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MEDICAL LAUGHTER AND MEDICAL POLEMICS: THE WOODWARD – MEAD QUARREL AND MEDICAL SATIRE

This article is based on a case study that is part of a larger approach of eighteenth-century medical controversies and literary genres. It reviews the comical genres at play within a pamphlet war, and shows how they partake of a larger culture of medical laughter. It examines the controversy between John Woodward – who recommended vomiting for the cure of the smallpox in his 1718 essay, *The State of Physic* – and a group of Doctors, including Richard Mead and John Freind, who responded to it in a series of pamphlets. This pamphlet war had little medical interest, being more personal than professional (the protagonists fought in a duel). Nonetheless, the authors displayed much literary creativity, resulting in the creation of a ballad Opera by Richard Mead, *Harlequin Hydaspe*, performed in Lincoln Inn's Fields, and soon censored.

Cet article se fonde sur une étude de cas qui s'inscrit dans une approche plus générale des controverses médicales et des genres littéraires qui les parcourent. Il passe en revue les genres comiques qui appartiennent à une tradition de l'humour médical qualifié en français de carabin. La controverse oppose John Woodward – qui recommande la purge contre la variole dans son livre The State of Physic (1718) – et un groupe de médecins, dont Richard Mead et John Freind, qui multiplièrent les attaques pamphlétaires à son égard. Cette controverse, motivée par des rivalités personnelles (les protagonistes se battirent en duel), présente peu d'intérêt médical, mais les pamphlétaires font preuve d'une grande créativité littéraire, comme la mise en scène d'un opéra comique écrit par Mead et joué à Lincoln's Inn Fields avant d'être censuré.

Studies in the history of science and medicine have shown how polemics and controversies are crucial to understand coexisting theories and their negotiations among scientists.¹ Early modern pamphlet wars can be read as “knowledge in the making,” by the con-

1. See Steven Shapin and Simon Schafer. See also the AGON project on early modern disputes <<http://www.agon.paris-sorbonne.fr/en>>.

frontation of concurrent interpretations of a similar phenomenon. Controversies are also useful to map out the social networks of natural philosophers and physicians in Europe, as many scholars took sides, and wrote to support their friends and colleagues. The quarrel opposing Richard Mead and his friends to John Woodward and his in 1719 is nothing of the sort. As the historian Joseph Levine puts it bluntly in his book on Dr. Woodward, “it generated more heat than light” (11). The two camps were composed, on the one side, of Mead’s friends William Wagstaffe, John Freind and John Quincy, with John Woodward and John Harris on the other. Although this dispute mainly is fuelled by personal hatred, each camp had polarised political opinions: some of Mead’s friends – especially John Freind – were involved in high Tory politics, while John Harris, on Woodward’s side, belonged to the Whig network in London. Political ideas were echoed by scientific methodologies, and if one considers the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns to be lurking under most scientific quarrels of the early eighteenth-century, it logically divides the two sides of this dispute as well, with Woodward on the side of the Moderns, and Freind, who published a translation and commentary on Hippocrates, on the side of the Ancients. They fought on therapeutics – whether purging or vomiting was better to cure the smallpox – but the controversy consisted more in satire *ad hominem* than in scientific arguments. Why, then, study such a petty pamphlet war? The humour and creativity of this heated debate are striking, as the texts display a great variety of comic literary genres and literary references. The multiple jokes and mockeries of the pamphlet writers are quite representative of the familiarity that medical writers exhibited with the satirical mode at the time.

The pamphlets presented in this article are labelled as medical texts, but their tone is openly satirical. In that sense, they are a sign of the literary culture of eighteenth-century physicians that has been studied both by historians and literary scholars.² This quarrel has previously been discussed from two different perspectives. It is mentioned at the beginning of Joseph Levine’s book on Dr Woodward’s shield – a shield bought by the Doctor and given as a legacy to the British Museum, but later found out to be a forgery. Levine uses the quarrel to give an account of Woodward’s polemical character and his relationships in London’s medical world of the eighteenth century.

2. See for example Jean-Christophe Abramovici; Juliet McMaster; Alexandre Wenger.

“At fifty,” Levine writes, “he was stubborn and combative as he had been two decades before, when he startled the world with bolder ideas about the formation of the earth” (Levine 17). Woodward’s earlier quarrel was related to his geological attempts to explain the biblical accounts of the deluge. He then made friends – including John Harris – and enemies – including John Arbuthnot, to whom some of the following pamphlets have been attributed in the past.³ Craig Ashley Hanson also took an interest in the controversy, mainly on account of the recurrent references to *Don Quixote*, which he analyses in the context of medical antiquarianism, as both Richard Mead and John Woodward were famous collectors – the former was interested in geological material and antique objects, while the latter built an extensive collection of books and art (Hanson 135-40). Both scholars mention satire, and the aggressive violence of the controversy, but the way in which this quarrel is extremely representative of the questions raised by medical satire has not yet been commented on. Indeed, laughter was both instrumental to the controversy, and criticised as unbecoming to proper scientists. To make it easier to follow the complex evolution of the dispute, the controversy will be narrated step by step, with reflections on the way satire functions in medicine and an analysis of how laughter was perceived within the medical culture of the eighteenth century.

“The great wisdom and happiness of man consists in due care of the stomach and of his digestion,” Woodward writes in his treatise *The State of Physic* published in 1718.⁴ Woodward’s professional reputation was by then well established as he had been a professor at Gresham College since 1692,⁵ and had an extended practice that included famous patients like Richard Steele. He was an active member of the Royal College of Physicians, as he accepted to be a

3. Two pamphlets have been attributed to John Arbuthnot, although this was later refuted: *A Letter from the Facetious Dr. Andrew Tripe at Bath* (London, 1719) – which is considered here to be by William Wagstaffe – and *An Account of the Sickness and Death of Dr. W—dw—rd; as Also, of What Appear’d Upon Opening His Body* (London, 1719).

