

A Meditation upon a Broomstick

Textual Introduction

The occasion and the date of composition of *A Meditation upon a Broomstick* were revealed piecemeal over the years following its appearance in print in 1710. Before this, it would seem to have passed about in manuscript copies.¹

Swift's intimate association with the family of Charles Berkeley, Lord Justice of Ireland, which lasted a decade and ended with the Earl's death in 1710, may have commenced at Moor Park.² Thereafter, he was for two years their "Domestick Chaplain," as Swift styled himself, in the viceregal court of Ireland, and after the Earl had died in September 1710, he was asked to compose the Latin inscription to his former patron for the mural tablet in the family chapel of Berkeley parish church, Gloucestershire.³ The second Earl's father, George Berkeley (1626/7–98), exactly a contemporary of Sir William Temple, had published (as "a Person of Honour" using the pseudonym *Constans*) a successful devotional manual, which he entitled *Historical Applications and Occasional Meditations upon Several Subjects*, and which by 1698 had gone into a fourth edition.⁴ Swift's *Meditation* was written in the family circle, but the amusing circumstance of its composition was not published until fifty years later, as a reminiscence of the second Earl's daughter, Lady Elizabeth Berkeley, with whom Swift resumed a lively correspondence in the 1730s.⁵ Her account, embroidered and elaborated by Thomas Sheridan in 1785, made the Countess, her mother, the innocent victim⁶; but an earlier account possibly by Swift himself⁷ and virtually forgotten, names Lady Betty herself. It is recorded in

¹ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 212n1.

² *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 134-35.

³ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 252n, 334 and n1. For the inscription, see *Correspondence*, ed. Ball, I, 389.

⁴ London: by J. Flesher for R. Royston, 1667, see also *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 253n4. Interestingly, George Berkeley's manual was inspired by Robert Boyle's sister, Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (1624-78), herself a distinctive writer of meditations (see Marie-Louise Coolahan, "Redeeming Parcels of Time: Aesthetics and Practice of Occasional Meditation," *The Seventeenth Century*, 22 [2007], 124-43 [p. 131 and n45]). Like Boyle, Berkeley was a member of the Royal Society (Michael Hunter, *The Royal Society and its Fellows, 1660-1700: The Morphology of an Early Scientific Institution*, 2nd ed. [Chalfont St Giles: British Society for the History of Science, 1994], pp. 134, 180 [nos 2, 244]).

⁵ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 325n, and *passim*.

⁶ See Thomas Sheridan, *The Life of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Swift* (Dublin: Luke White, 1785), pp. 37-38.

⁷ Barry Slepian, "Some Forgotten Anecdotes about Swift," *Bulletin of The New York Public Library*, 68 (1964), 33-44 (pp. 35-36).

George Faulkner's "Some Further Account of Doctor Swift, in a Letter to the Earl of C[hesterfield]," added to the eleventh volume of Swift's *Works* in 1762:

WHEN Lord *Berkely*, one of the Lords Justices of *Ireland*, was in that Kingdom, to whom Dr. *Swift* was Chaplain, Lady *Betty Berkely* his Daughter, was very fond of reading the great Mr. *Boyle's* Meditations, and frequently desired Mr. *Swift* to read to her; but, being one Time interrupted by Company, he stopped, and my Lady desired him to fold down the Leaf where he left off: Next Day her Ladyship requested him to read to her again, when he began with the Meditation on a Broomstick, which pleased her so extremely well, that she ran in the highest Raptures on Mr. *Boyle*, who could write so religiously on a Broomstick. But, Lady *Betty* opening the Book sometime after, found the Meditation on the Broomstick, in Mr. *Swift's* Hand Writing, and stuck in at the Place where he had been reading. This had the desired Effect, as Mr. *Swift* never was called upon again to read to her Ladyship.⁸

Swift himself would reveal only in print that his *Meditation* was "According to the Style and Manner of the Honourable *Robert Boyle's* Meditations."⁹ This note referred to Boyle's *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects*, first published in 1665, some sixteen or seventeen years after their composition,¹⁰ a work which invited parody from the start by the not infrequent oddity of its "occasions."¹¹

