

Central Lancashire Online Knowledge (CLoK)

Title	Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/50358/
DOI	
Date	2023
Citation	Tobyn, Graeme (2023) Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness? Culture and Cosmos, 26 (2). pp. 35-53.
Creators	Tobyn, Graeme

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.

For information about Research at UCLan please go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLoK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/policies/>

Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's *English Physitian* Undermine its Usefulness?

Graeme Tbyn

Abstract. Culpeper's *The English Physitian* (1652) was constructed from what the author considered the best learned study of English herbal medicines and was sold for a few pence to a nation whose medical practitioners were unaffordable by the majority and who hid from them useful knowledge on herbal cures they could instead obtain cheaply. Why, then, did Culpeper obscure that knowledge with an overlay of a system of astrological diagnosis and prescription which only a very few had the skill to utilise? Did this not work against the purpose of the herbal, or was there a simpler way to do it? I argue that Culpeper expected that most readers would use a simple almanac to help them select the appropriate herbal medicines and I explain the method laid out in the herbal as 'instruction for the right use of the book' and provide a worked example. Use of an almanac facilitated most readers to practice a form of astrological medicine and appreciate both the God-given signs in the heavens and the herbal medicines freely available for the sicknesses which troubled the descendants of Adam and Eve who had been cast out of the Garden of Eden.

Culpeper's herbal, *The English Physitian Or, an Astrologo-Physical Discourse of the Vulgar Herbs of This Nation: Being a Compleat Method of Physick* (1652), is the best-known astrological herbal in the English language. It continues in print today and is 'one of the most popular and enduring books in publishing history, perhaps the non-religious book to remain longest in continuous print'.¹ That publishing history inevitably includes changes to the original text over time, notably by many new entries of herbs inserted sometime in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, not unexpectedly, the early excision of the astrological key to the work. For, on the death of Culpeper's publisher Peter Cole eleven years after the author himself had passed on, the new owner of his titles, John Streater, who issued editions of several of them between 1666 and

¹ Benjamin Woolley, *The Herbalist: Nicholas Culpeper and the Fight for Medical Freedom* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), p.316.

Graeme Tbyn, 'Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's *English Physitian* Undermine its Usefulness?', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 26, no. 2, Autumn/Winter 2022, pp.35–53.

www.CultureAndCosmos.org

36 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

1673, responded to the new mood of restoration England by playing down the significance of the herbal as an aid to treating illness without the need of a physician and by removing its 'inclosed scheam' or horoscope. An abrupt and serious decline in the acceptance of astrology by educated people had set in following the halcyon days of the uncensored dissemination of predictions and interpretations during the Civil War and Interregnum.² Streater protected his investment by defending Culpeper's works against accusations that they encouraged 'empiricks' (irregular and unqualified practitioners of physic), harmed physicians and threatened the health of readers if they tried the prescriptions themselves. In the preface to his reprints of Culpeper's *The Practice of Physick* in 1668 and 1672, a translation of the *Praxis medicinae* of the French royal physician Lazare Riviere, Streater suggested that the book was rather directed at those who lacked a physician, not the elite or the middling sort but 'chiefly the poor of the nation, together with seafarers and soldiers', whose illnesses and wounds at sea or in war might be treated by a surgeon or apothecary present, by means of this book, of for use by 'divers honourable ladies and gentlewomen' who might help the local poor in their hour of illness.³ These limitations to the applicability of the knowledge contained in the herbal were accompanied by the removal of the instructional horoscope and its judgment from the final chapter of *The English Physitian Enlarged*, as the herbal was titled since its second, expanded edition in 1653, namely 'the way of mixing medicines according to the cause of the disease and part of the body afflicted'. The absence of a horoscope in Streater's editions of 1666, 1669 and 1671 helped to divert attention away from any content which might be read by the supporters of the restored order as the kind of religious enthusiasm and superstition which had contributed to the folly of the Civil War.⁴ The 'inclosed scheam' was never subsequently reinserted by a later publisher.

This figure or horoscope, which I have discussed in depth elsewhere, was the key to the whole 'astrologo-physical discourse' of *The English*

² Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.7,19.

³ Lazarus Riverius, *The Practice of Physick in Seventeen Several Books*, trans. Nicholas Culpeper, Abadiah Cole and William Rowland (London: Printed by John Streater, 1668), A2^r-A3^r; Mary Rhinelanders McCarl, 'Publishing the Works of Nicholas Culpeper, Astrological Herbalist and Translator of Latin Medical Works in Seventeenth-Century London', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 13 (1996): pp.225-276.

⁴ McCarl, *Publishing the Works of Nicholas Culpeper*, p.273.

