic use is created. Either the reasoning includes the description and explicit linking of the planetary ruler with the herb's manifest qualities – which are not routinely listed in the herbal but which are a necessary part of the standard Galenic theory of cure by contraries – or there is an absence of any reasoning to connect the planetary ruler with the list of indications drawn from the Galenic tradition. Examples of these two groups include blue-bottle (*Centaurea cyanus*): 'as they are naturally cold, dry and binding, so they are under the dominion of Saturn' who shares these qualities; and the scarlet pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*): 'it is a gallant solar herb. This is of a cleansing and attractive quality, whereby it draweth forth thorns and splinters...'<sup>54</sup>

Culpeper promised in his preface that 'if you view it with the eye of reason, you shall see a reason for every thing that is written, whereby you may find the very ground and foundation of physick'.<sup>55</sup> However, the majority of entries according to my analysis are of this last type, seemingly devoid of an explanation that connects a ruling planet to the medicinal indications of the herb. A breakdown of the 322 herb entries which are assigned a planetary ruler yields the following totals:<sup>56</sup>

<i>Explanations of connection between herb and its planetary ruler</i>				
	Sympathetic use		Antipathetic use	
	Strengthening related organs	By doctrine of signatures	According to manifest qualities	Seemingly without explanation
from total of 322 herb entries	83	18	50	171

Table 1: Explanation of the planetary assignments given to herbs listed in *The English Physitian Enlarged*

Taking the numbers in each grouping as percentages of the total, it is also possible to analyse the groupings related to each planetary ruler. In such a breakdown, it

<sup>53</sup> Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, pp. 87, 95.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 40, 298.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, C1v.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, (p.1) and n.3.

appears that Culpeper was much more likely than average to attribute a saturnine or martial rulership to a herb's cold and binding or hot and biting qualities respectively. A strengthening effect through sympathy of plant, planet and organ was relatively more often attributed to solar remedies for the heart and Venusian herbs for gynaecological use. Herbs under Mercury were significantly more frequently described as treating diseases of the lungs by antipathy to Jupiter, ruler of that organ, than by strengthening the brain by the power of sympathy. Indeed, there are no herbs of Mercury in Culpeper's text which are explained by either their manifest qualities or by the doctrine of signatures.

By way of examples, Culpeper writes of agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*): 'It is a herb under Jupiter and the sign Cancer; and strengthens those parts under that planet and sign, and removes diseases in them by sympathy, and those under Saturn, Mars and Mercury by antipathy, if they happen in any part of the body governed by Jupiter, or under the signs Cancer, Sagittary or Pisces, and therefore must needs be good for the gout'. Comfrey's (*Symphytum officinale*) manifest qualities stand out: 'this is also an herb of Saturn, and I suppose under the sign Capricorn, cold, dry and earthy in quality'. The prickly bramble bush (*Rubus fruticosus*) has a suitable signature for a sharp and wounding plant with sweet fruit, 'It is a plant of Venus in Aries...If any ask the reason why Venus is so prickly? Tell them, 'tis because she is in the house of Mars'. Figwort or throatwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*), hot and dry in the second degree, has its main therapeutic use represented even in its later Linnaean binomial: 'some Latin authors call it Cervicria because 'tis appropriated to the neck; and we throatwort... Venus owns the herb and the celestial bull will not deny it, therefore a better remedy cannot be for the king's evil, because the Moon that rules the disease is exalted there, nor for any disease in the neck'. With lovage (*Levisticum officinale*) Culpeper shows us how this herb may become the specific treatment for a disease with a particular celestial cause: 'it is an herb of the Sun under the sign Taurus. If Saturn offend the throat, (as he always does, if he be occasioner of the malady, and in Taurus is the genesis), this is your cure'. Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*) predominantly demonstrates treatment by sympathy: 'Venus owns the herb and it is under Leo. There is no better herb to drive melancholy vapours from the heart, to strengthen it, and make a merry, cheerful, blithe soul than this herb'.<sup>57</sup>

Generally, the notion of sympathy and antipathy viewed through the traditional teachings on the natures of the planets and their friendships and enmities – where, for instance, Mercury is an enemy to Jupiter and Venus to Mars (because each rules the zodiac signs opposite to those under the command of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 6, 73, 37, 101, 147, 164.



other) and Saturn is an enemy to both the moon and Venus (signs opposing or at right angles together with contrary qualities)—frequently supplies on close reading of the herb entries the explanations which Culpeper has not spelled out. Thus, many herbs under Venus treat inflammations, burns and wounds by antipathy and are gentle, or sweet to taste and restore beauty or stir up lust. A number of purges and vomits are under violent Mars. Some Jupiter herbs are wholesome and healthy. Lunar herbs counter inflammation and Saturn herbs are ‘anti-venereal’.

