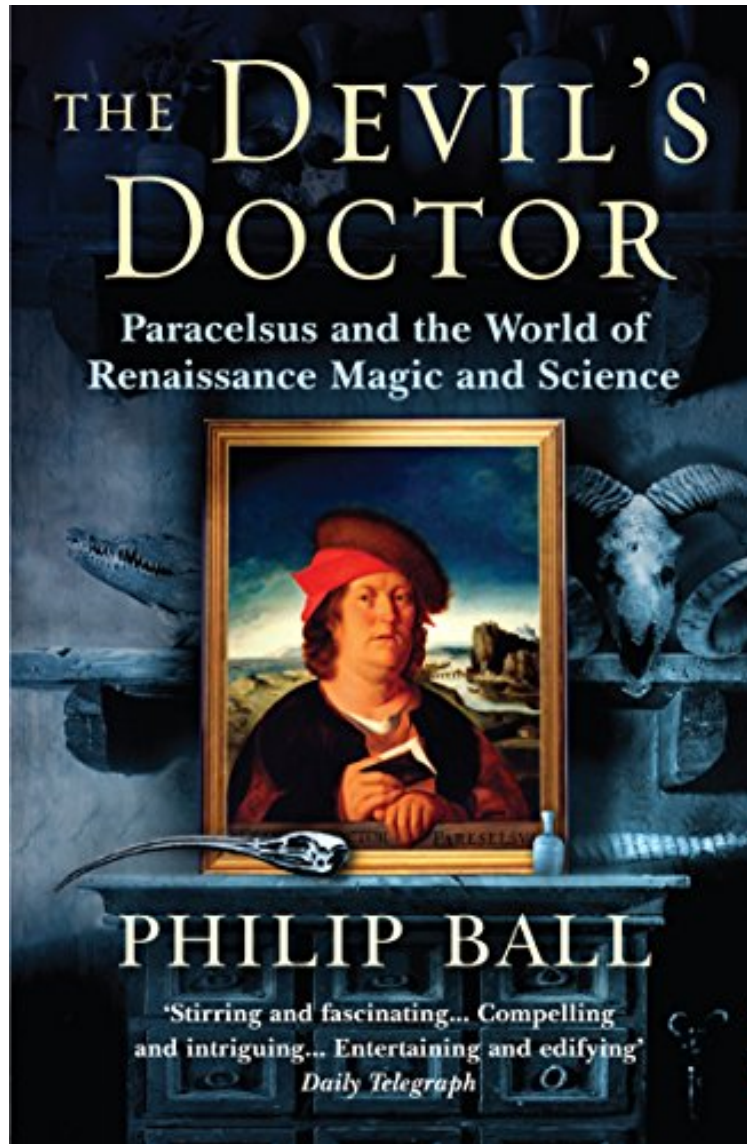


The Devil's Doctor: Paracelsus and the World of Renaissance Magic and Science

Von Philip Ball

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Von Philip Ball : The Devil's Doctor: Paracelsus and the World of Renaissance Magic and Science before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Devil's Doctor: Paracelsus and the World of Renaissance Magic and Science:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen2 von 2 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Pirouetting physicianVon Stephen A. HainesIf any age in human history can be called pivotal it must be the 16th

