

# CULTURE AND COSMOS

*A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy*

Vol. 9 no 1, Spring/Summer 2005

Published by Culture and Cosmos  
and the Sophia Centre Press,  
in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,  
in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology  
in Culture,  
University of Wales Trinity Saint David,  
Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts  
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 7ED, UK.

[www.cultureandcosmos.org](http://www.cultureandcosmos.org)

Cite this paper as: Curth, Louise, 'Astrological Medicine and the Popular Press in Early Modern England', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 9 no 1, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 73-93.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue card for this book is available from the British Library

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ISSN 1368-6534
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Printed in Great Britain by Lightning Source

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# Astrological Medicine and the Popular Press in Early Modern England

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**Louise Curth**

**Abstract.** For many centuries the study of the stars was considered to be a science in western Europe. In the middle ages both astrology and astronomy, thought to be the practical and theoretical parts of the scientific study of the celestial heavens, were taught as part of the university curriculum. The advent of printing in the late fifteenth century resulted in a huge variety of publications that provided the general public with access to this knowledge. This essay will examine the major role that almanacs, which were cheap, mass-produced astrological publications, played in disseminating information about astrological medical beliefs and practices to a national audience.

*The divine and laudable Science of Astrology, is a Learning that teaches by the Natures, Motions, Configurations, Significaitons', and Influencies of the Heavens and Stars therein, how to judge of future Contingencies, or to predict natural Events.<sup>1</sup>*

Astrology has played an important, albeit changing, role in western society for over two millennia. For centuries, it was regarded as a vital part of the science of the stars, with astronomy, or the 'theorick' part providing the 'Mathematical Demonstrations and Figures.... [of] various Motions, Places, Magnitudes, Distance, and Proportions one to another', while astrology, or the 'practick' part, used this astronomical material to illustrate and interpret the meaning of the stars and planets.<sup>2</sup> During the middle ages, celestial studies were further broken down into judicial astrology, which used the movements of the planets and stars to make predictions about future events, and natural astrology, which was based on the general effects of planetary influence on the weather, agriculture and health. With the advent of printing in the late fifteenth century, increasingly larger numbers of publications dealing with judicial and/or natural astrology began to appear in England.

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Louise Curth, 'Astrological Medicine and the Popular Press in Early Modern England', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 9 no 1, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 73-93.  
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This essay will focus on small, cheap, annual astrological publications called almanacs, the first true form of British mass media. For much of the twentieth century, these cheap, annual publications have often been marginalized or even ignored as having little to offer serious academics. The sole exception for many years was Bernard Capp's book on almanacs, published in 1979. Recent studies, however, suggest that almanacs are starting to attract the interest they so richly deserve.<sup>3</sup> Early modern almanacs were written to appeal to different levels of literate society, with the unlettered often sharing in their content through being read aloud. Although their major focus was on astrological events, many authors included material tailored to the interests of regional, occupational, political or religious groups. As a result, their text can often provide valuable insights into sixteenth and seventeenth century English culture and society.

This essay will discuss a relatively unexplored aspect of almanacs, that of popular medical beliefs and practices, focusing on their 'golden age' between 1640 and 1700, because of their involvement with 'political, social and religious controversies'.<sup>4</sup> These parameters also work well for the study of medical history, as this period begins with a burgeoning of medical and astrological books, made possible by the abolition of government censorship in a country moving ever closer to Civil War. The new freedom that allowed this growth was due to the abolition of the Star Chamber, a prerogative court which had previously controlled the printing industry through a strict licensing system which collapsed in July 1641 in response to Charles I's failure to maintain control of the kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Censorship returned under Charles II with a vengeance, resulting in the Licensing Act of 1662, which provided an enhanced system of censorship directed by the new 'Surveyor of the Imprimery' Roger L'Estrange.<sup>6</sup> During the remainder of the century official control ebbed and flowed, resulting in the need for vigilance amongst writers and printers. The most obvious signs of this were in the presence, or absence, of potentially seditious political or religious material in printed works. This included some astrological information and predictions, but had almost no effect on less contentious astrological material such as weather forecasts or on medical information which continued to appear in both books and almanacs. In fact, the growth of almanacs continued at a staggering speed which peaked in 1700, by which time printers were producing between 350,000 and 400,000 copies in the last two months of every year.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike some forms of ephemeral literature, early modern almanacs have survived in large numbers, making it possible to draw qualitative as well as quantitative conclusions about their medical content.<sup>8</sup> This article is based on 1,673 almanacs that are known to have survived between 1640 and 1700, of which 1,392 (83.2%) have been examined.<sup>9</sup> Almost three quarters of these almanacs contained preventative or remedial medical advice and/or advertisements for medical products or services. Given that other types of text varied in response to an almanacs target audience, it is interesting to note the uniformity of the medical advice. In general, this material focuses on ‘popular’ medicine, or traditional, Galenic principles and practices, with barely a nod to the great scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century, such as the circulation of blood within the body.