There has been some confusion, not to say obfuscation, as to the *Meditation's* exact date of composition. In 1711, Swift seems to have erred in assigning the piece to "August, 1704," when he was in Ireland. The date was suppressed altogether from the 1727 *Miscellanies*, and in 1735, another attempt yielded "Written in the YEAR 1703," meaning perhaps the winter of 1703/4 when Swift was in England from November to the end of May. He is known to have been at Berkeley Castle in August 1702, the date now favoured *faute de mieux*.¹² But Swift's account book for 1703/4 contains information that he also saw the Berkeleys at their Middlesex seat of Cranford, near Hounslow, between 1 and 22 May 1704.¹³ This evidence has the merit of resolving and reconciling

⁸ *Volume XI. of the Author's Works: Containing, The Tale of a Tub, To which is added, The Life of the Reverend Dr. Jonathan Swift* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1762), 311-331 (pp. 314-15) (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 53).

⁹ *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (London: John Morphew, 1711), p. 231.

¹⁰ See the "Introductory Notes" to *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis, 14 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2000), V, xi-xv; John F. Fulton, *A Bibliography of the Honourable Robert Boyle, Fellow of the Royal Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 48-50.

¹¹ Samuel Butler, for example, ridiculed Boyle in "An Occasional Reflection on Dr. Charlton's Feeling a Dog's Pulse at Gresham-College. By R. B. Esq." (*Satires and Miscellaneous Poetry and Prose*, ed. René Lamar [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928], pp. 341-43; see Maurice Johnson, "A Note on Swift's *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*," *The Library Chronicle*, 37 [1972], 136-42 [p. 142n5]).

¹² *Prose Works*, I, xxxiv and XIV, 242; *Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 74 and 76. See also *Daybook*, s.v. "August 1702."

¹³ THOMPSON AND THOMPSON, p. 41: "Spent G. at Cranfd, Lodg. &c."

both attempts by the author to settle the date. One is tempted to link the impetus and the imagery of the *Meditation* with the farcical appearance of “*Broom-stick*” in Section II of *A Tale of a Tub*, published on 10 May 1704, at this very time.¹⁴ When Faulkner’s four volumes of 1735 were reprinted in 1738, and the contents of Volumes I and II appeared in a revised order, *A Meditation upon a Broomstick* was advanced from thirteenth to second place in Volume I, quietly suggesting an earlier date.

In October 1708, Swift included the piece in his list of “Subjects for a Volume,”¹⁵ and as early as 2 November, his friend Anthony Henley had requested a copy.¹⁶ There is in 1708, too, a reference to the convivial Dublin circle including William Lloyd, Bishop of Killala, from whom the text purportedly found its way to the London bookseller who first put it in print.¹⁷ A manuscript annotation by the youthful Edmund Curll¹⁸ on his own copy of the first edition, which is in the British Library today, records the provenance: “Given me by John Cliffe Esq, who had them of the Bp. of Kilalla, in Ireland, whose Daughter he married & was my Lodger. — E Curll.”¹⁹ If indeed Swift was displeased with the publication of his *Meditation* in London on 6 February 1710, when he was in Ireland, he tacitly approved this text down to its accidentals within a few months by adopting it with only one correction and five substantive revisions, as he was preparing his authorized *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* of 1711.²⁰

One surviving transcript, in an unidentified hand and entitled “Meditations on a Broom-Stick in imitation of ye Hon’ble H—y B—le Esqr.,” bears the date 1709, a year before Curll’s first printed edition of 1710. However, this date was probably added later by Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford. Although the

¹⁴ See the Textual Introduction to *A Tale of a Tub* (p. G); see also PONS, pp. 325-26.

¹⁵ Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, p. 768. See also the introductory note to *Various Thoughts, Moral and Diverting* (p. G).

¹⁶ “Tho you won’t send mee y^r Broomstick Ile send you as good a Reflection upon Death as Even Adrians himself” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 211 and n1).

¹⁷ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 191 and n2.

¹⁸ Curll was then 27 (see Edward L. Ruhe, “Edmund Curll and his Early Associates,” *English Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John H. Middendorf [New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971], pp. 69-89 [72n3 and 84]; and Paul Baines and Pat Rogers, *Edmund Curll: Bookseller* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 10).