4. According to J.M. Levine’s *ODNB* entry, Woodward is one of the main targets of the Scriblerian play *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717) by John Gay, Jonathan Swift and John Arbuthnot, as the pretentious “Dr. Fossil.”

5. On this institution and its difficulties in the eighteenth century, see Richard Chartes and David Vermont.

censor twice, in 1703 and in 1714-1715. He was invited to give the “Goulstonian Lectures” in 1710 under the title: “On the Bile and its Uses.” His treatise was compiled from this series of lectures, and expanded into other subjects. It develops many aspects of contemporary hygienic treatises, promoting a temperate diet and good management of the stomach as the source of health. “Everything depended upon the keeping of the right balance of ‘biliose salts’,” Levine explains (12). Woodward’s principle of treatment relies on vomiting rather than other expectorant methods – bleeding, purging, which he finds tend to increase the symptoms. No such violence in Woodward’s prescriptions, as gentle emetics or stroking the tonsils with a feather make the process of vomiting less painful to the patient. He goes further, arguing that vomiting, rightly timed, is a useful cure for the smallpox. Such prescription is a direct attack on one of his peers, Doctor Freind, who made it clear in his commentaries on Hippocrates’ *Epidemics*, published in 1717, that purging is the best cure for the smallpox. Woodward quotes his work and invalidates his medical reasoning:

I now proceed on with the Consideration of the Small-Pox: and what Dr *Freind* and the Physicians in Consort with him, have proposed. It has been, I think, sufficiently shewn, that the Arguments of these Gentlemen for Purging, on the Access of the second Fever, are not by any means conclusive: that even their own Accounts, instead of proving what they alledge them for, prove rather the contrary: that both Nature and Reason are reluctant, and no Ways favour that Method: that ’tis so far from having any Countenance from *Hippocrates*, that his Precepts and Reasoning run directly to counter to it. (Woodward, *The State of Physick* 210)

Freind had compiled a note with Richard Mead, stating that purging after the second fever was the best option to cure the smallpox.⁶ Both Freind and Richard Mead were fellows of the Royal Society and committed Newtonians. Woodward’s exclusion by Newton from the council of the Royal Society after his fierce altercation with Sir Hans Sloane had made him an outsider, and left him potentially eager to oppose the representatives of the Society’s line of thought. His theoretical attack about Hippocrates’ principles was therefore directly

6. The smallpox diagnosis divided the illness in two initial “fevers” (one resembling common influenza, a second accompanied with vomiting). It lasted two to four days before severe lesions were formed on the mucous membranes, and a rash developed over the whole body – leaving the famous “smallpox scars” for those who survived.

aimed at John Freind and Richard Mead for personal and political reasons. Such outspoken hostility, together with Woodward's well-known antiquarian taste for fossils, and his notorious homosexuality, made him an easy target of satire.

John Freind was the first to answer, and he did not spare Woodward his belligerent temper – he had already been involved in several medical controversies in early eighteenth-century London, and was later imprisoned in 1722 for his involvement in the Atterbury plot. He replied on two levels: fellow physicians and erudite readers could read his letter to Dr Mead, written in Latin (*De purgantibus, in secunda variolarum confluentium febre, adhibendis epistola*), while his satirical *Letter to the Learned Dr. Woodward. By Dr. Byfield* was aimed at a broader audience.⁷ The entire pamphlet is a mock-eulogy of Woodward's theories. Freind exaggerates his opponent's prescriptions for oils, emetics and keeps, commenting ironically on the physiology of digestion exposed in *The State of Physick*. As most physicians of the time did when they opposed their professional enemies, Freind portrays Woodward as a quack. Calling one another a charlatan was all the more common as physicians needed to distinguish themselves from nostrum mongers, since the frontier between medicine and quackery remained uncertain, as Roy Porter explains in his book on charlatans in the eighteenth-century medical world (*Quacks*). Freind's Dr Byfield pretends to be enthralled by Woodward's theories, and offers to share with him his medical recipe for a universal remedy (a catholicon) ironically named *Sal Volatile Oleosum* (volatile and oily salt). He praises his own invention by explaining its effect in Woodward's own terms:

That the World therefore might have the Benefit of my Labours, I publish'd this Essay about that Quintessence of Health, that Genuine Elixir of Life, the *Sal Volatile Oleosum*; and invented this Sovereign Medicine my self, which I now dispense merely for the Publick Good, as the only *Catholicon* that cou'd repress the Insults, curb the Effervescencies, impede the Collucations, and appease the Turmoil and Emotion of the *Bile*, and that coul'd effectually eradicate the vitious Principle, and finally disappoint and captivate its Salts, whether Saccharine, Vitriolick, Ammoniack, or Muriatick, Acerb, Saline. (Freind 5)

7. According to Anita Guerrini's *ODNB* entry, "The 'Dr Byfield' of the latter work was a well-known empirical physician, but it was generally recognized that Freind was the author."