### **1. Almanacs**

Almanacs are one of the most ancient surviving forms of literature in the western world. One of the earliest surviving copies dates from the period of Ramses II (1304-1168 BC) on papyrus held at the British Library.<sup>10</sup> The origin of the word itself appears to be much later, possibly linked to the Arabic word for calendar, which was brought into Spain by the Moors. Alternatively, it may have originated from the Latin ‘manacus’ or ‘manadius’, which refers to the circle in a sundial.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest known medieval almanacs were referred to as ‘clog almanacs’. These were simple constructions made of sticks or rods marked by a series of notches and symbols, representing the lunar cycle and the Christian feasts.<sup>12</sup> ‘Kalendaria’ or manuscript almanacs were another early form which supplied ecclesiastical information in addition to a calendar. During the fourteenth century, the friars John Somer and Nicholas of Lynn expanded these works by including information on eclipses, medical and other matters of interest.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the earlier versions written for clergymen, they were aimed to appeal to a wider audience of students and physicians.<sup>14</sup>

The first printed almanac in Europe appeared in the fifteenth century. Johannes Gutenberg published it in 1448, eight years before his famous Bible. By the 1470s large numbers of almanacs were being printed in various countries on the Continent. They proved to be particularly popular in Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> Many of these almanacs were in a booklet form, while others appeared as broadsides, which were somewhat less in demand. Until the late sixteenth century, most printed English almanacs were translations of European ones which circulated

along with English manuscript almanacs.<sup>16</sup> The first almanac which was both written and produced in England is thought to be one by Andrew Boorde around 1537, during the first major surge in the British printing industry. In the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century around 400 books were printed, rising to 6,000 in the 1630s and 32,000 by the 1710s.<sup>17</sup> For most of this period the industry was regulated by ‘stationers’ a term which initially referred to publishers or dealers who purchased unbound works from printers to sell in their own shops. During the first half of the century a number of acts were passed to help protect the growing printing industry from foreign competition.<sup>18</sup> In 1557 a charter was enacted which formed the Company of Stationers, an organization that would become increasingly powerful, both as an agent of government censorship and in protecting their own interests. The new company began to produce increasing numbers of almanacs in their early years, although the numbers fell to a lower, more stable number in the 1570s. Their production was essentially ‘farmed out’ in 1588 to Richard Watkins and James Roberts who maintained tight control over the almanac trade in the last decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

In 1603, however, James I granted monopolistic rights over almanacs and ‘private prayers, pryments, psalters and psalmes’. This was known as the ‘English Stock’, a joint-stock enterprise open only to senior members of the company.<sup>20</sup> Although most elements of the English Stock sold in large numbers, almanacs provided the greatest profits, a fact confirmed by the appearance of numerous ‘counterfeit’ editions.<sup>21</sup>

It would have been fairly simple to produce a bogus almanac by following a standard ‘formula’. Most surviving almanacs were made up of two major sections, the first including a calendar and the second containing less ‘time-sensitive’ materials. A majority of almanacs included a diagram of ‘Zodiac Man’ either before, or immediately after, the calendar. This was a diagram depicting the relationship between the signs of the zodiac, illustrated either with the ‘anatomy’ or figure of a man, or a baby. The drawing generally included the twelve astrological signs arranged around the figure, often accompanied by a rudimentary explanation of what this signified. This related to the idea of humans being a microcosm, in the same way that the universe was a macrocosm. It therefore followed that if the sign governing a particular part of the body was affected by a malevolent planet or bad aspect, that part of the body would become ill.

The calendar section itself would be divided up into several columns, the first listing the days of the month, followed by the days of the weeks,

the latitude of the planets, and perhaps festivals or ‘terms’ of the year. This would be followed by columns citing ‘the rising, southing and setting of the Planets’, including the moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury and the sun.<sup>22</sup> Many calendars provided a blank space for notes amongst the text. It is clear from surviving copies that many people, such as gaps, or blank pages bound into their almanac, to record a range of information.

The second section of almanacs was generally called the ‘prognostication’ and contained less ‘time-sensitive’ material, from distances between towns to tips on husbandry. In most cases, this was the section where the greatest differentiation could be found between almanacs. Although the term ‘marketing’ did not exist in the seventeenth century, I believe that the Stationers’ Company approached the production of almanacs through a similar decision-making process. It is clear that different titles were written to appeal to readers with varying levels of literacy, wealth and sophistication and although most almanacs were printed in London, many targeted specific, regional audiences from Dover to Durham.