¹⁹ See the facsimile in *Prose Works*, I, 237. If this information is correct, “John Cliffe Esq” was the son-in-law of the Bishop of Killala, and in that case Swift may have been involved with Curll’s 1710 edition, or at least Curll thought him to be involved (Stephen Karian, “Edmund Curll and the Circulation of Swift’s Writings,” *Reading Swift* [2008], pp. 99-129 [119-20]). “Them” includes a reference to *The History of Vanbrugh’s House* published along with *A Meditation* in Curll’s 1710 Pamphlet (pp. 27-29). See also Baines and Rogers, *Edmund Curll: Bookseller*, p. 46 and nn11, 12.

²⁰ See *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 391n3.

text of the transcript has readings at once from the authorized 1711 version and from Curll's second edition of 1710, it also contains errors and variants which seem to prove that it does not derive from them.²¹

A *Meditation* apparently remained long in manuscript and was finally printed, in 1710, in an unauthorized edition, *A Meditation upon a Broom-Stick and Somewhat Beside* (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 1A), advertised in *The Daily Courant* of 6 April 1710. This small collection reprinted three poems by Swift (*Baucis and Philemon*, *The Humble Petition of Frances Harris*, *To Mrs. Biddy Floyd*)²² and added, together with a new fourth, *The History of Vanbrugh's House*, the *Meditation*; it was priced sixpence. A reprint, priced two pence, in the same year has minor changes of capitals and punctuation in the text of the *Meditation*, which are doubtless due to the compositor. When Swift added the *Meditation* to the 1711 *Miscellanies*, he appears to have used this pirated text, but made a handful of substantive revisions and added the date of composition (later changed). This subsequently became the canonical text; it was reprinted in 1713, with many changes in accidentals originating in the printing house, as well as in Volume II of the 1727 *Miscellanies*²³ and both Volumes I of Faulkner's 1735 and 1738 editions of the *Works*.

Historical Introduction

The Honourable Robert Boyle (1627-91), seventh son of the Earl of Cork, was an active member of the Royal Society early on.²⁴ As a religious man deeply interested in theological issues, he was eager to reconcile science and religion in *The Christian Virtuoso*, whose subtitle declared "That, by being addicted to Experimental Philosophy, a man [was] rather assisted than indisposed to be a good Christian" and whose title was to become Boyle's sobriquet.²⁵ In his Will,

²¹ This transcript is at the University of Nottingham, Portland MS Pw 2V 26. See also Alexander Lindsay, "Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745," *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, III: 1700-1800, pt 4 (London and Washington: Mansell, 1997), p. 80 (SwJ 439), and Karian, "Edmund Curll and the Circulation of Swift's Writings," p. 106 and n20.

²² See *Forster Collection*, p. 505 (8937, X, item 3).

²³ Swift entered no emendations in his own copy of 1727 (*The Rothschild Library*, I, 368 [1422]).

²⁴ Boyle was present at the Royal Society's inaugural meeting on 28 November 1660. In 1680, he was elected President of the Society but declined to accept, because he did not want to take the oaths required under the Test Acts (R. E. W. Maddison, *The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle F.R.S.* [London: Taylor and Francis, 1969], pp. 99-100, 138-40, and the entry on Boyle by Michael Hunter for the ODNB).

²⁵ The first part was published in 1690, the second only appeared as late as 1744 in the collected edition of Boyle's works edited by Thomas Birch (*The Works*, 6 vols [Hildesheim:

he provided for the establishment of the Boyle Lectures, a series of lectures designed “*for the Advance or Propagation of the Christian Religion amongst Infidels.*”²⁶ In line with this rationale, the first sequence, a defence of Christianity against the new scientific atheism,²⁷ was delivered, in 1692, by the young scholar and divine, Richard Bentley, one of Swift’s targets in *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*.²⁸ Boyle’s method of ‘creating’ devotions, which posited not only that “all the workings of nature were direct manifestations of the omniscience and goodness of a constant and intelligent power,”²⁹ but also that everybody could explore these divine manifestations by “pry[ing] into the innermost Recesses of mysterious Nature,”³⁰ provoked Swift into ‘imitating’ Boyle’s affected meditative tone and into deriding his habit of choosing “the most slight and trivial Occurrences.”³¹

A Meditation upon a Broomstick is not particularly like any of Boyle’s, except that it is rather perfunctorily ‘occasional’ (“THIS single Stick, which you now behold,” l. G). Boyle himself takes actions and sights, not objects, as the occasions, “*His Horse stumbling in a very fair way,*” the “*manner of giving Meat to his Dogg,*” “*Upon the Sight of a fair Milk-maid singing to her Cow,*” not to mention a variety of angling experiences.³² In his *History of his Own Time*, the Bishop of Salisbury, Boyle’s younger contemporary and friend Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), while giving credit to Boyle’s scientific achievement, emphasized the Christian Virtuoso’s reclusive character, his ostensibly humourless and sombre self-sufficiency: “He neglected his person, despised the world, and lived abstracted from all pleasures, designs, and interests.” When

Georg Olms, 1966 [1772]], V, 508-40; Fulton, *A Bibliography of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, pp. 130-32; Maddison, *The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, p. 178).