Physitian, the central exposition of Culpeper's method of astrological healing, 'a compleat method of physick' promised on the book's title page.⁵ It symbolised and associated diagnostic and prescriptive possibilities, and utilised the fundamental correlation in astrological medicine of star, plant and organ of the body in a zodiacal melothesia, or mapping of the twelve signs of the zodiac onto the human body, from Aries and the head to Pisces and the feet ('head to toe', the Latin phrase 'a capite usque ad calcem', literally from the head to the heel, and made proverbial with Erasmus, had also been since the Renaissance a common way of structuring a medical textbook of diseases and their treatments). It linked to and made sense of Culpeper's assignations of a planetary ruler for each of the herbs delineated in the body of the herbal. Thus, for the plant named kidneywort, 'Venus challengeth the herb under Libra', and in the case of eyebright, 'if this herb were but as much used as it is neglected, it would half spoil the spectacle-makers trade', being 'under the sign of the Lyon and Sol claims dominion over it'.⁶ These are examples of treatment by sympathy to strengthen the organ affected: Libra and its ruler Venus correlated with the kidneys and sight was denoted by the Sun and its sign of Leo.⁷ Conversely, the rulership of Mars or Saturn over a herb was usually illustrated by qualities to be used antipathetically in treatment, so that, for instance, bistort 'belongs to Saturn and is in operation cold and dry' for stopping internal bleeding and fluxes of the bowels; and butcher's broom is 'a herb of Mars, being of a gallant cleansing and opening quality' to make patent the urinary passages and flush out kidney gravel by a diuretic action.⁸ The entry on lovage contained a horoscopic delineation: it was a specific remedy for throat problems, blending concepts of sympathy to the part of the body affected and antipathy to the planet denoting the disease in its being 'an herb of the sun under the sign Taurus, if Saturn offend the throat (as he always doth, if he be an occasioner of the malady,

⁵ Nicholas Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged* (London: Peter Cole, 1653), pp.394–8; Graeme Toby, *Culpeper's medicine: A practice of western holistic medicine* (1997; London: Singing Dragon, 2013), pp.265–72.

⁶ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, pp.137, 96.

⁷ Graeme Toby, 'Dr. Reason and Dr. Experience: Culpeper's assignation of planetary rulers in *The English Physitian*', in Charles Burnett and Dorian Greenbaum, eds, *From Masha'allah to Kepler: Theory and Practice in Medieval and Renaissance Astrology* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2015), pp.473–90.

⁸ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, pp.36, 44; Toby, 'Dr Reason and Dr Experience', pp.486–87.

38 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

and in Taurus in the genesis), this is your cure'.⁹ Thus, Culpeper envisaged the possibility of a high degree of specificity for the curative treatment required where the horoscopic figures relevant to an individual case had been calculated and the astro-medical indications determined. Culpeper had laid out at the very beginning of the herbal his understanding of these macrocosm-microcosm correspondences which united the physical, celestial and intellectual realms:

The whole world, and everything in it, was formed of a composition of contrary elements, and in such a harmony as must needs shew the wisdom and power of a great God. I knew as wel, 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 (though God may have other ends best known to himself) by the various operations of the macrocosm; 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 operation 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.¹⁰

Culpeper's naturalism-cum-supernaturalism (to use Patrick Curry's description) with man the microcosmic epitome of God's macrocosmic universe was further delineated into the three worlds of a hermetic or Neoplatonic system in the 'Premonitory epistle to the Reader' of his translation of the new 1650 *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* of the College of Physicians, issued in 1653.¹¹ The elementary world populated by objects and living beings, which were composed of the four elements, were subject to influences over their humours and forms from the planets and stars of the celestial world above it. The human rational mind, however, was free from such influence and was able to perceive the highest world occupied by God, who had set the planets in motion, and might therefore rule his

⁹ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, p.147.

¹⁰ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, C1r.

¹¹ Curry, *Prophecy and Power*, pp.23–25; Nicholas Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (London: P. Cole, 1653), which contained a more detailed delineation of the harmony of creation in 'A Premonitory Epistle to the Reader' at the front of the work.

stars and his own emotions and desires by anticipating and mitigating the effects of celestial forces as planets came into and out of alignment. Astrology permitted humankind to understand how to live an exemplary life as God intended, for He had placed the planets and stars in the firmament as signs and to give light to mankind, as well to mark seasons and days and years.¹² Healing herbs were freely given to remedy the sicknesses which were the lot of the descendants of Adam and Eve cast out of the Garden of Eden..

For the purpose of helping the reader of the herbal to identify the correct herb to effect a cure on the basis of an astrological symbol, the index of the first edition was 'a catalogue of the herbs and plants &c in this treatise, appropriated to their several planets'. To search for an appropriate herb of, say, Jupiter with which to treat a sick person, because Jupiter was strongly and appropriately positioned in the 'schem' cast for them, all herbs of Jupiter were listed one after the other under that planet in the catalogue. The more learned reader, no doubt already as familiar with the plants described in the herbal as they must be with the casting of horoscopic figures, might peruse each entry in turn, looking them up in the roughly alphabetical order of the plant entries in the book to select the most appropriate remedies for the patient. This ease of astrological prescribing was made more cumbersome when the catalogue was replaced in *The English Physitian Enlarged* a year later with an alphabetical index common to medieval and early printed books but not the author's original intention for this text. Thinking it would not undermine significantly the working of the astrological herbal, Cole probably made the change before publication in the autumn of 1653 when Culpeper had only a few months left to live and was not able to be present any more at the printer's shop to proof-read the copy and make editorial decisions. The change meant that the reader would have to peruse the whole table across ten pages in order to pick out the herbs of Jupiter. Cole's greater support for the medical content of the herbal thus made itself known.¹³

A question may reasonably be asked at this point: the identification of planetary rulers implied the necessary use of a horoscope, such as that in the back of *The English Physitian*, from which to obtain the God-given

¹² Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*, C1r.