Many writers provided material of interest to specific occupational groups ranging from weavers through to constables. *The City and Countrey Chapmans Almanack* included listings of markets and fairs, as well as mileage between towns and ‘other things useful for all sorts of Traders’.<sup>23</sup> *The Sea-mans Almanack*, on the other hand, offered tide tables while *Veterinarium Meteorologist Astrology* provided a range of practical information on caring for livestock.<sup>24</sup> There were also almanacs that were produced mainly to entertain their audience, such as the satirical *The Poor Robin* series which urged potential readers to ‘buy, read & laugh, here’s that will fit your fancy’.<sup>25</sup>

The prognostication was also the main section where medical information, advice and by the later part of the century, advertisements could be found. There was very little differentiation between almanacs in the nature of their medical content, which was based on Galenic, astrological principles. Although some authors might contain more medical material than others, the foundation of all advice was divided into preventative and remedial treatments for humans, and often for animals as well. The former was based on ways in which to manipulate the non-naturals through a good daily regime, while the later discussed mainly remedies that could be prepared either at home or by an apothecary. Many almanacs also provided basic advice on common therapeutic treatments such as phlebotomy with the underlying

assumption that readers would need to obtain professional assistance with the procedure itself. This material was joined by the later part of the century with a growing number of advertisements for books, including 'self-help' volumes, as well as non-medical books, medical services and implements such as trusses and fake eyeballs.

Almanacs containing such medical information were produced by a wide range of writers, with those used in this study attributed to 189 different authors. The majority of almanacs containing medical information claimed to have been written by specialists either in astrology, 'physick' (i.e. medicine), astrological physick or mathematics.<sup>26</sup> Many of these writers became so popular that their names resulted in the development of 'brand names', such as Nicholas Culpeper, William Lilly and John Gadbury. As a result, the Company of Stationers continued to produce editions appearing under their name for years, or even decades, after their deaths. Edward Pond, for example, was an early seventeenth-century almanac writer, who began publishing almanacs in 1602. Clearly, the almanacs appearing under his name at the end of that century were being produced by one, or perhaps several, different ghostwriters. Dade, Woodhouse and Vaux were all dead by 1655, but 'their' almanacs appeared through the end of the century written by a seemingly endless stream of anonymous writers. According to one modern historian, there were many 'non-literary literary men' compiling 'inalienably commercial' publications during the early modern period.<sup>27</sup> These numbers appear to have peaked during the 1640s, when the closure of the theatres forced many to look for other work, and continued to grow in what Adrian Johns has dubbed the 'Age of Paper-prostitution'.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Almanacs and Medicine

*No Man can reasonably deny, but that the whole Prognostick part of Physick is govern'd by Astrology; and those Physitians which follow Hippocrates and Galen, in making that their Principal refuge, do wisely and commendably.*<sup>29</sup>

The types of medical beliefs and practices found in seventeenth-century English almanacs were based on principles developed many centuries before. These centred on the humoral theory introduced by Hippocratic writers which was later developed by the second-century Greek physician Galen of Pergamon.<sup>30</sup> Together, they included two main principles; firstly

that disease was caused by an imbalance in the qualities and the humours (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood) in the body.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, that these imbalances were caused by ‘the various and different Aspects and Positions of the Stars’, which would determine which humours were affected and therefore what illness would occur. The specific celestial movements were thought to be orchestrated by God who was their ‘chief Gouvernour’ and could cause disease in individuals, whole communities, or even nations, at his will.<sup>32</sup> This meant that, in theory, ill health could be avoided or cured only ‘with the blessing of God’, who provided assistance in the form of raw materials for medicines such as ‘Hearbes, Fruites, Plantes and Trees’.<sup>33</sup>

Almost three-quarters of the almanacs in this study contained information on how to use nature’s bounty to either prevent or treat illness. The major emphasis was building a strong body, and thereby either preventing or moderating the force of illness by following a daily health regime based on the non-naturals. If such efforts failed, almanacs also offered a range of therapeutic advice.

Although almanac writers were forced to omit judicial astrology during periods of religious or political tension, natural astrology remained largely unaffected. Astrological physick, in particular, remained a major part of almanacs throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with many writers emphasizing that it was not only a vital component in their almanacs, but also one of the most important parts of astrology. John Partridge vehemently stated that physick was ‘the main business of Astrology’. Nathaniel Culpeper agreed, and argued that ‘Galen himself confirms this assertion’.<sup>34</sup> These sentiments were confirmed by the nature of medical information and advice in almanacs, which focused on Galenic-astrological beliefs and, in turn, helped to perpetuate orthodox medical beliefs and practices in early modern England.

In fact, the use of astrological physick is clearly apparent in every aspect of the medical material in almanacs, showing that it had an effect on all stages of illness, from initial diagnosis through treatments and the eventual outcome.<sup>35</sup> The sophistication of an individual volume’s medical information depended on the author and intended readership of each title. At its most simplistic level, an almanac might contain only a diagram of Zodiac Man, which showed the relationship between the signs of the zodiac and parts of the human body. The second most common feature was a section on the ‘four quarters’ which discussed the types of illnesses most likely to result from that year’s astral movements. A third regular feature contained astrological guidelines on the most auspicious time for



preventative or remedial physick, generally placed under the heading of 'physical observations'. The fourth most common section on astrological physick covered a broader range of material which might contain medical recipes, information about herbs or advertisements for services, books or goods relating to astrological physick.

### 3 Astrological Physick in Medicine

*The Natures, Signs, Causes, and Cures of all Diseases incident to Mankind, as they depend upon the Positions and Aspects of the Planets and Stars.*<sup>36</sup>

In its purest form, astrological physick was a highly complex science. Almanacs could not, and did not try to provide readers with a great deal of theoretical information which could be obtained in other types of printed literature. Instead of explaining the 'whys' of astrology, almanacs offered practical advice on how the movements of the stars and planets over the coming year would affect their health.