²⁶ Maddison, *The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, pp. 205-6, 257-82 (267, 274).

²⁷ See Maddison, *The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, pp. 205, 274-75.

²⁸ For Bentley’s eight “Sermons Preached at Boyle’s Lecture” in 1692, see *The Works of Richard Bentley, D.D.*, ed. Alexander Dyce, 3 vols (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1971 [1838]), III, 1-200.

²⁹ Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 183-84; see also J. R. Jacob, *Robert Boyle and the English Revolution: A Study in Social and Intellectual Change* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1977), pp. 98-99, and *passim*.

³⁰ *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 34.

³¹ *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 26; see also V, 42, and Leslie Moore, “‘Instructive Trees’: Swift’s *Broom-stick*, Boyle’s *Reflections*, and Satiric Figuration,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19 (1986), 313-32 (p. 318); see also Carson S. Duncan, *The New Science and English Literature in the Classical Period* (Menasha, Wisconsin: The Collegiate Press, 1913), p. 152.

³² *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 56, 54, 98-104, 104-6, 118-20, 129-31.

Swift read Burnet's *History* in the 1730s, he added an appropriately dry comment: "Boyle was a very silly writer."³³

This "silliness" exasperatingly comes to the fore in the flat and lumbering "Discourse Touching Occasional Meditations," which preceded *Occasional Reflections*, with all its solemn division into parts and chapters. Among other things, it contains a tedious analysis of the analogical possibilities of meditating on pruning fruit trees, which may have helped trigger off Swift's parodic reflection on Man as a lopped and inverted tree:

If then, in the Spring of the Year, our Reflector see the Gardener pruning a Fruit-tree, we may suppose him invited by that Object, to reason thus within himself: Though one that were a Stranger to the Art of Gardening, would think, that that Man is an Enemy to this Tree, and goes about to destroy it, since he falls upon and wounds it, with a sharp Iron, and strikes off several of its Youthful parts, as if he meant to cut it in pieces; yet he that knows, that the Gardener's arm is not set on work by Anger, but by Skill ... that he has a mind to have it Fruitful, and judges these harsh means the fittest to produce that desirable Effect ... So [the Divine *Husbandman*[']s] kind and skilful stroaks adding as much to the Beauty of a Christian's Mind, as they cut away from the Superfluities of his Fortune.³⁴

The banality of the *Meditation*'s "Surely [Mortal] Man is a Broom-stick" makes a mockery of such devotional cant, a tactics ever so recurrent in *A Tale of a Tub*, too. From the beginning of his career as a satirist, Swift resented, and challenged, the false tones, the formidably self-righteous as well as the extravagantly dignified ones. Although he is unlikely to have bracketed Boyle's pompous fervour with the sectarian zeal of the Dissenters, his *Meditation* explodes the philosopher's self-complacently pious babble by the same sexual innuendoes sabotaging the religious enthusiasm of the Sects.³⁵

It is this attitude rather than the man that Swift was targeting in *A Meditation upon a Broomstick*.³⁶ As far as is known, he never owned a single one of Boyle's works, unlike those of Lord Chancellor Francis Bacon or Sir

³³ *History of his Own Time*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Ward, and Joseph Downing and Henry Woodfall, 1724-34), I, 193, and *Prose Works*, V, xxxvi, 271. Predictably, Swift was taken to task for this remark by Thomas Birch in his *Life of Boyle*, prefixed to his edition of *The Works* of 1772, for not having shown "in that piece a just regard to the interests of religion, any more than to the character of Mr. Boyle, by allowing himself to treat such subjects, and so excellent a person, with the most licentious buffoonery" (I, lxxii).