¹³ Jonathan Sanderson, 'Nicholas Culpeper and the Book Trade: Print and the promotion of vernacular medical knowledge 1649-65' (PhD dissertation, University of Leeds, 1999), p.181; Rex F. Jones, 'Genealogy of a classic: The English Physitian of Nicholas Culpeper (PhD dissertation, University of California, San Francisco, 1984), p.201.

40 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

indications for best treatment in that case, but did the inclusion of technical astrology not obscure Culpeper's materials for teaching ordinary people untrained in that art how the herbs of English garden, field and hedgerow might be used in treating their illnesses? Here I will briefly discuss Culpeper's instructions for use of his astrological herbal and then propose how a reader unversed in the casting and reading of horoscopic figures might still follow his method. Culpeper did at least provide an alternative method for using the herbal to determine a cure without the aid of astrology, by means of a table of diseases at the end of the book which cross-referenced the maladies listed in the margins of each herb entry for easy retrieval of that plant's therapeutic indications. He gave only limited instructions on the steps to be taken for this mode of treatment, calling it the 'vulgar road of physick' in distinction to his own astrological method and felt 'sorry it hath been your hard mishap to have been so long trained in such Egyptian darkness' (when the Hebrew God through Moses punished the Egyptians for keeping the children of Israel enslaved).¹⁴ At least he could direct readers to his translation of *Galen's Art of Physick*, published that same year, for instruction in the signs of distempered organs and imbalances of temperament, the 'first rudiments and principles of the art' of physic.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the table of diseases at the end of the herbal could be seen to be very deficient when compared with a fuller and more completely indexed version in a pirated edition of *The English Physitian* printed by William Bentley in late 1652, during a period 1651 to 1653 when the book trade was free of control after the collapse of the 1649 Printing Act.¹⁶ This was remedied by Cole and Culpeper as part of the changes and additions made to *The English Physitian Enlarged* to re-establish the new edition as the genuine article over the pirated versions. The table in this new edition was much more comprehensive and effective and further facilitated the non-astrological use of the herbal.

Yet Culpeper must have thought that the overlay of astrological treatment by sympathy, or antipathy at least, onto the best descriptions of English herbal medicines he had derived from John Parkinson's herbal *Theatrum Botanicum* (1640) could be readily understood by his audience.¹⁷ Two specially written entries in the herbal, on *carduus benedictus* or

¹⁴ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, p.394.

¹⁵ Nicholas Culpeper, *Galen's Art of Physick* (London: Peter Cole, 1652), p.122.

¹⁶ Sanderson, 'Nicholas Culpeper and the book trade', pp.149–52, 180, 227–29.

¹⁷ See my forthcoming: Graeme Toby, 'Culpeper's herbal, its debt to John Parkinson and its true purpose'.

blessed thistle and on wormwood, were designed to exemplify the method. The 'government and vertues' of *Carduus Benedictus* or blessed thistle began:

It is an herb of Mars, and under the sign Aries. Now in handling this herb, I shall give you a rational pattern of al the rest... It helps swimmings and giddiness of the head, or the disease called vertigo, because Aries is in the house of Mars. It is an excellent remedy against the yellow jaundice and other inflammations of the gal[l], because Mars governs choler... The continual drinking the decoction of it helps red faces, tetter and ringworms because Mars causeth them... Thus you see what it doth by sympathy. By antipathy to other planets, it cures the French pox, by antipathy to Venus who governs it. It strengthens the memory and cures deafness by antipathy to Saturn who has his fall in Aries which rules the head...

Culpeper's explanation for uses of the herb by sympathy and antipathy is based on the simple friendship or enmity of the planets, which he had already laid out in his major work on astrological medicine, the *Semeiotica Uranica*.¹⁸ There he admitted he was not in agreement with any writer, ancient or modern, though he referred readers to 'Mr. Lillies Introduction'.¹⁹ His own opinion, grounded in reason, was that there were two causes of friendship and enmity between planets – essential and accidental. Accidental friendship or enmity depended on how planets were configured with each other in a horoscope figure, with square and opposition aspects denoting enmity and sextiles and trines friendship. Essential friendship or enmity between planets was of three kinds: according to their rulerships and exaltations; by virtue of their qualities; and when their conditions differ. Because Jupiter ruled Sagittarius and Pisces and Mercury ruled the opposite signs of Gemini and Virgo respectively, these planets were enemies. The same for Jupiter, exalted in the sign Cancer, and Mars, who was exalted in the opposite sign of Capricorn. Mars, hot and dry in quality, was the opposite of the Moon, cold and moist, but friendly with the Sun, also hot and dry. As for condition:

There is enmity between Sol and Saturn, for one loves the court, the other the country; Jupiter is enemy to Mars for he loves peace and

¹⁸ Nicholas Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica; Or, an astrological judgment of diseases* (London: Peter Cole, 1651), pp.29–31.

¹⁹ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647; London: Regulus, 1985), pp.57–83.

42 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

justice, Mars violence and oppressions. Mars is enemy to Venus for he rejoyceth in the field, she in the bed; he loves to be publique, she plays least in sight.