The technical terms are here only for the aesthetic effect of medical jargon, to create a comic enumeration of chemical salts already mentioned in Woodward's treatise. Comic effect relying on the hyperbolic use of medical jargon is reminiscent of the caricature of doctors in Augustan literature, especially of Dr. Fossile's vituperations in the Scriblerian play *Three Hours after Marriage*, performed in 1717. In this play, which is a subtext for the pamphlet war of 1719, Woodward was ridiculed as "Dr. Fossile" by Swift, Gay and Arbuthnot, whose knowledge of the medical lexicon might have helped with the elaboration of Fossile's lines. At one point in the play, Fossile talks to his enemies in disguise, one of whom pretends he is a foreign doctor (Dr. Lubomirski) and the other, a patient. Both Fossile's nonsensical prescription and Byfield's description of his universal remedy sound very much alike:

True, we might unload the Stomach by gentle Emeticks, and the Intestines by Clysters stimulative, carminative, and emollient, with strong Hydroticks, quiet the spasms of the Viscera by Paregoricks, draw off the stagnant Blood by deep Scarrifications, and depurate its Fæculencies by Volatiles; after this, let there be numerous Blisters and potential Cauteries – I consult my Patient's ease; I am against much Physick – he Faints, he is Apoplectick, bleed him this Moment. (Act 3, 46)

Byfield's references to the "*bile*," however, are not meaningless. The "insults," "emotions," and "turmoils" of the bile might well be applied to the effects of his own satire, which was recurrently associated with "gall" in contemporary writings. Such mockery was hard to stomach. Yet the pamphlet war had just started.

As Guerrini explains in her article on medical pamphlet wars in early eighteenth-century London, controversies had an impact on the status and reputation of medical doctors ("A Club of Little Villains"). Each little pamphlet war had political and social consequences on the career of physicians, which is why they relied on their professional networks to handle the controversy. Several clubs were created according to personal friendships that shared political and theoretical common ground. Freind and Mead were thus friends with William Wagstaffe, a very affable Medical Doctor who graduated at Oxford and was quick to ascend in the influential medical circles of London; he would soon become censor to the Royal College of Physicians. Like Freind, Wagstaffe uses the usual pseudonym, "Andrew Tripe," by which he is known for his satirical writings. Like Freind also, he

pretends to praise the work of Woodward, and offers to dedicate his new invention to the learned doctor:

I shall publish speedily a *Treatise, dedicated to yourself*, wherein I propose the *Model of a Close-Stool*, in the Manner of a *Spinster*, to open it self, or to contract, according to the various Dimensions and Latitude of *Human Buttocks*. For it has been a General Mistake in the Structure of this Instrument of *Ease*, and in which the *Joyner*, I suppose, might be the only Man consulted, to make the *Orifices of them all nearly equal Diameter*. I have contrived likewise that the Body shall be placed in such a Posture as to give the *Diaphragm* and *Muscles of the Abdomen* the Liberty of acting without those *contorsions of Countenance* which frequently accompany that Exercise. (Wagstaffe 13)

This fake invention sounds like a scatological farce echoing the Scriblerian taste for subversive technology and mock-science as can be found in Swift's *Tale of a Tub* or *Gulliver's Travels* (Lynall). Wagstaffe's joke verges on the grotesque in its representation of orifices and contortions while keeping with the technological and scientific jargon of tools and measurements. The parody of modern scientists – Woodward was one of them – obsessed with new inventions, observations and absurd instruments, is thus complete. In addition to this extravagant invention, Andrew Tripe diagnosticates Woodward with a literary disease, the "*Scribendi Cacoethes*," which he defines as "an Involuntary Propensity in the Hand to write something, without any manner or Regard to the two circumstances, what, or wherefore" (Wagstaffe 20). This distemper comes from a long tradition of satirical works, very familiar to Augustan writers, that can be traced back to Juvenal's poems – among the most biting satires of Antiquity. The disease was already mentioned on the title page of the pamphlet, and ascribed to "the Redundancy of BILIOSE SALTS, and not to be Eradicated but by a *Diurnal Course of OYLS and VOMIT*," parodying once more Woodward's medical system. As he exposes the symptoms, Tripe further remarks that "there is a Pleasure of scratching, even in the *Itch itself*, so I am at an uncertainty whether a Man of common Sense, if he weighs maturely all the Symptoms of this Distemper, would wish to be entirely without it" (20). Such addictive pleasure explains that those who suffer from the disease "dispatch a *Volume of Three hundred Pages* in very little Time, and be as *plump* afterwards, and *sleek* in countenance, as if he had been eating and drinking all the While" (25). Addictive writing is represented here as a symptom

which affects many physicians: beyond Woodward's treatise, Wagstaffe ridicules the anxious attempts of many doctors to get published, either through controversial pamphlets or quickly written treatises in the competitive medical context of early modern London (Porter, *Disease*).

In all its derisions of the practice and theories of modern science, the pamphlet was an insult to Woodward's modern scientist friends, particularly to John Harris, who had previously sided with Woodward in a pamphlet war about the deluge, in an earlier debate on the geological vestiges of the flood mentioned in Genesis (Porter, "John Woodward"). John Harris was definitely one of the moderns: his publication of *Lexicon Technicum, or, An Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1704) is considered as an early example of the encyclopedias and dictionaries of the Enlightenment. The taste for instruments ridiculed by Wagstaffe touched him to the quick. Harris, called Mead, Freind and Salisbury Cade – the censor at the Royal College of Physicians that year – "The Fatal Triumvirate," and denigrated the attack in a pamphlet entitled *A Letter to the Fatal Triumvirate: In Answer to That Pretended to Be Written by Dr. Byfield: And Shewing Reasons Why Dr. Woodward Should Take No Notice of It*. Harris's main argument is social and political. The pamphlet war does not fit the tone of scientific exchange in polite society, and the satirical mode of the other camp discredits their arguments: "How easy is your Way of Writing! And how vulgar! How common is it, now-a-days, to turn serious Things to Mirth and Drollery, and to banter the most useful and important Truths!" (Harris, *Letter* 6). He thus takes a moral stance on the quarrel, showing that Freind and Mead misunderstood most of Woodward's initial arguments. Beyond the obvious reproaches expected in this context, Harris establishes a proper tone for scientific debate that should be innocent of literary elements, calling upon neutrality as the proper rule for discussion. This could be read as an early example of eighteenth-century constructions of objectivity, which Lorraine Daston has demonstrated to be closely linked with moral philosophy. In this perspective, therefore, laughter and science are deemed incompatible and their association deemed "vulgar" in the literal sense, good enough for common people but unfit for those with proper education. John Woodward's position on his enemies' satirical attacks is in the same vein. His personal answer to Dr Byfield, entitled *The Two Sosias: Or, the True Dr. Byfield*, sounds like a pastiche of Dryden's *Amphytryon*,

or the *Two Sospia* (1690). The title's function, however, is not to denounce Freind as the author of the pamphlet (since "Dr Byfield" was a well-known empirical physician), or reproach him with the baseness of his attack:

Are these the ordinary Practices of those *Graduates* that you speak so loftily of? Are these the Precepts of the *University* you value yourself so much upon? Or are they not rather the ill Arts of such as, relying solely on Titles, and the Sanction of *Universities*, do both the utmost Dishonour? To tell you freely my Opinion, were Newgate intitled to the Morals that appear throu' your Letter, Bedlam to the Reasoning, and Billingsgate to the Language, neither of those three Academies would receive any great Accession of Praise from your Performance. (Woodward, *The Two Sospias* 20)

By focusing on the institutional status of his enemies, Woodward's moralizing rebuke adds a political element to Harris's scandalized response. Unlike Woodward, who built his medical career from apprenticeship to becoming a full professor at Gresham, Wagstaffe and Freind graduated from Oxford, and Mead spent time on the continent, graduating from the University of Utrecht before coming back to England to establish his medical practice. Through Woodward's raillery, a whole class of physicians is attacked, who rely on university networks for their careers, unaware of the responsibilities granted by a powerful status that might have been reached too soon (Woodward was a decade older than his enemies). Woodward's subversive change of institutional names – Newgate prison, Bedlam asylum, and Billingsgate Fish Market instead of the Royal Society and the Royal College of Physicians – emphasizes the triumvirate's social status and echoes Harris' accusation of vulgarity by rooting them in the institutional context of London. He thus draws a link between satire, political and moral responsibility, as if higher social functions had less right to laugh at their peers, since this only reinforces the power they already entertain over them.

At this point, Richard Mead enters into the arena with a satirical pamphlet addressed to John Harris. The genre in which he chose to retaliate – a mock-commedia dell'arte – has political implications, since the commedia was the unofficial form of street theatre used to parody the plays and operas performed in institutional theatres. Mead is therefore aware that the debate is gradually leaving the circle of medical professionals to become a matter of public debate and gossip. Unlike Harris and Woodward, the secularisation of the quarrel amuses

Mead, who cynically sees the world as a theatre in which professional doctors have to play their part. In the dialogue *A Serious Conference Between Scaramouch and Harlequin*, Harlequin answers the objection made on the pertinence of laughter within a serious medical debate:

Alas, alas! 'tis a wicked Age, that is the truth on't, *Scaramouch*, and thy Concern for it, give me pain truly; but be comforted; tho' we do live in Burlesques Times, I can assure you, there is many a serious, sound Argument dress'd up in a facetious manner; and you know very well, *Scarré*, that a great deal of Impertinence may be veil'd under the Appearance of Gravity, and a bold assuming Air. (*Triumvirate* 6)

Mead reasserts the social and philosophical function of Harlequin's buffooneries, like the jokes of the fool, which counterbalance the power of the monarch in some Shakespearian plays, such as *King Lear*. The pamphlet starts on a scene in which Harlequin (Richard Mead) and Scaramouch (John Harris) have a meta-theatrical discussion about whether they should debate publicly. Scaramouch – or *Mouché*, as Harlequin calls him – argues that the debate should be led in a gentlemanly manner: “let us use one another well” (2). Harlequin's cynical response makes him aware of the expectations of public opinion “The Town expects it of us; our Performances are at present the High Taste” (2). The need to dramatize their dispute for their professional interest, while remaining good friends, is also at stake. To Scaramouch's objection that he is in earnest Harlequin replies with the mock diagnosis of “Serio-Pragmatico-Comico-Biliose Nature” (3), using once again literary and medical enumeration to mock the medical taste for controversies as well as the literary categories of the time. The rest of Mead's “conference” is indeed rather serious, and looks more like a catechism than a theatrical parody. This question-and-answer structure is recurrent in several controversies, as it enables the polemist to locate the weak elements in their opponent's reasoning, and convince their reader more easily with a well-targeted answer.⁸ Mead particularly insists on jargon – which he parodies – and on the fact that Woodward's Latin quotes are not understandable, and most probably not understood by Woodward himself.

8. See for example Elizabeth Nihell's *Treatise of Midwifery* (1760), structured around a dozen of “objections” in favour of the development of men-midwives, which she counters very systematically (Lieske).

In the next pamphlet, Woodward's camp relinquish their call for serious discussion, and turn to satire, which seems to be a more efficient strategy in this conflict.⁹ The author of the pamphlet entitled *An account of a Strange and Wonderful Dream, dedicated to Dr Mead* starts by laughing at Mead's research interests, as his most famous treatises deal with poisons, and the influence of the sun and moon on animal bodies.¹⁰ These, the author says, are "astrological performances" that call for the exposition of a strange dream to this learned man. As expected, the dream narrates the story of an incompetent physician named "Mulso" [i.e. Mead], who thinks that purging is the due course of treatment for the smallpox. The narrator finds some of Mulso's notes from his visits in which he mistakes labour-pains for the colic in one patient, and prescribes more and more purges to another lady who finally dies of the smallpox. Among these papers, one letter is of particular interest to the narrator, and to this article:

I herewith send you, my dear Friend, a Book wrote by a *Professor* in our Faculty. I always hated the Author, but, as he reflects upon our Method of Cure, I have now a double Aversion to him. It must be answer'd. I desire you to undertake this Task. And have sent you the following Rules to guide you in managing controversy:

- I. 'Tis not necessary even to mention the subject of the Controversy.
- II. As the Book is unanswerable, nibble at the Style, and cavil with Words.
- III. Write a great deal; the less to the Purpose the better.
- IV. Misrepresent every Thing that may turn to his Advantage.
- V. Lay on a swinging Load of Scandalous Reflections.
- VI. Have no regard to Truth.