Almanac writers clearly assumed that their readers had at least a rudimentary understanding of the principles of astrological physick which included knowing that the body had four humours, which would result in illness if they 'exceede or alter that proportion that God by nature ordained them at the first' and that 'the severall parts and members' of the body were ruled by different signs of the zodiac.<sup>37</sup> Armed with this knowledge, readers could easily utilize the information provided by the ubiquitous illustration of 'Zodiac Man' showing the 'anatomy of mans body as the parts thereof are governed by the 12 signes of the Zodiaque'.<sup>38</sup>

'Zodiac Man' was the most commonly used name for the diagram that depicted the relationship between the human body and the signs of the zodiac (Fig. 1). Most almanacs did not contain a theoretical explanation of how this worked, presumably because they expected readers to know that the human body was a microcosm, in the same way that the universe was a macrocosm and that if the sign governing a particular part of the body was affected by a malevolent planet or bad aspect, that part of the body would become ill. Authors clearly believed that an illustration of 'Zodiac Man' was a vital part of the yearly almanacs. Although Richard Allestree mockingly referred to the way in which Zodiac man 'which long enough hath gulld my countrey friend', he included the diagram in

all of his almanacs, claiming that without them 'He [country friend] with contempt would straight refuse to buy'.<sup>39</sup> In the later part of the sixteenth century the figure of Zodiac Man was often portrayed as a baby or young child; in the following century the figure of a full-grown man was much more common. The drawing generally depicted the twelve astrological signs arranged around the figure, and often contained a rudimentary explanation of what this signified. As one almanac author explained, these were necessary for those readers who 'do not understand the part of the body that is governed by the severall signs', while others included a poem, or rhyme, which had long been used as an aid to memorizing important information.<sup>40</sup>

Although the diagram of Zodiac Man was found in almost all almanacs, the next most common medical feature was that of the 'four quarters'. Every season, as with each individual, was linked to specific signs of the zodiac, which gave them their characteristic features. Many writers would begin with a brief explanation of the nature of that season by explaining which planets determined its representative features. It was believed that each quarter would begin when the sun moved into a certain sign, such as winter starting when the sun moved into Capricorn. Since this was based on astrological calculations, the exact time when this would happen would vary each year. For example, in 1598, the winter quarter would start on the twelfth of December and continue until the tenth of March. The following year this quarter would start a day earlier and continue until the eleventh of March.<sup>41</sup> While such minutiae may not have been considered very important by some readers, most were interested in a range of other commonly included information, much of which pertained to weather and/or predicted agricultural conditions, such as unseasonable conditions likely to result in crop failure, economic failure and hunger or even be the harbinger of plague.<sup>42</sup>

Most authors included more detailed descriptions of how each season could affect the health of both man and beast. On the broadest level, this included lists of diseases that were common in each quarter or what times of the year were best for carrying out various medical procedures. Springtime, for example, was linked to Leo and Aries, which meant that it was a hot and moist season and therefore paralleled people with a predominantly sanguine complexion. As a result, although the spring was said to be 'the most comfortable quarter in all the year', this was 'comparatively such', as it could still cause humoral imbalances in someone with a similar constitution.<sup>43</sup>

One author claimed that the word ‘summer’ came from the German, ‘for it is as if you would say Sun-mehr.... because we have more of the Sun now, than at any other time’. The ‘aestival’ or summer quarter began with the Sun entering Cancer, which signalled the coming of hot and dry weather, which suited those of a phlegmatic constitution because ‘the powerful heat of the Sun in this season dryes up the superfluous moisture that accustomed to discompose him’. Others, however, were likely to suffer from ‘Stomach aching, posthumes, pestilent Feavers [and] Jaundise’. In general, the summer season threatened the health of an even greater number of people as particularly high temperatures could ‘cleave the stoutest Trees nay the Earth it self: and must therefore Rack and tear mens Bodyes’.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, ‘harvest’, or the autumn, was considered to be a ‘second spring’ and therefore almost as propitious a season, best suited to those of a ‘sanguine complexion’. The autumn, being naturally cold and dry best suited those of a ‘sanguine complexion’. Those of a ‘melancholy constitution’ would be most subject to disease at that time.<sup>45</sup> Since it was generally considered to be ‘a suitable time to take Physick in’, the satirical *Poor Robin* almanac suggested that it be referred to as ‘the Physicians Harvest’, presumably referring to the vast amounts of fees they could hope to ‘gather’.<sup>46</sup>

To modern readers, it appears that many almanacs repeated the same standard information on seasonal diseases every year. Much of it also sounds very trite, such as the statement that many ‘aged persons’ were likely to die during the winter quarter.<sup>47</sup> However, many writers supplemented such content with highly specific, annual predictions. For example, in 1554 Anthony Askham warned his readers that although January would have ‘no great sicknesses’, February would bring great quantities of snow and rain which would result in ‘rewmes, goutes, dropsies and quotidian agues’.<sup>48</sup> Some almanacs even provided daily forecasts, such as to expect windy, cold and dry weather for the first two days of January and cold snow or rain on the third or to beware of certain forthcoming conjunctions of planets.<sup>49</sup>