These essential relationships are summed up in Table 1. The planets not mentioned as a friend or enemy of a particular planet may be shown as such 'accidentally', according as they are placed in the zodiac and therefore in the horoscope figure, providing further possibilities in the selection of suitable herbs for a cure.

Planet	Friends	Enemies
Sun	Mars	Saturn, Moon, Venus
Moon	Venus	Sun, Mars, Saturn
Mercury	Saturn	Jupiter, Venus
Venus	Jupiter	Mars, Mercury, Sun
Mars	Sun	Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Moon
Jupiter	Venus	Mercury, Mars, Saturn
Saturn	Mercury	Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mars

Table 1. Friendships and enmities of the seven planets.

The rather prolix second 'astrologo-physical discourse' on wormwood extended the entry to the longest in the herbal. Culpeper acknowledged the entry was voluble and it may not have been that effective since it was singled out for criticism.²⁰ Another 'student of physick and astrology', Joseph Blagrove (1610–79), in his *Supplement or Enlargement to Mr Culpepper's English Physitian* (1674) decided he had to draft a new entry on the plant because 'Culpepper hath so ridiculously romanced upon it'.²¹ Benjamin Woolley, a contemporary biographer of Culpeper, read into the repeated references to Venus and her wanton women, among those who would benefit from a dose of wormwood, the suggestion of trouble at home with his wife: Woolley envisaged Culpeper to be by this stage a bitter man already facing death and working all hours he could trying to give his readers 'a whol model of physick', while Alice, a mother to seven children six of whom died in infancy and still only twenty eight years old, was

²⁰ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, C2v.

²¹ Joseph Blagrove, *Blagrove's Supplement or Enlargement to Mr. Nich. Culpepper's English Physitian* (London: printed for Obadiah Blagrove, 1674), p.233. Cf. Hugh G. Dick (1946) 'Students of physick and astrology', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, no. 1 (1946): pp. 300–315, 419–34.

surely thinking ahead concerning her life in widowhood and already catching the eye of twenty-three-year-old articled clerk John Heydon, later to be a Rosicrucian writer and astrologer.²² Heydon did marry Alice but only in September 1656, suggesting that a relationship developing in 1652 was rather unlikely.²³ Culpeper classified bitter wormwood as a herb of Mars which ‘helps the evils Venus and the wanton girl produce by antipathy’.²⁴ It is true, however, that Culpeper was not free from the rampant misogyny of the times, writing in his herbal that ‘all plums are under Venus and are like women, some better, some worse’.²⁵ This does not sound like a joke matching much of the misogyny of medieval and early modern European culture which ‘was expressed in the form of humor — often leaving historians in some doubt about how seriously to take it’.²⁶ Misogyny, wrote Stephen Mullaney, presents an interpretive embarrassment of riches: it is everywhere, unabashed in its articulation and so overdetermined in its cultural roots that individual instances sometimes seem emotionally underdetermined, rote and uninflected expressions of what would go without saying if it weren't said so often.²⁷

These examples of *carduus benedictus* and wormwood were signposted in the ‘instruction of the right use of the book’ provided by Culpeper in the preface to the herbal.²⁸ I have below abbreviated the text, divided it into three groups and explained each instruction as follows:

Identify the planets involved

[1] The planet ‘causing’ the disease – taken from the horoscope cast for the illness, guided by Culpeper’s main astrological primer *Semeiotica Uranica* (1651).

[2] The part of the body afflicted by the disease – obtained from the report of the sick person or on observation/examination.

²² Woolley, *The Herbalist* pp.320-322; Anon. ‘The life of the admired physician and astrologer of our times, Mr Nicholas Culpeper’ in Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper’s School of Physick* (London: Nathaniel Brook, 1659), C5r.

²³ Tbyn, *Culpeper’s Medicine* (2013), pp.33-6.

²⁴ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, p.375.

²⁵ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, p.302.

²⁶ Joy Wiltenberg, ‘Soundings of Laughter in Early Modern England’, *Early Modern Women*, 10, no.2 (2016): pp. 22-41.

²⁷ Stephen Mullaney, ‘Mourning and Misogyny: Hamlet, The Revenger’s Tragedy, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45, no.2 (1994): pp. 139-162, quote on p.141).

²⁸ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, C2r-C2v.

44 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

[3] The planet ruling the part afflicted – also from *Semeiotica Uranica*, but equally understood from the depiction of the ‘zodiac man’ in any almanac, showing the relationship between signs of the zodiac and parts of the body.²⁹

Choose appropriate herbs according to their planetary rulers

[4] The herbs and their indications for curing various diseases by strengthening the part afflicted, from the *English Physitian Enlarged*.

[5] The herbs that cure a disease by antipathy, being ruled by a planet opposed to that planet which causes it: Jupiter v Mercury, Sun and Moon v Saturn, Mars v Venus and the contrary.

[6] Planets curing their own diseases by means of their herbs, such as herbs of Jupiter curing the liver, Saturn the spleen, from the *English Physitian Enlarged*.