I only send you these as Hints. Whatever you write I'll take Care to disperse, tho' I send my Footman to protect the Hawkers. Yours, Mulso. (*An Account of a Strange and Wonderful Dream* 15)

This mock-methodology for controversies implies, on the contrary, that there are proper rules for debate. Such rules had been set out in 1718

9. This pamphlet is attributed to Woodward, but I would rather suggest that it should be attributed to Harris, for two reasons. First, the classified ads of the *Postboy* advertise its publication in May, one month after Mead's attack on Harris. Secondly, the pseudonym "Dr Technicum" should be read as a reference to Harris's major publication, *Lexicon Technicum, or, a Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, first published in 1704.

10. Richard Mead, *A Mechanical Account of Poisons in Several Essays* (1702); *A Discourse Concerning the Action of the Sun and Moon on Animal Bodies; and The Influence Which This May Have in Many Diseases* (1708).

by Ambrose Philips in his periodical *The Freethinker*, as he reacted to the controversial spirit of the age. The journal lays down ten rules of “Pen-Chivalry” which Woodward simply reverts when applying them to Mulso.¹¹

A quick reply to this pamphlet was published in the same month under the same pseudonym, Dr. Technicum. It can only be attributed to the opposite side, as the use of the same pseudonym seems to be a strategy to ridicule Woodward’s attempt at writing a witty pamphlet: “The pamphlet being return’d in our hands by the bookseller, the Dr. grew immediately chagrin and melancholy” (*An Account of the Sickness and Death of Dr. W--dw--rd* 4). This condition degenerates into a serious disease from which Woodward finally dies, Technicum explains, faithful to the humour of repetition now familiar to Woodward’s opponents: “He took a vomit the very day he died” (6). The rest of the pamphlet is a parody of post-mortem examinations, as can be found in *The Spectator*, in which several imaginary dissections are performed on type-characters to examine the physiological reasons for their preposterous behaviour.¹² In a similar anatomico-satirical vein, Technicum unveils the composition of Woodward’s stomach and bowels (full of oil and sack-whey, a mixture of sherry and weak milk Woodward prescribed to invalids), his liver (full of bile) and his brain:

Upon opening the brain there were evident marks of the cruel *Ravages* and *Depredations* of the *Biliose* principles. The *Dura Mater* was fretted, and wholly unstrung. The *Circumvolutions* in the *Cerebrum* all obliterated. And the surface quite plain and even; which Dr Willis has observed to be the case of *some Particular Persons*. The *Vacuities* in this *Venter* were large to an uncommon degree, the *Pineal Gland* was perfectly flaccid, so that it seem’d to have been incapable for some Time of giving proper Directions to the Will. (12)

Once again, the pamphleteer accumulates anatomical terms meant to denote emptiness and flaccidity. Extravagant accumulation of medical

11. For example “Whoever undertakes to write against another, ought to be very cautious how he discovers any Malice, or other Prepossession towards his Opponent; since his Arguments, after such a Discovery, will become as suspected to an equitable Reader, as his Evidence against the same Person would be, in a Court of Justice” (*The Freethinker* no 26 [1718], 122).

12. In Addison’s *Spectator*, imaginary dissections are performed on a woman’s tongue (no 247), on a Beau’s head (no 275) and a coquette’s heart (no 281). I would like to thank Amélie Junqua for these references.

jargon is a recurrent trope in this controversy. But the attack is meant to touch on graver subjects, as the serious reference to Willis' work is sign that the anonymous author is well versed in medical knowledge, and that he is asserting his own authority on Woodward's incapacity for valid medical reasoning.

More derision was to come from Mead's circle, who displaced their comical harassment from the anatomical amphitheatre to the summer theatre, with the performance of a mock-opera entitled *Harlequin-Hydaspé* on May, 27, 1719 at Lincoln's Inn Fields. The plot and songs are based on Francesco Mancini's *Idaspe*, one of the operas that were part of the Italian fashion in London at the time.¹³ Beyond the usual mockery of Woodward's medical incompetence, the play includes raillery at Woodward's reputation for homosexuality, and for his inability to satisfy women. The following scene is reminiscent of *Three Hours after Marriage*, as he becomes a cuckold through believing that Harlequin (disguised as an Italian singer) is castrated:

[Enter Harlequin in a Chair, with a Footman, who carries a large Portmanteau, filled with Musick: He gets out of his Chair, and addresses Himself in Italian to the Doctor.]

Doct.: What! Does the Gentleman speak no *English*?

Scar[amouche]: Not a syllable, Sir; He is a Neapolitan [sic.] just arriv'd.

Doct.: Since 'tis so, I must make use of *Colombine*: She learnt that Language at the Boarding-School ——— Heh! will it be sage to have such an Interpreter?

Scar.: Sir, 'tis the Gentleman's Misfortune to have had a certain accident befall Him in his Youth — His voice is a *conteralto*.