The third most common type of astrological physick was generally found under the heading of ‘Physical Observations’, although it was sometimes referred to as ‘An Astrologo-Physical Discourse’ or ‘Astronomical Elections’. In most almanacs, this would be divided into two main sections beginning with a discussion of constitutions followed by guidelines about carrying out specific preventative or remedial treatments. The first, larger part would focus on the individual attributes

of a patient that had to be taken into account before carrying out any preventative or remedial treatment. These included factors of sex, 'constitution', age, body size, the time of year and if used for therapeutic reasons, the 'strength and vehemency of the Disease'.<sup>50</sup>

Some of these variables would change over the course of time, while others would not. For example, women were thought to be 'less robust' than men, partly because they had a greater quantity of blood, which was colder and thicker than that of men.<sup>51</sup> This made them susceptible to a wider range of illnesses, particularly those falling under the category of 'Hysteric' diseases, such as apoplexies, epilepsy, palpitations of the heart and violent coughs or vomiting.<sup>52</sup> A person's constitution, which was determined by their time of birth, was also immutable. Someone born under the sign of Aries was likely to be 'of middle stature, lean and spare, big bones, strong thick shoulders, a long neck and a dusky brown or swarthy complexion'. They would be most at danger from diseases affecting the head, such as headaches, toothaches, migraines, 'heat and pimples in the face' and smallpox.<sup>53</sup> One's state of health was also linked to age and body size, with certain treatments being unsuitable for babies or the very young. Many almanac writers also warned readers to be cautious about administering physick to their offspring, as 'he that taketh much physicke when he is young will much repent it when he is old'.<sup>54</sup> The 'grosness or leanness' of a person also had a big impact on what types of treatment could be carried out.<sup>55</sup>

Another consideration was 'the Astrological time when most Convenient' for carrying out procedures.<sup>56</sup> Although certain conjunctions of planets promised auspicious times for taking medicine or carrying out procedures, others could be very dangerous. The positions of Saturn and Jupiter, for example, were considered to be particularly dangerous in medical terms.<sup>57</sup> Jupiter by itself, on the other hand, was considered to be 'the helper and comforter of the Vertues, so that the Medicine can but weakly expell the humours. The phases of the moon were another vital component, as the amount of blood in the body was also thought to ebb and flow in response to its movements. Since this was greatest at the time of a full moon, readers were therefore advised not to let blood 'within three dayes before or after the Change of the Moone'. It was also important to avoid letting blood 'within 24 houres before nor after the full' because this was when the humours would be in the process of flowing from the interior to the exterior of the body.<sup>58</sup>

The second most common feature in sections on 'Physical Observations' included information on carrying out various types of

treatment. Somewhat surprisingly, uroscopy, which was one of the central diagnostic tools of medieval physicians, and was linked to astrology, was discussed in a number of almanacs. Although Thomas Bretnor did not appear to be mocking the procedure, he did pour scorn on ‘the rude multitude’ who expected physicians to be able to diagnose ‘every idle pinch and trifling griefe about them’ from examining a glass bottle of their urine. These receptacles, with a bulbous bottom and tapering neck, were divided into superior, middle and inferior zones. These related to the various parts of the body, with the top representing disorders of the head and brain, moving on to the heart and lungs and so on. The nature of the urine followed rules such as if the ‘place of the live’ was in Aries with Mars, the resulting heat would weaken the power of the organ. This weakened state would allow gross substances to infiltrate the urine, which will result in red colour. On the other hand, if the signs were Saturn in Capricorn, the urine would look black caused by ‘mortification’ caused by the effects of the former planet.<sup>59</sup>

Although ‘urine-gazing’ said to be increasingly used only by quacks in the early seventeenth century. Nevertheless, there were still some practitioners who continued to offer this diagnostic tool, presumably because there was a continuing demand for it. This certainly appears to be true of some almanac readers in the last decades of the seventeenth century. The first advertisements for such a service appeared in Robert Morton’s almanac of 1662 under the heading ‘The Signification of several urins’. He explained that the colour of the urine would help to explain the type of humoral imbalance the patient was suffering from, although it needed to be used in conjunction with other diagnostic tools. In 1670 Lancelot Coelson offered to provide diagnosis of urine belonging either to his readers or to their ‘relations’. William Dade’s almanacs promoted the presence of such information on the title page, stating that it included ‘How to judge the Diseases in Man or Woman, by the Urine’. This included thirty-two different descriptions of the appearance, smell and texture of the urine. Although Dade did not mention astrological links, he believed that red urine was a sign of liver trouble and that black urine was a presage of death.<sup>60</sup>