Guidance on the above steps for ‘young students’ (7 & 8) and all readers (9)

[7] Consult Culpeper's *An Astrologo-Physical discourse on the Human Vertues in the Body of Man* in his *Ephemeris for the Year 1651*, ‘...I suppose it would do much good to young students to peruse that with this book’.³⁰

[8] Compare the uses of herbs in the *English Physitian Enlarged* with the above rules to understand why they cure in the way they do.

[9] Study the key of the method in the entries on wormwood and especially carduus benedictus.

With a horoscopic figure and a copy of *Semeiotica Uranica* to hand, which modern historians of Culpeper have reasonably assumed was to be read alongside *The English Physitian*, the reader could follow these instructions to determine which planets needed supporting and opposing with appropriate sympathetic and antipathetic simples or remedies, for ‘as the cause is, so must the cure be’.³¹ By this method, the reader could ‘see a

²⁹ Louise Hill Curth, ‘The Medical Content of English Almanacs 1640-1700’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 60, no.3 (2005): pp.255–82.

³⁰ Nicholas Culpeper, *An Ephemeris for the Year 1651* (London: Peter Cole, 1651), I3v-K4v; Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, C2r.

³¹ Nicholas Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica; Or, an astrological judgment of diseases* (London: Peter Cole, 1651), p.85; Sanderson, ‘Nicholas Culpeper and the Book Trade’, p.149; Woolley, *The Herbalist*, pp.317–19; Olav Thulesius, *Nicholas Culpeper English Physician and Astrologer* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1992), p.107.

reason for everything that is written, whereby you may find the very ground and foundation of physick' and to allow an exponent of the method to 'be able to give a reason of your judgement to him that asketh you'.³² This, in Culpeper's eyes, was a marked improvement on previous writers of herbals, Parkinson and Gerard included, who offered no explanation of how herbs worked on the body and 'instead of reason for their judgment quote old authors'.³³

The directing of readers to *Semeiotica Uranica* was lost from these instructions after Culpeper's death when his publisher Cole fell out with the publisher of *Semeiotica Uranica*, Nathaniel Brook, who handled Culpeper's more astrological works, as they competed to publish further materials, remaining scraps and notes from Brook, several later spurious works from Cole, under the lucrative Culpeper name. As a result Cole edited out the reference to *Semeiotica Uranica* in these instructions for the use of the *English Physitian Enlarged* from the 1656 edition onwards.³⁴ Cole competed for sales to the well-to-do reader while Culpeper had been at pains to make his works as widely available as possible, via both publishers.³⁵

But how important was the direction to consult the astrological textbook anyway? The reader would have had to be able to cast or obtain and judge a horary figure such as the 'inclosed scheam', or a decumbiture chart cast for the time a person takes to their bed realising their sickness, which was a skill possessed by only a few trained people – often those involved in practical mathematics such as surveyors, teachers or instrument-makers, or practitioners of astrological medicine like Culpeper, or even members of the clergy?³⁶

One possibility not previously considered by commentators is that Culpeper understood that many of his readers would use an almanac to work out which planet was active on the day a person fell ill. These readers included his 'young students' – new to or unread in both the art of astrology and the uses of herbal medicines derived from Parkinson's expensive folio and laid out in *The English Physitian Enlarged* and to whom he directed to his *An Astrologo-Physical discourse on the Human Vertues in the Body of Man* for a resume of the organs and parts of the body, their operations and

³² Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, p.55, C1v, B2r.

³³ Culpeper, *The English Physitian Enlarged*, A2r.

³⁴ Tbyn, *Culpeper's Medicine* (2013), pp.27–31.

³⁵ Sanderson, 'Nicholas Culpeper and the Book Trade', pp.141–2, 150

³⁶ Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p.51.

46 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

the planets which governed them. This was a detailed exposition in comparison to the 'zodiac man' common in almanacs but both indicated which sign and therefore which planet ruled each part of the body and therefore which herbs might strengthen the part of the body diseased. Louise Curth suggested that a basic knowledge of astrology was available readily and cheaply in almanacs and it may have enjoyed a degree of popular understanding in the same way that humoral medicine did.³⁷

An almanac also showed the positions of the planets in the zodiac – an arrangement which could often be confirmed simply by looking up at the night sky. Belief in a natural astrology, distinct from the delineations on paper of judicial astrology, was almost universal in Tudor England and 'popular knowledge of the science was probably greater in the late Tudor and the Stuart period than ever before or since'.³⁸ The village herbalist in Culpeper's day 'with a smattering of astrology from an almanac' was said to be looked upon by their neighbours as 'a little God-Almighty'.³⁹ Keith Thomas nevertheless rightly pointed to the large gulf between such 'popular beliefs of a vaguely astrological character' and the skilled reading of a horoscope of the sort which Culpeper exemplified in his herbal.⁴⁰

During his lifetime, Culpeper issued his own almanac or 'ephemeris' in 1651, 1652 and 1653, the first published by Cole and containing the *Astrologo-physical discourse*, the second by Brook and T. Vere, and the third by John Macock for the Stationers Office. These were all roughly the same size, probably conforming to a 'law' that 'an almanac is to three sheets confined', each one with a preface signed by Culpeper and dated the August before the year commenced.⁴¹ Ephemerides by Culpeper for 1654, 1655 and 1656 were also printed by John Macock but these are the work of another astrologer, suggesting again that Culpeper was too ill to write in the second half of 1653 before dying the following January.⁴² The absence of any preface at all in the 1654 ephemeris is a telling difference. Those which Culpeper did write himself might be thought properly titled ephemeris rather than almanac because of the exactitude he sought in

³⁷ Curth, 'Medical content of English almanacs', p.257

³⁸ Capp, *Astrology and the popular press*, pp.31, 21.