Doct. Oh, 'tis as it should be; I understand you. [To Colombine] Niece, pray be civil to this Gentleman. (13)

The usual quid pro quos follow, leaving Harlequin and Colombine to their amorous duets. The plot alternates with interludes of repetitive

13. *Hydaspe fedele* (3.4.1710 London H) [Idaspe fedele]: this reference was found on the Stanford online archives: <http://opera.stanford.edu/composers/M.html>. The plot can be summarized thus: Idaspé (Harlequin) is disguised as a Moor to get closer to his lover Berenice (Colombine), held captive by the Persian King Artaxerxes (the Doctor, a caricature of Woodward who was played by Christopher Bullock). Idaspé's friend Dario (Scaramouche), prefers to wage a war on Artaxerxes to free his beloved Mandane (Isabella), and dresses up as a General. He is later found to be Artaxerxes's younger brother, and everything ends well in a double wedding. Translated and adapted from <http://operabaroque.fr/BROSCHI_IDASPE.htm>, 14 April, 2013.

medical humour, in which apothecaries come to consult the doctor, demonstrating a desperate case to which he prescribes oils and emetics: “You have not given Oil enough to soften, dilute and entangle her superabundant Bile. Pray, Mr Crocus! empty her, empty her, I say, till she is quite out, or she is a dead Woman” (7). In his study on the rise of Summer theatres in London, William Burling explains how this mock-opera was performed only once, because Christopher Bullock, who was to play the part of the Doctor, was arrested after the first performance (64-65).¹⁴ Although no official account of his arrest can be found, it is clear that the play was abruptly stopped. According to Burling, Christopher Bullock, who was also involved in the management of Lincoln’s Inn Field, might have voluntarily stopped the performances for political reasons, and rumour had it that he had been arrested. Whatever the reasons, *Harlequin-Hydaspes* publicly ridiculed Woodward to such an extent that even Richard Steele, who had kept silent during the whole affair, made a public intervention in *The Antidote, in a Letter to the Free-thinker, Occasion’d by the Management of the Present Dispute Between Dr. Woodward and Certain Other Physicians*. His letter praises Dr Woodward’s practice and cure of the poor, and condemns the witty attempts of his opponents:

For Without drawing upon the Scurrility of an innocent Man’s Name for the abuse of another only to serve a Jest, it is a Pity to the last Degree, and against all Propriety, to make him who is introduced for a Creature, full of Vanity and Self-Conceit, speaking of Himself, as he does, Things that must render him Contemptible. (Steele 10)

The same journal intervened in June 1719 after the performance of Mead’s mock opera, calling for a truce:

This Method of delivering Persons over to the Theatre, when we happen to differ from them in our Sentiments, or to take a Dislike to their Conduct, is erecting the Play-House into an Inquisition: And, as no Man is entirely free from Enemies, none can be secure from this unmanly Kind of Revenge. It is Introducing of Cruelty into our Diversions in as barbarous a Manner, as was practiced by the *Heathens*, when they exposed Men in their *Amphitheatres*, to fight with Wild Beasts, for the Entertainment of the Vulgar. (*The Freethinker* 126, 347)

14. Burling claims that the play had been lost, but research tools have improved since 2000, and it is now available through Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

The political consequences of satirical plays and their impact on reputation and public life are often invoked in responses to satire. The *Freethinker's* political argument goes one step further, comparing satire with the darkest institutions of absolute power, the Catholic Inquisition and the fighting games of the Roman Empire. This corroborates Woodward's Whig vision of satire (Philips's political ideas were notoriously Whig) as a practice that prevents people from expressing their ideas and opinions, reinforcing the authority of those in power. The dangers of laughter were not merely personal, they were political: being laughed at publicly was a mode of humiliation that could restrain the collective debate of ideas, by enforcing a culture of fear on dissident opinions within a same institutional body.

The next step in the dispute is indeed an illustration of the immediate dangers of unregulated quarrelling, and their potential life-threatening consequences. It belongs to a tragic-comical register, as the event related is fraught with peril, but its anecdotic rendering involves witty repartee. On June, 13, 1719, *The Mist's Journal* published the following account in its news items:

Last week Dr Mead and Dr Woodward, both belonging to Gresham College, in walking down Bishopsgate-street quarrelled and caned one another; and when they came into the Square of the College, they drew and fought; the latter was wounded in several Places, and making another Pass, Dr Woodward fell down backwards, and the other gave him his Life. (3)

Gresham College was a public space for scientific exchange – the Royal Society held their meeting there until 1710 – in which Mead and Woodward were bound to meet, considering how integrated the two physicians were to the higher London medical circles. As duelling was prosecuted and even punishable by death, such acting out of their personal hatred is worth remarking in the present context of controversy studies to understand the powerful impact of pamphlet wars on the social networks of the time. There is a coherence to be found in Mead's satirical attacks, where laughter is used as a weapon to attack one's enemies, and his art of sword-fighting, where the weapon is now material and life-threatening. The gradation described in the journal, from quarrel to duel, remains neutral, and implies that Woodward's life was spared thanks to Mead's generosity.

This version of the story became the subject of another controversy, as it was confronted one week later with Woodward's own

account of the duel, which differs slightly from the version given in *The Mist's Journal*. One learns from this account that Mead had started it, and that Woodward made several passes until he fell ("my right foot was stopp'd by some Accident, so that I fell down flat on my breast"). He then gives a detailed account of Mead taking advantage of his sudden fall, neglecting once more the rules of honour:

In an Instant I felt Dr Mead, with his whole Weight upon me. 'Twas easy for him to wrest my Sword of my Hand, as he did; and after that, gave me very abusive Language, and bid me ask my Life. I told him, I scorn'd to ask it of One who, through this whole Affair, had acted so like a Coward and a Scoundrel; and at the same Time, endeavour'd to lay hold of his Sword, but could not reach it. He again bid me ask my Life. I reply'd as before, I scorned to do that; adding Terms of Reproach suitable to his Behaviour. By this Time some Persons coming in, interpos'd and parted us: As I was getting up, I heard Dr. Mead, amidst a Crowd of People, now got together, exclaiming loudly against me for refusing to ask my Life. I told him, in answer, he had shewn himself a Coward, and 'twas owing wholly to Chance, and not to any Act of his, that I happen'd to be in his Power. I added, that had he been to have given me any of his Physick, I would, rather than take it, have ask'd my Life of him; but for his Sword, I was very harmless; and I was ever far from being in the least least Apprehension of it. (*The Weekly Journal or British Gazeteer*, June 20, 1719, 1382)¹⁵

Woodward's "authentic" version of the duel, and his need to have it published are a sign of the importance of storytelling in this situation, where competing versions of the physical fight continue the violent confrontation of the two opponents. For historians, however, such an event materializes the personal conflict between the two physicians, showing that early modern scientific controversies could deteriorate into physical conflict. Woodward's narrative, as it ends on a witty sally, survived more objective accounts of the duel, and remained a famous anecdote often retold in historical books on Gresham College, the City of London or in Levine's *Dr Woodward's Shield*.¹⁶

The duel resolved nothing. Pamphlets continued to be published on the theme of purging and vomiting as a potential cure for the smallpox – this is deliberately presented here as a theme, for the

15. The letter is dated and signed "Gresham College, June 13. 1719. J. Woodward."

16. See for example Austin Dobson and *The Medico-chirurgical Review and Journal of Practical Medicine* (October 1839), 328.

pamphlets did not seek to determine whether one was better than the other, but elaborated on several literary genres around the question of purging and vomiting. *The Life and Adventures of Don Bilioso De L'Estomac* is a quixotic improvisation by Richard Mead to ridicule the works of Woodward even further. Each chapter title is depicted in a picaresque context, in which characters named in a mock-quixotic fashion are involved in debasing activities: "The pleasantest Chapter in the whole Book: How *Donna Diarrhoea* put the Giant *Variolas* into such a Fright, that he be-sh-t himself: How *Don Bilioso* persuaded him not to wipe his Br—ch, lest part of the excluded Excrement might be repelled into the *Anus*, *Periculosae opus plenum oleae* p. 131 *ad* 138" (Mead, *Don Bilioso* 17). The page references at the end of each title refer to specific passages in Woodward's *State of Physick*, turned into ridicule by this succession of grotesque scatological tableaux, which Mead was clever enough not to develop. This passage refers to Woodward's reluctance to purge his smallpox patients, as he fears that purging medicines would accelerate the passage of "vicious matter" into the blood:

Nor, when this Affair shall be rightly considered, and the Mechanism of the Body set in a proper Light, can any One be reasonably surprised at so terrible a Result of the Diarrhoea. 'Tis true, both by that, and by Purgeing, much of the vitious Matter, that is the very Cause of the Disease, may be thrown out of the Body. But, whoever shall attempt the Thing in that Way, I will take the Liberty to tell Him:

Periculosae plenum Opus Aleae
Tractas, & incedis per Ignes
Suppositos Cineri doloso (Hor. Ode I. L. 2)¹⁷

'tis like rouseing a sleeping Lyon: and that Matter, being thinned, incited, and poured out of the Stomach into the Guts at once, passing the whole length of them, and presenting itself to the Orifices of all the Lacteals, a Quantity of it, as much greater than before as the Charge on the Guts is now greater, must enter the Lacteals, and pass into the Blood. (137)

Woodward's Latin quote peevishly recycled by Mead does not come from ancient medical treatises, which, as a modern, he keeps at bay, but from Horace. As he refers to the Latin poet known for his lyrical

17. "A task that is filled with dangerous pitfalls, / so that you're walking over embers / hidden under the treacherous ashes" (translated A. S. Kline, 8.04.2010. <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Horacehome.htm>>)

works, Woodward establishes the tone of his own work, both educated and well-meaning. Mead's scathing satirical response – much like Juvenal's, which is a reference for Andrew Tripe as shown above – is even more violent as it works on visual tableaux in twenty-nine chapter titles that evoke outrageous and farcical situations exploiting all the scatological possibilities of Woodward's work. *The Adventures of Don Bilioso* ends on the inevitable depiction of the other physician as quack:

How *Don Bilioso* turn'd Mountebank; how he tumbled, cut Capers, and walk'd the Slack Rope; but being not perfectly Master of his Trade, his Foot slipt, and he unfortunately broke his Neck, to the Admiration of all Spectators. (23)

Mead's accusation, however, goes beyond calling Woodward a quack for his ignorance and lack of medical skills. He laughs at Woodward's account of the duel in *The British Gazetteer*. Like Harlequin's replies to Scaramouch in Mead's earlier pamphlet, this title takes into account the public display given by the controversy, in which he both plays the part of the opponent and that of the playwright in control of the action.

The witty repartees of both camps calmed down for a while, and laughter seemed to leave the discussion. Two months later, John Quincy, a Newtonian apothecary friend of Mead and Freind, decided to answer Woodward and Harris' call for a "serious" response. He published *An Examination of Dr. Woodward's State of Physick* which starts a brief overview of the "dispute," "quarrel," or "controversy," as he alternately calls it:

It has been taken notice of in many Places, how difficult it is to answer the Doctor with *Seriousness* and here it may not be amiss, once for all, to observe that his Language and Sentiments are equally peculiar; insomuch as it is as hard a matter to understand him, as it is to convince wherein he is mistaken. (10)

The rest of the book is a detailed discussion and criticism of Woodward's use of medical and scientific concepts such as hypothesis, bile or cogitation. Quincy's method is systematic: he quotes *The State of Physick*, questions and compares Woodward's argument with other medical authors, to finally reject his medical notions. The tone of the pamphlet can get angry, but remains that of a serious scientist engaged in a professional discussion. After Quincy, a few pamphlets were reprinted but the main tide of the controversy was over, and satirical creativity subsided.

