

Jeffrey Boss

- 441, n. 54. *Angariaverunt aegrum*: "Have burdened the sick man."
442, line 6. The right reading is "Impotencye."
442, line 14. The quotation reads:

Omnes crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum.

Grata superveniet quae non sperabitur hora.

Believe that every day which has shone on you has been your last.
Each hour will then come as a pleasure through being unexpected.

The source is Horace *Epistles* 1.4.14, and is appropriate advice for a condemned man.

These notes confirm that Butler was a typical Elizabethan academic, imbued with the classics and the Bible, but also ready to accept some modern authors and to use practical commonsense in treating his patients. In his theory he was a pragmatic Galenist of the old school, with J. C. Scaliger his favourite among the moderns, and, *pace* Dr. Boss, in these papers he shows no acquaintance with or liking for Paracelsus and his medicine. He follows Galen's example in treating the individual as a whole, taking into account mental as well as physical factors.²⁴ If some of his treatments appeared strange and wonderful to his contemporaries, that too could be said of Galen, and his endeavours to combine in fitting measure both experience and reason follow Galenic precept. Yet throughout he preserves a trenchant independence of judgment, and his vigorous and exuberant style, in controversy and in prescription, proves him beyond doubt a Cambridge character.

²⁴ S. W. Jackson, 'Galen on mental disorders', *J. Hist. Behav. Sci.*, 1969, 5: 365–384.

DR. BUTLER REVISITED: APPRECIATION AND COMMENTS

by

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THE LATE Mr. M. Newbold of Cambridge transcribed some of the Clare College papers of William Butler (1535–1618), but the transcriptions were never published. I therefore made transcriptions of eight papers selected for medical interest.¹ In my copying of the four of these which had transcriptions by Mr. Newbold I was fortunate to be able to use these latter papers as a source of suggestions which, of course, I was not obliged to take. Dr. Nutton's paper now extends this work by

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¹ Jeffrey Boss, 'William Butler (1535–1618): further evidence on a physician between two ages', *Med. Hist.*, 1977, 21: 434–445.

transcribing three medical papers (one with practical details) which I missed.² Dr. Nutton is to be thanked not only for his original contribution to this work, but also for his improvements of readings from three of the eight manuscripts which I had already published. In these three papers he has amended fifteen words, ten so as to change or add to the sense, and has drawn attention to three typographical errors (as well as one in a fourth paper). In one of these three transcriptions Dr. Nutton has most usefully provided readings where I had omitted two words which I could not read, and has made explicit a conjecture which I left to the reader; he has also provided a word deleted in the manuscript and omitted by me. Thus Dr. Nutton has not only made available three further Butler manuscripts but has provided amendments for my transcriptions of three others. (It is to be presumed therefore that he considers five of my transcriptions reliable as they stand—apart from the omission of a *tilde* on an *o*—and the other three to be so when read with his amendments. His Note 2 refers to unspecified “errors”, presumably of less importance than the omitted *tilde*, but this general charge of miscopying is, of course, impossible to answer.)

In addition, Dr. Nutton has traced, for the same three of my transcriptions, eight further references for Butler’s allusions, corrected a reference which I gave with a query, chosen between alternative readings of a word about which I was uncertain, and made four amendments of my translations from Latin, two with change of sense. Dr. Nutton has also raised some topics for discussion. I shall comment briefly on three groups of these.

(a) Butler was certainly capable, when writing to someone holding high and potentially threatening office, of being facetious (“characterised by, or addicted to, pleasantry; jocose, jocular”, *Oxford English dictionary*), as the paper on my p. 443, for example, indicates. As to my n. 42, p. 439, Dr. Nutton has substantiated Butler’s reference to Scaliger, but not the other two alleged citations to which I refer. (i) The words, “in the Hebrew tongue is termed *Inscitia Loquax*” clearly mean that *inscitia loquax* is a Hebraism (cf. *Oxford English dictionary*, s.v. “face”, 2g) based on a Hebrew idiom, tag or proverb, Dr. Nutton’s comment on my p. 439, line 4, is beside the point. The mere sentiment is found in many languages. The explanation using Proverbs 9.13 ignores a disjunctive trope which was certainly recognized in Renaissance Hebrew studies. If Butler “added the reference to the ‘Hebrew tongue’ to enhance his own learning”, as Dr. Nutton admits he may have done, we must have either pleasantry or deliberate deception, and the latter would have been both out of character and dangerous. (ii) On my p. 439, line 5, Dr. Nutton admits that Butler’s “Aristot.” does not indicate a verbatim quotation but thinks that Butler alludes to *Nic. Eth.* VII, 14, 1154a, 32–35. If Butler had had this passage in mind, he would of course have been aware that it is about the evil nature which explains the pursuit of certain bodily pleasures; the irony is clear. However, Dr. Nutton’s translation of Butler is “And it makes no difference whether one is superior in morals or in age” (i.e. the origin of the evil is immaterial). Aristotle says that it makes no difference whether an evil nature is *ek genetês*, congenital (as with animals) or *di’ ethos*, due to habit (as in some people). These do not correspond to Butler’s alternatives. If “habit”