³⁹ Capp, *Astrology and the popular press*, p.21.

⁴⁰ Keith Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic* (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1971), p.297.

⁴¹ Capp, *Astrology and the popular press*, p.41.

⁴² Frederick N.L. Poynter, 'Nicholas Culpeper and his books', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* XVII, no. I (1962): pp.152–67.

consulting the calculations of several astronomers – Lorenz Eichstad, Vincent Wing, David Origanus, Tycho Brahe, Nicolaus Copernicus and Andrea Argoli – in order to more precisely construct the ephemeris and lunar aspects and time the quarterly ingresses of the Sun.⁴³

So, how would a ‘young student’, literate but not knowledgeable in astrological medicine, use an almanac alongside the herbal to determine an astro-medical cure for, say, a pain in the left side of the abdomen? Knowing already, or ascertaining from the Zodiac Man, that this part of the body was signified by Virgo and its ruler Mercury, they might look up the planet configured with the Moon on the day of falling ill in the lunar aspects section of the monthly calendar as the (secondary) cause of the disease to see how that planet related to Mercury – friend or enemy, indicating treatment by sympathy or antipathy. The focus on the lunar aspect can be seen as a continuation of the first of two main varieties of medical astrology practised in the Latin Middle Ages, according to Hilary Carey: a lunar medicine which aimed to balance the humours as opposed to a scientific astrological medicine which owed more to the Hellenic and Arabic tradition’.⁴⁴ There is much crossover, however, since lunar aspects are also important in decumbiture or horary charts, where the moon often points out the planet indicating the nature and cause of the disease. Culpeper wrote in *Semeiotica Uranica*:

That place and state of the planet from which the moon is separated at the decumbiture, and the condition of the planet... is to be heeded. If you please to observe the state of that same planet, by it you may know the state of the sick, and what the cause of his sickness is. When you have done so, it is your wisest way to consider to what planet the moon applies, and then do but so much as view what sign the planet is in... what part of the body he governs, and what disease he governs.⁴⁵

⁴³ Nicholas Culpeper, *An ephemeris for the year of our lord 1653* (London: Printed by John Macock for the Company of Stationers, 1653), pp.9–10.

⁴⁴ Hilary M. Carey, ‘Medieval Latin astrology and the cycles of life: William English and English medicine in Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.5.26’, in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds, *Astro-medicine: Astrology and medicine, East and West* (Firenze: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), pp.33–74.

⁴⁵ Culpeper, *Semeiotica Uranica*, p.73.

48 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

Further, Lilly had reproduced in *Christian Astrology* a chapter entitled *Hermes Trismegistus upon the first Decumbiture of the Sick*, in which the disease, its treatment and outcome might be read from the configuration of the Moon with Mars or Saturn.⁴⁶ Culpeper's version of this ancient Greek text was inserted into the 1655 posthumous edition of *Semeiotica Uranica* by Brook. Both texts were subtitled *shewing the signes and conjecture of the disease and of life or death by the good or evil position of the moon at the time of the patient's first lying down or demanding the question*.⁴⁷ Thus, not only the nature of the disease, but in acute cases the prognosis of life or death, might be judged from the lunar aspect alone. The moon's last separation from and first application to a planet was also the main feature of the 'inclosed schem' in the herbal by which Culpeper had judged that the lady in question was truly ill, where the disease lay and the nature of the malady. Lunar aspects thus formed part of the complex judgement of a complete horoscope which Culpeper illuminated by his example and to which he hoped all might aspire, but they also featured more readily in almanacs.

Among a generation of medical astrologers preceding Culpeper, Simon Forman (1552–1611) wrote in his *Astrologicallye judgmentes of phisick and other questions* that if the planet causing the disease because of its dominion over the houses of sickness is also the planet the Moon separates from or applies to, the signification of the nature of that sickness is doubled.⁴⁸ Forman's approach, however, was a mixture of precision and

⁴⁶ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, pp.268–82

⁴⁷ Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Astrologicallye Judgmentes of Diseases, from the Decumbiture of the sick, Much Enlarged* (London: Nathaniel Brook, 1655), pp.122–32.