Mead's anger, however, did not subside, even two decades after Woodward's death, when his career was well-established and the Woodward affair almost forgotten. In fact, he revived the quarrel in a later publication on the Small-Pox, *A Discourse of the Small-pox and Measles*, published in 1747. Between 1719, the year of the controversy, and 1747, Mead's understanding of the smallpox had dramatically changed, as he joined Sir Hans Sloane to perform the early trials of inoculation on British prisoners in 1721. Purging and vomiting was no longer the heart of the debate about the smallpox since the controversy on inoculation was just about to start, and Mead had picked his side very early on. In spite of this evolution, Mead's bitterness remained untouched. He vented his spleen on his late rival in the preface to his later treatise (prefaces are perfect places for quarrels to catch fire). He drew a satirical portrait of his late opponent as a self-invented natural philosopher and ignorant antiquarian (unlike Mead himself, whose collection was second to that of Hans Sloane):

The ring-leader of these gentry was one *Woodward*, professor of physick at Gresham-College: who, having served an apprenticeship to a linen-draper, after that, scraped together a parcel of cockle-shells, pebbles, minerals, and the lord knows what trumpery of the like fossile tribe, and so took it into his head, forsooth, to set up for a philosopher: and having worked himself into a certain physician's family, turned out, an't please you, through the preposterous grammar of his friends, a consummate graduate doctor, a pragmatical coxcomb, and a creature who could not bear, that any one besides himself should run away with the least scrap of commendation. This fellow, then, in a pamphlet *Concerning the State of Physick*, which he had scribbled in his mother-dialect, raved like a madman at Dr. *Freind*, and those who sided with him, and directed the abundance of his spleen against me in an especial liberal manner: bidding strong defiance, not from his being armed with reason and experience, which he was an utter stranger to, but by discharging whole vollies of ribaldry, and downright billingsgate. (Mead, *A Discourse of the Small-pox* vii-viii)

Even twenty years later, Mead was to remember Woodward's own words ("billingsgate")¹⁸ and even allude to their physical confrontation ("vollies of ribaldry"). The tone has now become cynical and mean, and

18. See above the quote from Woodward's *The Two Sosias*: "were Newgate intituled to the Morals that appear throu' your Letter, Bedlam to the Reasoning, and Billingsgate to the Language, neither of those three Academies would receive any great Accession of Praise from your Performance."

the quality of satirical laughter has changed into the cringe-making sarcasm of accumulated resentment. This controversy might well be one of the reasons why Hobbes, who wrote at a time when pamphlet wars were numerous, was so suspicious of laughter: “The passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly” (11.13).¹⁹ Mead’s sudden glory here is retrospective, as he looks back on the controversy, but the sarcasm is astonishing, as is the energy invested to destroy somebody who is already dead.

Such a late attack could have revived the whole quarrel entirely, had not Mead outlived most of the participants. It did not go unnoticed, and an anonymous satirical pamphlet was published in 1748 under the title *Dr. Woodward’s Ghost. Occasion’d by a Passage in Dr. Mead’s Preface to His Treatise of the Small-pox and Measles [...] By Dr. Andrew Tripe*. As the pseudonym is William Wagstaffe’s, this pamphlet is attributed to the Doctor in *The English Short Title Catalogue*. But Wagstaffe had been dead for more than two decades. The pseudonym, however, coming from Mead’s group, and the excessive solemnity of the pamphlet’s tone, together with the poetic form, might be a sign that it should not be taken literally. It starts with a call for universal justice: “Abusing the immortal dead was ever looked upon as execrable by all nations not absolutely uncultivated and barbarian; and considered as the highest Pitch of Immorality that could possibly be arrived at” (*Dr. Woodward’s Ghost* i). But he goes on quoting Mead’s preface in Latin at length, and translating it for the reader, giving thus a wider audience to Mead’s attack. His final statement confirms my ironical reading of the text: “For, in reality, I am rather Merry, than angry” (ii). Woodward is the first-person narrator of the satirical poem that follows. Coming back from the dead, he asks for revenge and repeats the indignation already expressed in the preface: “Where is, I say, the mighty Fame/in blackening my oblivion’d name?” (4). The poem parodies ghost and apparition stories, keeping a self-proclaimed solemnity of tone (“I appeal to the subsequent solemn scene” 4), in contrast with Mead’s sarcasm. Laughing about dead people usually raises the question the pleasure of forbidden laughter as it infringes upon sacred space (the recent satire on Margaret Thatcher’s death is a good example of this).

19. See Ewin.

The grotesque vision of a pseudo-gothic tableau evoked halfway through the poem seems a fitting conclusion. It depicts a revengeful spectre with excessive gravity and takes a prophetic tone to announce his revenge, ending on the phrase that triggered this article:²⁰

A Specter, fiercer than my Ghost,
 Shall the despotic Don accost;
 Shall raise a Tumult in his Breast,
 A Parson ev'n sha'n't lay to Rest,
 Be thou, Book-vending B—dl—y,²¹ there:
 And mark the Agonies of Fear.
 Confest to fairest view the Sprite
 Shall all appear in black and white:
 Exhibiting a dismal Scroll,
 That won't on laughing Matters roll. (5)

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20. The author would like to thank H       Dachez for her valuable input.

21. Mead's book is "printed for John Brindley, Bookseller and Stationer to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, in New Bond Street." The publisher's name is quoted in the poem, which is quite rare in the context of early modern controversies. This is a sign of crossing of boundaries that, according to the pamphleteer, should have been privately censored.

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