Most writers included a section on physical observations, which included a simple list of rules on bleeding, purging, bathing and sweating, whether used ‘to keep health’ or ‘to cure disease’.<sup>61</sup> Since these will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, it will suffice to mention briefly their astrological links in this section. At the most simplistic level, this was based on where the Moon was in relation to the

other planets. The most dangerous position was when the Moon was in any aspect with Saturn which would ‘conceal the humors’, thereby rendering any medical treatment ineffective. Phlebotomy was also ill-advised when the Moon was in aspect with Jupiter, ‘the giver of life’ which would multiply the effect of any treatment that was given.<sup>62</sup>

Advice on phlebotomy generally began with what not to do. In the first instance, readers were warned to ‘bleed not at all except urgent causes compel thee’.<sup>63</sup> The major factors to be considered were the time of year, the age, complexion and physical state of the patient and the phases of the moon. It was thought to be dangerous to let blood when ‘the weather is extreame hot or cold’. Readers were also advised not to allow blood to be taken from ‘decrepit old age’ and ‘young infantes’.<sup>64</sup> The amount of blood that could safely be let was also linked to the complexion of a patient: those with ‘coole complexions’ only had ‘narowe vaines and little bloude’, while a ‘hote’ complexion ‘aboundeth with much blood’ and could afford to have more taken. Finally, it was safer to let blood from the ‘corpulent’ or those of a ‘ruddie colour’ than from those who were ‘very leane’ or ‘weake’.<sup>65</sup>

There were similar guidelines to be considered before purging. One of the most important points involved choosing the correct type of purgative. Because the humours would ‘move from the inward parts of the body to the outward’ as the moon moved from full to a quarter, it was better to use ‘external evacuations’ during the first and third weeks of the moon's course and save internal purgations for the other weeks.<sup>66</sup> Drugs taken either to purge or ‘comfort’ the body would also react in different ways according to the movements of the stars and planets. If administered in the ‘wrong hour’, they would have the opposite effect from what they were meant to do. This was particularly true of medicines given under signs that ‘chew the cud’, such as Aries and Taurus, as the patient would be unable to keep from vomiting them up.<sup>67</sup> If the aim was to purge the body, then the most auspicious time to take a purgation would be when the moon was in an aspect with a moist planet, such as Cancer, Scorpio or Pisces, which ‘stirred up and down’ the humours, which would aid in the process. The best time to administer pills was in the watery sign of Pisces, which would help to dissolve completely in the body.<sup>68</sup>

#### **4. Herbs and Astrological physick**

It was commonly accepted that God was the source of illness in individuals, animals or even whole communities or nations. However, it was also thought that God provided living creatures with a variety of

medicinal aids. These included raw materials such as ‘Hearbes, Fruites, Plantes and Tree’, which could be used to prepare both preventative and remedial potions. Thomas Bretnor praised God for providing the understanding of ‘the verity and excellent of Astrology in Physick’, through the use of which ‘thou shalt see so much of Gods Power, wisdom and Goodness, as will make thee love and serve him the more’.<sup>69</sup> Many almanac writers discussed the importance of astrological considerations that would determine when they should be planted, harvested, ‘properly elected and applied’.<sup>70</sup> The consequences of not following such rules were clear in a case study recounted by John Gadbury of a woman who died of the ‘Palsey’. He explained that the herbs making up the medicine she had been taking should have been of another ‘nature’ because as everyone ‘that herbs and plants properly elected and applied’ were of the utmost importance.<sup>71</sup> While few almanacs had the room to provide in-depth information about this link, readers could turn to *Culpeper’s Complete Herbal* for detailed advice on herbal medicine:

First, consider what planet causeth the disease; that thou mayest find it in my aforesaid Judgment of Disease,

Secondly, Consider what part of the body is afflicted by the disease, and whether it lies in the flesh, or blood, or bones, or ventricles.

Thirdly, Consider by what planet the afflicted part of the body is governed: that my Judgement of Diseases will inform you also.

Fourthly, You may oppose disease by Herbs of the planet, opposite to the planet that causes them: as diseases of Jupiter by the herbs of Mercury, and the contrary.

Fifthly, There is a way to cure diseases sometimes by Sympathy, and so every planet cures his own disease; as the Sun and Moon by their Herbs cure the Eyes.<sup>72</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The medical content in almanacs, based on a mixture of Galenic rationalism and astrological medicine based on the theory that God would use the heavens to communicate his will to all living creatures, remained firmly ensconced in a traditional, orthodox system of medical beliefs and practices. The movements of the planets and stars would result in