² Vivian Nutton, ‘Dr. Butler revisited’, *Med. Hist.*, 1978, 22: 417–426.

corresponds to Butler's "morals" (*moribus*), which is itself reasonable, "congenital" must correspond to superiority due to age! The alternative is even less convincing, with "habit" corresponding to "age" (*aetate*), and "congenital" to "morals". To postulate conflation with Nic. Eth. VI, 12 (q.v.) only adds to the improbability of any clear reference to Aristotle. Dr. Nutton's explanation makes Butler a worse scholar than Dr. Nutton himself claims. (iii) Dr. Nutton therefore has very slender grounds for the contradiction of me in his Note 19.

(b) On my n. 40, p. 438, Dr. Nutton prefers a translation which paraphrases Hippocrates rather more closely than does mine. Both translations echo the Hippocratic teaching on the expulsion of noxious matter, and therefore we do not differ on this. I, however, allow *ducenda* its more obvious reference, to *natura* in the same sentence, rather than to *materiam* in the previous. This adds to the meaning the notion of nature being assisted in its action in "uncertaine and dowtfull" cases, a principle receiving particular development later in the century.³ If the principle may have influenced Butler's paraphrasing of Hippocrates, the evidence should not be pushed aside. Similarly, on my n. 43, p. 439, Dr. Nutton wishes to add a word to what Butler wrote or to take Butler's first word out of the sentence. However, *pace* Dr. Nutton, my literal translation of Butler's own words is not nonsense: "nature the physician [i.e. working through its *vis medicatrix*] is the servant of nature [i.e. the nature of the organism, which is fulfilled in health]". Butler has in fact just referred to nature acting to restore the normal (natural) state. Also, it is not clear why Dr. Nutton strains at a manuscript comma and swallows a verbal emendation; in fact the comma would be normal if *est* had been omitted, and it is therefore easy to see how it could have intruded as a *lapsus calami*, or because the addition of *est* was not intended when the opening of the motto was being written. Butler combines two ancient doctrines, that the physician is the servant of nature, and that nature is a healer, to make an apparently paradoxical statement implying that nature is both master and servant; this may not be Galenic but it was a seventeenth-century teaching from Bacon to Baglivi.

(c) There are minor misunderstandings. (i) On my p. 439, bottom, Dr. Nutton is right to point out my error by drawing attention to Butler's physiological explanation. Having done this, however, it makes no sense to write that to "offer a 'physiological explanation' would be futile". (ii) On my p. 438, line 20 with n. 38, Dr. Nutton convincingly corrects my transcription. Having read the manuscript, however, even wrongly, I did not force my reading to fit my expectations. "Dr. Boss unfortunately fails to realise . . ." is therefore a *non sequitur*. (iii) Dr. Nutton's defence of Butler's humanistic erudition is unnecessary. (The old philosophy, my p. 437, which I show Butler to reject, is scholastic, as is clear from the context.)

Butler is not at all points unambiguously neo-Galenic. While the "*salte fierie spirit*" (my p. 441) may arise from Galenic doctrine (as Dr. Nutton says), it could equally show Paracelsian influence. Butler's use of *natura* echoes non-Galenic ideas perhaps (but not necessarily Paracelsian); Dr. Nutton uses linguistic devices to maintain Galenic purity. In his attitude to the way the mind works on the body, Butler

³ Thomas Sydenham, *Opera omnia*, edited by W. A. Greenhill. London, Sydenham Society, 1844, pp. 96, 103; *Obs. Med.*, sect. 2, cap. 2, paras. 1 and 19.

Dr. Butler revisited: appreciation and comments

need not have been influenced by any philosophical school, but he is for example, nearer to Bright⁴ (who exhibits Paracelsian influence) than to the more Galenic Jorden.⁵ (These examples indicate merely the need for caution, of course, not Butler's sources.) We have Fuller's word,⁶ written forty-four years after Butler's death, that Butler used Paracelsian remedies, although Fuller was wrong in making Butler the first in England to use them together with Galenicals. The erosion of Galenism in Butler's England is exhibited along a spectrum from King James's trusted Mayerne (condemned by the Paris College of Physicians for deviation from Galenism) all the way to the totally heterodox Fludde. If an English physician of Butler's period makes a statement which may or may not be Galenical, the onus of proof is on the scholar who wishes to force the statement into a Galenical mould at least as much as it is on he who would interpret it otherwise. Dr. Nutton is to be thanked for his Galenic interpretations, but the choice remains open where non-Galenic explanation is also possible, at least until further evidence is adduced.