⁴⁸ Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, and John Young, "'Early modern astrology", A Critical Introduction to the Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634', <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/astrological-medicine/early-modern-astrology>; Robert Ralley, Lauren Kassell, and Michael Hawkins, eds, 'A critical edition of Simon Forman's "The Astrologicallye Judgmentes of phisick and other Questions"', *The casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: a digital edition*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/transcriptions/TEXT5> [accessed 22 December 2022], item 2.6 General notes to be observed before all judgments; Ronald C. Sawyer, 'Patients, Healers and Disease in the south-east Midlands 1597-1634' (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1986), pp.283–4, asserted that Forman's pupil, Richard Napier (1559–1634), used the aspect of the moon as the sole indicator of disease and its treatment thousands of cases.

imprecision: like Culpeper, he sometimes compared different ephemerides to determine the exact positions of the zodiac signs in the sky to cast the houses of a chart but then took the planetary positions for noon straight out of the ephemeris without further calculation, no matter how many hours distant that was from the time his client asked their question.⁴⁹ The almanac reader could do the same by taking the position of the Moon and the planet configured with it straight out of the booklet in order to identify the planet signifying the disease. Thus, someone with a 3d. copy of *The English Physitian Enlarged*, an even cheaper almanac for the year and perhaps a hand-written copy of the 10 pages of Culpeper's *Astrologo-Physical discourse*, had an effective and ready means of following Culpeper's astrological method of physic by selecting herbs in sympathy or antipathy with that planet aligned with the Moon on the day in question.

The linking of the Moon with a planet on a given day for the purpose of diagnosis had a precedent in the history of astrological medicine in England in the 'folding almanacs' that have survived from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In her detailed study of these, Carey noted that the English forms were of the simplest sort compared to the several kinds extant from France in the same period. Moreover, they lacked the positions of the five planets in the lunar tables that were present in seventeenth-century almanacs because their calculation required more effort than their compilers were likely prepared to expend, necessitating as it did special books and tools such as fully-worked ephemerides and the ability to compute planetary positions.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the set of two lunar tables in such folding almanacs, one determining the zodiac sign occupied by the Moon on any day of any month, the other the planet which ruled the planetary hour for the time of day in question, still performed the same conjoining of Moon and planet for diagnosis, even if there was no astronomical alignment.⁵¹ This was more sophisticated than simply diagnosing a disease symbolised only by the ruler of the hour which

⁴⁹ Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, and John Young, 'Early modern astrology', *A Critical Introduction to the Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/astrological-medicine/early-modern-astrology> [accessed 15 March 2023].

⁵⁰ Hilary M. Carey, 'Astrological medicine and the Medieval English folded almanac', *Social History of Medicine* 17 (2004): pp.345–63.

⁵¹ Hilary M. Carey, 'What is the folded almanac? The form and function of a key manuscript source for Astro-medical practice in later Medieval England, almanac', *Social History of Medicine* 16 (2003): pp.481–509.

50 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's
English Physitian Undermine its Usefulness?

constituted an even more simplified and to that degree debased method of astrological diagnosis which also existed in this earlier period.⁵²

When Culpeper was active, almanacs were ubiquitous. By the end of the sixteenth-century they had become money-spinners for members of the Company of Stationers who were given a monopoly over almanacs by James I and did not limit their printing to 1,200-1,500 copies as they did with other publications, so that they provided 'readier money than ale and cakes'.⁵³ Most published almanacs were from authors living in London, the south-east and towards Cambridge, the other centre of production, and they often required a patron or representative in the capital.⁵⁴ The collapse of censorship at the beginning of the Civil War released a flood of vernacular publishing and the market for almanacs boomed, becoming the first true form of mass media and reaching an output of three to four million issued in the ten years after November 1663, outselling even the Bible.⁵⁵ Almanacs showed the position of the Moon on each day of the year, its waxing and waning with respect to the Sun, all of which was especially useful to farmers for the planting of seed and to people generally for determining favourable days for purging, blood-letting, or bathing. Seventeenth-century almanacs also delineated the aspects of the Moon with the other planets throughout each month. There was the useful diagram of the Zodiac Man indicating which signs of the zodiac and their planetary rulers were linked with each part of the body that aided the choice of herbs to treat the part of the body affected.⁵⁶ The image illustrated a very simple idea which might just as easily be conveyed in as little as twenty four written words.⁵⁷ Culpeper was likely perfectly aware of how herbal and almanac might facilitate astro-medical practice but sought to raise the standard of diagnosis, prognosis and prescription by reference to his major work on astrological medicine.

⁵² Carey, 'Medieval Latin astrology and the cycles of life', p.53

⁵³ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.294; Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, p.44.

⁵⁴ Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, p.46.

⁵⁵ Michael McDonald, 'The career of astrological medicine in England', in Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham, eds. *Religio medici: Medicine and Religion in seventeenth-century England* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), p.77; Curth, 'The Medical Content of English Almanacs', p.256; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.294.

⁵⁶ Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, pp.293-8; McDonald, 'Career of astrological medicine in England', p.77.

⁵⁷ Carey, 'Medieval Latin astrology and the cycles of life', p.40.

Table 2 is a worked example of Culpeper's instruction on the right use of *The English Physitian Enlarged* for a person debilitated by head pain late morning on the 21st January 1642/ What is the astrologically indicated remedy?