This astrological reasoning appears to be more prevalent in Culpeper’s herbal than the appeal to a doctrine of signatures which requires first-hand knowledge of the plants. Yet the two are not mutually exclusive; rather they compound the picture of the herb’s true essence. Living close to nature and having familiarity with the herbs Culpeper discussed would have allowed his readers easily to connect thorny bushes and thistles with Mars and the knowledge of their medicinal virtues which the herbal taught would confirm it. Equally familiar to readers must have been the fact that the flowers of the scarlet pimpernel, designated above as a solar herb ‘without explanation’ with respect to its medicinal indications, open only when the sun is shining and close in wet or humid weather, earning the plant the common names of ‘poor man’s weather-glass’ and ‘shepherd’s sundial’.<sup>58</sup> Its assignation to the sun was so obvious Culpeper felt no need to allude to it by quoting such common names nor make a formal link to its medicinal actions. The names of some herbs which designate their main therapeutic indications, such as goutwort (*Aegopodium podagraria*) and dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*, for urinary problems) also attracted the relevant planetary ruler (Saturn and Venus respectively).

Local names, familiarity in nature and the ‘eye of reason’ were combined with the medicinal knowledge supplied in Culpeper’s Herbal of native plants to provide explanations for his planetary assignations, which had little or no need of supplementation by a foreign text full of classical Southern European observations of the kind that Antoine Mizauld wrote.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I have shown that Culpeper’s application of astrological medicine partook of both Galenic and Paracelsian teachings. He remained steadfast in his use of native herbal simples that all his readers could hope to access cheaply or for free. But the philosophical and transcendental aspects of the Paracelsianism

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<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Grigson, *The Englishman’s Flora* (London: Phoenix House, 1960), pp. 268–69.

that was in vogue during the 1650s chimed with his devout puritan outlook and his faith in reading signs in the heavens, while its rejection of authorities in favour of new approaches to knowledge, of the sort promoted by Dr. Reason and Dr. Experience, must have carried political and intellectual appeal. Thus he sought to teach his fellow countrymen not only about the healing benefits of the herbs around them, but how to use them most efficiently through heavenly aid. The assignations of planets to herbs facilitated their therapeutic application and the understanding of the method was available to any who could use the 'eye of reason'.

The macrocosm-microcosm concept and the associated notions of sympathy and antipathy between the celestial and physical worlds were not part of a new doctrine but had ancient roots. Regarding the astrological lore concerning plants in antiquity, however, Ducourthial has argued that the instructions of astrologers of that period were in no way comparable to occasional comments concerning celestial signs in, say, Pliny or Dioscorides. These latter made reference to the stars for determining the most favourable moments for achieving different agricultural tasks, which may have included the gathering of certain non-cultivated plants, although in Hesiod's *Works and Days* there is no consecration of the most favourable moments for the harvest of non-cultivated plants. But the majority of observations by those involved in the transmission and teaching of knowledge of medicinal plants are drawn from nature itself. Astrologers seem scarcely to have thought of integrating these into their system, which tended to remain at the level of theory regarding elemental composition.<sup>59</sup> Such correspondences between the elemental and celestial worlds had concerned the human mind since the time of the Pre-Socratic philosophers and of Plato, but it was Paracelsus who first undertook the systematic application of such speculation to a study of Nature.<sup>60</sup> Culpeper was directly inspired by the revival in mid-seventeenth century England of this approach to promote his own synthesis of astrological medicine.

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<sup>59</sup> Guy Ducourthial, *Flore Magique et Astrologique de L'Antiquite* (Paris: Belin, 2003), p. 274.

<sup>60</sup> Pagel, *Paracelsus*, p. 50.