

Location Matters for Bodies, Diseases, and Medicines: Paracelsus, “The Fourth Defence” (c. 1538)

Abstract

The Swiss physician Paracelsus (born Theophrastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541) upheld and promoted existing ideas about localism in the humoral makeup of individual bodies. At the same time, however, he also radically shifted ideas about disease *away* from traditional humoral theory. By the late sixteenth century, his ideas had gained traction in the medical community. Given his professional stature, Paracelsus’ attention to local environments and their role in shaping bodies is significant. It is also worth noting that Paracelsus was one of the first physicians to compose and publish his medical treatises in German, rather than the standard Latin of learned discourse.

Source

The Fourth Defence Concerning my Journeyings

[...]

A physician should first of all be an *Astronomus*. Now necessity demands that his eyes should give him evidence, in order that he may be such: without this evidence he is only an astronomical gossip. It demands too that he should be a *Cosmographus*: not to describe how the countries wear their trousers, but to attack more bravely what diseases they have. Although it be thine intention and desire to be able to make the costumes of this land from what thou hast learned here, and thou excusest thyself thus from gaining knowledge of strange lands, what concern is it of the physician’s that thou art a tailor? Wherefore, as the things now mentioned must be experienced, they belong to us *Parabolanis*^[1] and are bound up with medicine and not to lie serrated from it. Thus it is also necessary that the physician should be a *Philosophus* and that his eyes inform him in order that he may be such: if he desires to be one, he must gather together from all quarters what is there. For if a man but desire to eat a roast, the meat comes from one land, the salt from another land, the food from another land. If these things have to travel till they reach thee, thou too must travel till thou attainest what cannot come to thee. For the arts have no feet for the butchers to drive them after thee; neither can they be put into vats, nor can they be nailed up in a barrel. Now as they have this infirmity, thou must do what they should do. English *Humores* are not Hungarian, nor the Neapolitan Prussian, wherefore must thou go where they are; and the more thou seekest them out and the more thou learnest of them, the greater is thine understanding in thy native land. Thus it is also necessary that the physician be an alchemist: if now he desire to be one, he must see the mother from whom grow the *Mineralia*. Now the mountains go not after him, rather must he go after them. Now where the *Mineralia* lie, there are the artists: if a man wish to seek out artists in the analysis and preparation of nature, he must seek them in the place where the *Mineralia* are. How then can a man find out the preparation of nature if he does not seek it out where it is? Should I then be blamed because I have wandered among my *Mineralia* and learned the temper and heart, and grasped in my hands the art of those who teach me to separate the pure from the dross, by which I anticipated much evil? Nonetheless I must also repeat the philosophic saying, that wisdom is despised only by the ignorant; thus, too, art by those who do not profess it.

[...]

NOTES

[1] “Parabolani” originally meant reckless fellows. At the time of Paracelsus, the term was applied to those who, regardless of their own danger, went out to tend the sick, particularly in times of pestilence. Cf. Du Cange. *Clotfarium mfdiafft infimaf Latmilatif*. . . VI. Niort. 1886, p. 155.

Source of English translation: Paracelsus, “The Fourth Defence,” from “The Reply to Certain Calumniations of His Enemies (Seven Defensiones),” translated by C. Lillian Temkin, in *Four Treatises of Theophrastus von Hohenheim called Paracelsus*, edited by Henry E. Sigerest. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1941, pp. 26–28. © 1941 The Johns Hopkins Press. Reprinted with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

Source of original German text: Paracelsus, “Die Vierdte Defension,” from “Die Verantwortung über etliche Unglimpfungen seiner Mißgönner,” in Paracelsus, *Ander Theil || Der Bücher vnd Schrifften/ des || Edlen/ Hochgelehrten || vnd Bewehrten PHILOSOPHI || vnd MEDICI || PHILIPPI THEO-||PHRASTI Bombast von [...]*. Basel: Waldkirch, 1589, pp. 136–37. Available online at:

<https://digitale.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vd16/content/titleinfo/993607>; also reprinted in *Bücher und Schrifften von Theophrastus Paracelsus*, vol. I, part II, edited by Johannes Huser. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971, pp. 175–76.

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