No	Instruction	Worked example	Source
1	Consider what planet causes the disease	Moon in Aquarius conjunct Jupiter at 7h in the morning: Aqua ♃♁ 7m Disease is shown by Jupiter.	Vincent Wing, <i>An almanack and prognostication for the year of our Lord God, 1642</i> (London: company of Stationers) for January and reading across the line for 21 st of the month.
2	What part of the body is afflicted?	The head is ruled by Aries	Zodiac man in almanac
3	Planet governing the afflicted part?	Moon and Mercury govern the brain	Culpeper's <i>Astrologo-physical discourse</i> (1651), reproduced in subsequent editions of <i>Pharmacopoeia Londinensis</i>
4	Use herbs in sympathy with affected part to strengthen it	Herbs of Moon and Mercury	<i>English Physitian</i>
5	Oppose the disease with herbs, by sympathy or antipathy as required	Jupiter, signifying the disease, does not rule the brain (Mercury and Moon do), so the disease comes by antipathy and the cure must be by antipathy to Jupiter, namely Mercury, (Mars is also possible)	<i>English Physitian</i>
6	Herbs curing disease by sympathy with the part afflicted	Herbs of Mercury or Moon	Derived from Zodiac man in almanac or <i>Astrologo-physical discourse</i>
7	Conclusion: use herbs of Moon, Mars (by opposition) and particularly Mercury, as required.		

52 Did the Astrological Content of Culpeper's *English Physitian* Undermine its Usefulness?

8	Admire the agreement of these rules with the virtues of the herbs in <i>The English Physitian: Lavender</i> (Mercury) 'is of special good use for all the griefs and pains of the head and brains that proceed of a cold cause' (p.72). <i>Valerian</i> (Mercury) 'The green herb with the root taken fresh, being bruised and applied to the head, taketh away the pains and prickings therein' (p.232). [Wild] <i>Lettuce</i> (Moon) 'the juice of lettuce mixed with oyl of roses and applied to the forehead and temples procureth sleep and easeth the headache proceeding of an hot cause' (p.72).
9	See how this matches the examples of wormwood and carduus benedictus

Table 2. An example of using an almanac to determine the planet signifying a disease at the time of falling ill or asking the question and the astrological treatment of the disease.

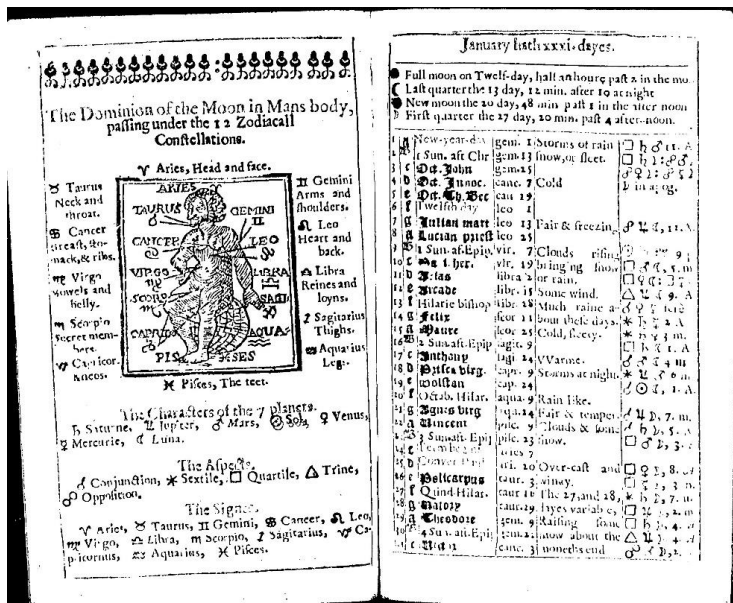


Fig. 1. Vincent Wing, *An almanack and prognostication for the yeare of our Lord God, 1642* (London 1642). On the right, planetary positions and lunar aspects for January 1642, and on the left, mage of the 'zodiac man'. Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. Image produced by ProQuest as part of Early English Books Online. www.proquest.com.

To a symbolist, the conjunction of the moon with Jupiter shown obtained from the almanac suggests a fullness of humours in the head, causing pain, more damp than hot unless the head felt hot.⁵⁸ In Galenic terms there was an excess of the phlegmatic humour in the ventricles of the brain and especially in the blood vessels (Aquarius). Lavender water and fresh valerian and wild lettuce taken inwardly and applied to the head are the herbs indicated for relief of this headache. These are rational choices of plant medicines for headache to a modern herbalist also.

In conclusion, Culpeper's *The English Physitian* and its enlargement were written to make available to the reading public a knowledge of English herbs and their uses and applications. This was derived from what Culpeper considered the best English herbal, John Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum*. Since lunar aspects shown in almanacs were central to the astrology of health and disease at any level of complexity, and a basic understanding of this was widespread, Culpeper's instructions for the right use of his herbal facilitated the practice of an astrological medicine. Many a 'student in physick and astrology', as Culpeper styled himself, followed in his wake. The addition of the astrological rulerships and example horoscope provided an explanation of how herbs healed, the 'compleat method of physick' promised on the title page of the herbal, and, more largely, encouraged the reader to admire the unity of God's universe and the celestial signs he provided to humankind to live an exemplary life. Culpeper, the radical sectarian in religion, could not omit this important spiritual teaching but thought his system accessible to most of his readers: from the few who knew how to cast and read horoscopes, to the many who consulted the mass print of his day, namely almanacs.

⁵⁸ The constructor of the almanac, Vincent Wing, was the founder of a remarkable dynasty of mathematical practitioners in the East Midlands. His fame rested primarily on his achievements in astronomy, as a champion of the new astronomical systems of Copernicus and Tycho Brahe. He first began making almanacs from 1641 (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*).