⁴ Timothie Bright, *A treatise of melancholie*, London, T. Vautrollier, 1586.

⁵ Edward Jorden, *A brief discourse of a disease called the suffocation of the mother, etc.*, London, 1603.

⁶ Thomas Fuller, *The history of the worthies of England*, London, printed by I. W. G. L. and W. G., 1662; Suffolk, p. 67, *Physicians*.

RESPONSE BY DR. V. NUTTON

Dr. Butler would smile at this controversy, as heated, if not as elegantly expressed, as those to which he was a party. My defence of his learning had a dual purpose, to combat the charge of facetiousness and by establishing some of his sources to reach a fairer appreciation of his medical allegiances. While he could undoubtedly be witty in his presentation, I see nothing in his formal response to James I that conveys facetiousness in the use of allusions, and Dr. Boss's belief in the clarity of Aristotelian irony is not shared by all. His list of possible explanations is also too short: to ignorance, an undiscovered source, "witty invention" (a better and less emotive term than facetiousness) could be added careless quotation (certainly a possibility for the hurried *Aristot.* and confirmed in the *Appendix*) and a deliberate parade of dubious learning to impress an important hearer (as possibly with the "Hebrew tongue"). The wit of such references would be savoured by James I only if he knew they were or were likely to be false or pretentious: yet Butler was answering a serious medical question, not writing a Rabelaisian skit.

To determine Butler's medical stance requires careful examination and evaluation of the evidence. Despite Dr. Boss's disclaimer, his original description of Butler's methods twice made them correspond to his period, after the impact of Paracelsus on older medicine and before Sydenham. Yet what evidence is there for the influence of Paracelsus? The late and not always accurate notice of Fuller on his remedies and the pretty tale told by Aubrey of the destruction of his chemical stills are the only external guides,¹ and the papers themselves offer very little internal support—a doubt-

¹ J. Aubrey, *Brief lives*, edited by Andrew Clark, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1898, p. 143 (strangely omitted by Dr. Boss). There is no mention of Butler in A. G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians*, London, Oldbourne, 1965.

ful phrase (*salte fierie spirit*) and one idea (of nature) based on a mistranslation and a disputed text. On the other hand, traditional humoral therapy pervades the documents and at least five Galenic quotations can be identified. Not that this means that Butler was a strict Galenist, for I deliberately compared him with the independent doctors of the previous generation, such as Scaliger, whose vigour and erudition set them a little apart from the mainstream of orthodox Galenism. Far from being a good example of the post-Paracelsian phase in English medicine, in his theory and in much of his practice Butler was a throwback to the years of his youth.

Dr. Boss also accuses me of using linguistic devices to maintain Galenic purity. If accurate copying, correct translation, understanding of the argument, and a suspicion that a passage requires emendation are these devices, this is a charge to be welcomed, not rebutted. Even with my printed corrections, Dr. Boss's transcripts are not textually accurate, although they are reliable enough for the purpose of giving the general sense of the argument.² Yet an accurate text is a first requirement for the understanding of an author, and if a hurried transcription results in an unusual reading, reason and a knowledge of the subject should together impose a cautious reflection before accepting the consequences of a puzzling text. Had Dr. Boss been sufficiently acquainted with sixteenth-century medical theory, he would have suspected the "wine-forming" nectar of the blood (p. 438, 1.20) as somewhat odd, and returned to his copy and thence to the Ms. to assure himself of the correct reading. That he was prepared to attribute so strange a theory to Butler without comment and against his own expectations indicates either naïveté or a comforting belief that ancient and renaissance scholars were used to reading and writing what to them was nonsense.

When rejecting the complaint, p. 439, that Butler offered no physiological explanation for the action of antidotes, I assumed that Dr. Boss had understood the argument of the piece and was looking "anachronistically" for some "modern" physiological argument. I am sorry to learn that my initial assumption was wrong.

² I count at least a dozen more mistakes in the response to James (e.g. 438.1 "putt"; 438.6 "measylls"; 439.29, 31 "whyther"), nine in the prescription on p. 441 (e.g. 441.7 "Bloodde"; 441.8 "hathe"; 441.11 "upō" = "upon"), and five in the letter on p. 443 (e.g. 443.8 "they were both"; 443.11 "strangurie"): I have no accurate copy of the other documents to hand.