Century C.E. Nearly every major social norm, from national law through religion endured significant upheavals. It was the time of Martin Luther, Erasmus, Copernicus, Thomas More, Calvin and a host of others. A nearly forgotten element was that of medicine. For centuries, the hold of Galen, through the Church, had dominated medical thought and procedures. Not until this pivotal time did a figure emerge that seriously challenged this monopoly. Philip Ball has produced a lively and informative biography of Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim the man we know as Paracelsus. We don't call doctors unless we're ill or need a golfing partner. In the Renaissance, it was a risky venture to place yourself in a medic's hands. Doctors worked from scholastic dogmas, rarely investigating symptoms except to fit them to rules laid down centuries before. Many diagnoses were done through the visual inspection of a urine sample. A prescription was then derived from what Galen or other Roman Empire authorities recommended. Paracelsus castigated this hands-off approach to medicine. In fact, he did so with such vehemence that the term bombastic is said to derive from his name. For him, the body was the best healer. Conditions should be established that would allow Nature to work its own cures. Establishment doctors rejected this approach almost universally, causing Paracelsus to lead a peripatetic life. Moving from town to town, he would lecture against normal medical practice, even while performing cures of his own. This wasn't faith healing: since Paracelsus was a keen student of herbs and natural medicines. This all sounds revolutionary and far-sighted even for Renaissance Europe. Ball shows that simple assessments of Paracelsus, or even changing medical outlooks, have no place in dealing with this radical healer. Although he rejected long-held dogmas, Paracelsus also held fast to even less credible ideas. He was a dabbler in magic and a leading student of alchemy. Alchemy had many aspects, and some modern scholars credit it with laying the groundwork for modern chemistry. Ball doesn't go quite that far, noting that the quest for gold from other metals dominated the alchemists' programme. Theophrastus spelled out many of his ideas in a series of works, nearly all of which were published after his death. Ball confronted an immense task in dealing with the works of this complex figure. He handles it well, and is fully conscious of his subject's shortcomings. Some of the writings are self-contradictory, while others spend more ink on castigating his enemies, that Paracelsus left many readers scratching their heads to make sense of it. In dealing with alchemy, for example, the militant medic launched into the realm of cosmology, trying to tie together mundane aspects of doctoring with astrological themes. It's a bad fit in any circumstance, but it shows clearly why Paracelsus is an important transition figure. The many and varied elements of Paracelsus' life and work make it difficult, if not impossible to assess him. Certainly, as Ball demonstrates, he had both enemies and supporters enough in his own time and later. Where some praise him as the liberator of medicine from the thrall of classical dogmas, others dismiss him as misguided or a charlatan. Yet, as Ball makes clear, this radical reforming did provide a foundation for modern medicine. Although hardly gifted with foresight, Theophrastus von Hohenheim disrupted the locked view of doctoring that would ultimately overturn fixed thinking. Nature, in whatever way proved best, was now consulted to aid doctors in treating the sick. That legacy alone should grant him respectful immortality. Ball has given us a work ably explaining what science and scientists have endured to advance our thinking beyond simple formulas. [stephen a. haines Ottawa, Canada]

Kurzbeschreibung Philip Theophrastus Aureolus Bombastus von Hohenheim - known to later ages as Paracelsus - stands on the borderline between medieval and modern; a name that is familiar but a man who has been hard to perceive or understand. Contemporary of Luther, enemy of established medicine, scourge of the universities ('at all the German schools you cannot learn as much as at the Frankfurt Fair'), army surgeon and alchemist, myths about him - from his treating diseases from beyond the grave in mid-nineteenth century Salzburg to his Faustian bargain with the devil to regain his youth - have been far more lasting than his actual story. Even during his lifetime, he was rumoured to travel with a magical white horse and to store the elixir of life in the pommel of his sword. But who was Paracelsus and what did he really believe and practice? Although Paracelsus has been seen as both a charlatan and as a founder of modern science, Philip Ball's book reveals a more richly complex man - who used his eyes and ears to learn from nature how to heal, and who wrote influential books on medicine, surgery, alchemy and theology while living a drunken, combative, vagabond life. Above all, Ball reveals a man who was a product of his time - an age of great change in which the church was divided and the classics were rediscovered - and whose bringing together of the seemingly diverse disciplines of alchemy and biology signalled the beginning of the age of rationalism. From Booklist To his successful popular-science titles, Ball adds this biography of an outlandish Renaissance figure. Paracelsus (1493-1541) trained in medicine but ridiculed the profession's medieval scholasticism. Incurably impolitic, he sought to reform medicine with all manner of alchemical means and metatheories that seem strange by modern lights, impudent by those of a civilization in transition from magical to rational thought, and heroic to future Romantic poets. Here is the picture of one man against the world, and Ball makes the most of his sprawling, spendthrift, undisciplined life. A lifelong itinerant, Paracelsus ranged the expanse of Europe, offending, befriending, and moving on. Ball handles the travelogue as a book in itself, parallel to his summaries of Paracelsus' writings on health, alchemy, astrology, and himself. An enlivening portrait that will spark interest in Paracelsus' role in the rise of

science. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Pressestimmen "Praise for The Devil's Doctor Brilliant... This prodigiously learned volume can only reinforce Ball's reputation as one of our most versatile and gripping science writers. John Carey" (Sunday Times) "Stirring and fascinating reading... This is a remarkable piece of work, entertaining and edifying in a way in which so few biographies are. Niall Griffiths" (Telegraph) "This biography is a study of a culture as well as of a man, and in analysing the life and thought of Paracelsus, Ball brings to light a largely forgotten phase of human understanding. It is a considerable achievement.' Peter Ackroyd" (The Times) "[A] wonderfully rich biography... Inspiring and important.'" (Guardian) "Praise for Critical Mass: 'This is a wide-ranging and dazzlingly informed book. I can promise you'll be amazed.' Bill Bryson" (Daily Express)