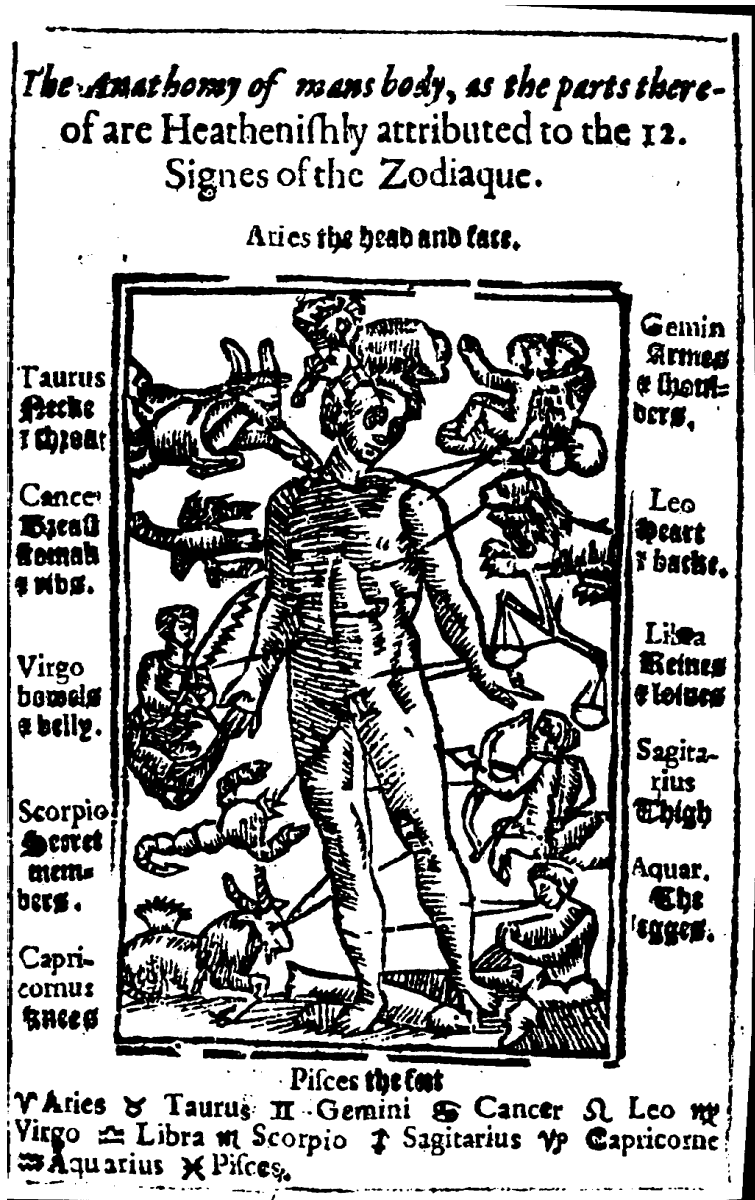
humoral imbalances, which could be treated with the help of plants, animals and other items provided by God for just that purpose. These astrological-Galenic principles applied to all aspects of medical practice, from determining the nature of a disease through to administering the proper medicines to ease it.<sup>73</sup> The orthodox nature of medical advice in almanacs was further highlighted by the inclusion of information about uroscopy in the second half of the seventeenth century, a procedure which had fallen out of general usage a century before. Astrological physick, however, showed no sign of falling out of use. Such content clearly supports Roy Porter's conclusion that readers of vernacular medical literature approved of such rational physic that they were already familiar and comfortable with.<sup>74</sup>

As one almanac writer noted, 'Physic without Astrology is like a Cloud without Rain'.<sup>75</sup> However, in its purest form, astrological physick was extremely technical, involving detailed mathematical calculations and complex analysis. Readers who wished to learn more about the science were generally advised to consult books, often written by the author of the almanac, or consult the writer him- or herself. Even so, a great deal of information could be found in the pages of almanacs, most of which assumed that readers already had some knowledge of astrological principles. At the lowest level, this would have included an understanding of the basic relationship between the planets and various parts of the body. Most contained an illustration of Zodiac Man, to help reinforce and help readers to apply this information in order to diagnose and treat their illnesses. Other almanacs offered more detailed advice, such as the rules linking the movements of the moon, sun and other planets to the course of an illness, and whether or not the patient would survive. As John Gadbury reminded his readers:

Without the knowledge of these Arts all Learning is imperfect, and nothing but Sound and Shadow, and all Diseases both Mental and Corporal, are either cured by a kind of Chance, or else miserable Mankind doth linger and languish tediously under them, from their first taking them to the latest time of their dissolution; so that it commonly cometh to pass, that Person and distemper come to be buried together.<sup>76</sup>



Figure 1: Zodiac Man from Richard Allestree, *An Almanack*, (London, 1620), sig. A3r.



