

THE PISSE-PROPHET or, Certain PISSE-POT LECTURES Thomas Brian, 1637

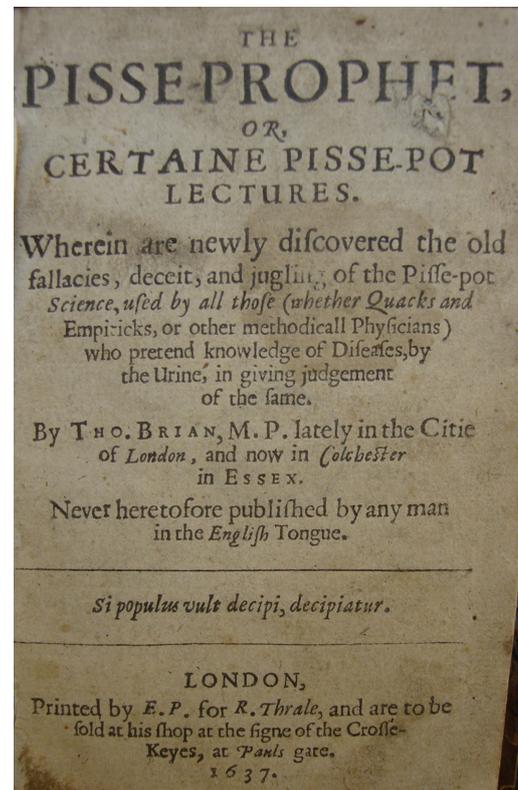
This short satirical text by the physician Thomas Brian exposes the fraudulent use of uroscopy (diagnosing illness by examining the patient's urine) by some physicians. Brian describes them as either trying to use urine as their sole means of diagnosis, or pretending to be able to do so for prestige, deceiving their customers with what are essentially conjuring tricks.

In the preface, he states that he wrote this exposé to atone for his own past behaviour in deceiving patients in the same way.

Urine had played an important part in medical diagnosis since ancient times and this practice became increasingly sophisticated during the Middle Ages. By the seventeenth century, when *The Pisse-Prophet* was published, many physicians were diagnosing from urine alone. The publication of popular books about medicine, which included urine colour-charts, had led many people to self-diagnose, without needing to consult a doctor and avoiding having to pay for their services at all.

While Brian does not altogether discount the importance of urine, he states that a diagnosis can never be made from urine alone. He paints a picture of physicians' assistants running round London, ferrying jugs of urine between doctors and patients without the two ever meeting. His frustration with the absurd demands of his patients is obvious, and conveys a real sense of what the life of a real physician could be like at the time.

You can download [the full text](#) of the copy held at the Bodleian Libraries from the ProQuest website.



Bodleian Libraries, Antiq f.E. 1637.7

Questions

1. Brian criticises the behaviours of 'quacks and empiricks'. **Which phrases does he use to describe their behaviour?**
2. **Why does Brian think that relying on uroscopy alone is problematic?**
3. **What does this text tell us about the practice of medicine in the 1600s?**
4. **What do you think Brian hoped to achieve by writing this book?**
5. Uroscopy plays a role in modern medicine. **Which diseases can be diagnosed through analysis of a urine sample?**

FURTHER READING

Learn more about quack medicine in this [article from History Today](#).