Endnotes

Culture and Cosmos

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- 1 W. Knight, *Vox stellarum: or the voyce of the stars* (London, 1681), sig. A2r.
- 2 R. Edlyn, *Observations Astrologicae or an Astrological Discourse* (London, 1659), p. 5 and J. Moxon, *A Tutor to Astronomy and Geometry* (London, 1674), p. 112.
- 3 C. O'Boyle, *Medieval Prognosis and Astrology* (Cambridge, 1991); P. M. Jones, 'Medicine and Science' in L. Hellinga and J.B. Trapp (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 433-439; R. C. Simmons, 'ABC's, almanacs, ballads, chapbooks, popular piety and textbooks' in J. Barnard and D.F. McKenzie (eds) *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, IV (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 504 - 513.
- 4 B. Capp, *Astrology*, p. 24.
- 5 J. Black, *The English Press 1621- 1681* (Stroud, 2001), p. 5 and M. McDonald, 'The Career of Astrological Medicine in England' in O.P. Grell and A. Cunningham (eds.) *Religio Medici - Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 77.
- 6 P. Hinds, 'Roger L'Estrange, the Rye House Plot and the Regulation of Political Discourse in Late-Seventeenth century London', *The Library*, Seventh Series, 3, No.2 (March 2002), 3 - 31.
- 7 C. Blagden, *The Stationers' Company, A History 1403 – 1959* (London, 1960), p. 188.
- 8 The master list of the almanacs used in this study has been compiled from D. Wing, *Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England ... and of English Books...1641 - 1700*, 2nd edn., 3 vols. (New York, 1994); B. Capp, *Astrology*, pp. 347 - 386 and 'Early English Books Online' website.
- 9 There are several reasons why some surviving almanacs have not been used in this study. Many were inaccessible for various reasons, such as not being microfilmed or reproduced on the Internet. Others were either in fragments, or deemed too fragile to be handled.
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14 K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), p. 348.

15 R. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1988), p. 180.

16 B. Capp, *Astrology*, p. 27.

17 J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor, 'Introduction: the practice and representation of reading in England' in J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor (eds) *The practice and representation of reading in England* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 5.

18 C. Blagden, *The Stationers' Company: a History, 1403 - 1959* (London, 1960), pp. 23 – 33.

19 W. Gregg, *Some Aspects and Problems of London Publishing Between 1550 and 1650* (Oxford, 1956), p. 100.

20 N. Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain 1590 - 1660* (London, 1999), p. 57.

21 R. Myers, 'The Financial Records of the Stationers Company 1605 - 1811' in R. Myers and M. Harris (eds) *Economics of the British Booktrade 1605 - 1939* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 1 - 32 and J. Bowker, *An Almanack* (London, 1676), sig. B8v.

22 V. Wing, *An Almanac and Prognostication* (London, 1643), sig. A2r.

23 *The City and Countrey Chapmans Almanack*, (London, 1687), sig. A1r.

24 *The Sea-mans Almanack* (London, 1655) and *Veterinarium Meteorologist Astrology* (London, 1698).

25 *Poor Robin*, (London, 1670), sig. A1r.

26 In many cases it has been possible to corroborate these claims through their other publications. For example, the almanac writer John Poole also produced *Country Astrology* (London, 1650) and William Eland published *A Tutor to Astrology, or Astrology made easie* (London, 1694).

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- 29 J. Gadbury, *Thesaurus Astrologiae* (London, 1674), sig. A4v-5r.
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- 33 G.C., *A Briefe and Most Easie Introduction to the Astrologicall Judgment of the Starres* (London, 1598), sig. A3r and J. Gadbury, *Ephemeris, or a Diary Astronomical, Astrological, Meteorological* (London, 1692), sig. C8r.
- 34 J. Partridge, 1681, sig. C7v and Nathaniel Culpeper, 1682, sig. C2v.
- 35 L. Kassell, 'How to Read Simon Forman's Casebooks', *Social History of Medicine*, 12 (1999), p. 8.
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- 37 R. Allestree, 1620, sig. C4r; T. Trigge, 1678, sig. C1v; V. Wing, 1643, sig. A2r and R. Morton, 1662, sig. D3r.
- 38 R. Allestree, 1619, sig. A3r.
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- 43 R. Allestree, 1614, sig. B2r and W. Clarke, 1668, sig. B4r.
- 44 Swan, 1670, sig. B4r; T. Trigge, 1676, sig. C2r and T. Trigge, 1667, sig. C1r.
- 45 M. Holden, 1688, sig. A4r and J. Bowker, 1679, sig. C4r.
- 46 Poor Robin, 1682, sig. C4v.
- 47 W. Lilly, 1684, sig. A7r.
- 48 A. Askham, 1554, sig. A2r.
- 49 J. Booker, 1651, sig. C7v; J. Baston, 1657, sig. B5v and C. Atkinson, 1673, sig. C2r.
- 50 L. Coelson, *The poor mans physician and chyrurgion* (London, 1656), p.6.
- 51 H. King, *The disease of Virgins: green sickness, cholorosis and the problems of puberty* (London, 2004), pp. 8 and 23.
- 52 J. Pechey, *A general treatise of the diseases of maids, bigbellied women, child-bed women*, (London, 1696) sig. A2v.
- 53 W. Eland, *A Tutor to Astrology: Or, Astrology made easie* (London, 1694), p. 4.
- 54 R. Allestree, 1636, sig. C6r.
- 55 F. Winter, 1646, sig. B1v.
- 56 L. Coelson, 1674 sig. A3v.
- 57 G. Gilden, 1623, sig. C1v.
- 58 J. Woodhouse, 1634, sig. B6r.
- 59 T. Bretnor, 1618, sig. C1r; J. Gadbury, 1671, sig. A3r and R. French, 'Foretelling the Future: Arabic Astrology and English Medicine in the Late Twelfth Century, *Isis*, 87, 3 (September 1996), 453-480.
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65 E. Gresham, 1604, sig. B2r.

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68 Swallow, 1640, sig. B8r.

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