³⁴ *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 45-46. Leslie Moore claims that Boyle misuses the text of St John 15:1-6 in this passage, which, if correct, is likely to have enraged Swift ("Instructive Trees': Swift's *Broom-stick*, Boyle's *Reflections*, and Satiric Figuration," p. 321).

³⁵ See, in addition to Johnson, "A Note on Swift's *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*," pp. 140-41, the glosses on ll. GG.

³⁶ In "A Note on Swift's *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*," Maurice Johnson states, correctly we think, that "if Swift is mocking Boyle, it is more by adopting than by burlesquing his method" (p. 137).

Isaac Newton, for example, at any stage of his life.³⁷ The upshot is bound to be that Swift came across what he knew of Boyle at Berkeley Castle, or at any of the Berkeley family seats,³⁸ and that, for him, the name ‘Robert Boyle’ stood for a religious attitude which manifested itself in Boyle’s ‘occasional reflections’ and which he encountered among members of the Berkeley family circle, no matter whether it was embodied in Lady Elizabeth or the Countess, her mother, or both.

If George Faulkner’s account is to be trusted, Swift prepared his gambit carefully. He clearly did not improvise when his turn came again to read from Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections*, he had written out the parody beforehand, and afterwards made sure that Lady Elizabeth, or the Countess, her mother, would actually find “the Meditation on the Broomstick, in Mr. *Swift*’s Hand Writing,” and in the book, too, “stuck in at the Place where he had been reading.” Faulkner’s report concludes on the sentence: “This had the *desired Effect*, as Mr. *Swift* never was called upon again to read to her Ladyship.”³⁹ The “desired Effect” can only mean that “her Ladyship,” or their Ladyships, had learnt the lesson intended for them, and that further enlightenment “According to the Style and Manner of the Honourable *Robert Boyl*’s Meditations,” odd and humdrum, bizarre and banal as these were, was unnecessary or unwelcome. Whichever the case, Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections* were but the means to an end, not the end itself. But then, neither Lady Elizabeth, nor the Countess, her mother, seem to have been sufficiently mortified at having had the veil of self-delusion torn from them as to have destroyed Swift’s holograph found in the copy of Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections* from which he had been reading. It is unknown whether this was ever returned to its rightful owner, but if it was not, the transcripts circulating of *A Meditation upon a Broomstick* soon after must have originated in the Berkeley family circle, and its ‘victim, or victims,’ Lady Elizabeth, or the Countess, her mother, were finally responsible for this form of ‘scribal publication.’

In driving the lesson home, which he had intended for Lady Elizabeth, or the Countess, her mother, Swift chose to elaborate, and reshape, an ancient topos, the figure of Man as a “Topsy-turvy Creature,” as *arbor inversa*, as rooted in the air.⁴⁰ This topos describes Man’s “Animal Faculties [as] perpetually mounted on his Rational,” with “His Head where his Heels should

³⁷ PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 126-27; II, 1314-15.

³⁸ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 214n1.

³⁹ “Some Further Account of Doctor Swift, in a Letter to the Earl of C[hesterfield],” pp. 314-15; see also Sheridan, *The Life of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Swift*, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁰ For a more complete history of the *arbor inversa* topos, see the gloss on “what is Man, but a Topsy-turvy Creature” (pp. GG).

be; groveling on the Earth” (ll. GG); a widespread idea vouchsafed for by the most celebrated authorities in intellectual history. While Swift was always ready to turn the thoughts of the past to good account, he was happiest when inventing, or discovering “new uses for the ruins of the traditional form.”⁴¹ Since his early poetic trifle, “Verses Wrote in a Lady’s Ivory Table-Book,” his satire was double-edged, simultaneously attacking follies and vices around him as well as uttering pleas for new, or at least altered, literary visions, both in poetry and prose.⁴² That is why distinct generic expectations – narrative, structural, thematic – are ‘regularly’ provoked only in order to be sabotaged, and *A Meditation upon a Broomstick* is hardly an exception to this rule. On the one hand, he turned the pious cant of Boyle’s ‘occasional reflections’ on its head, their banality as well as shallowness, thereby transforming the miraculous presence of the Divine Providence in the world into the trivial workings of a celestial busybody; on the other, he also inverted his central motif of *homo arbor inversa*, the description of Man’s position in the Creation as it is and should be,⁴³ thereby not only metamorphosing Man into “a Topsy-turvy Creature” emblemized by a broomstick but also redirecting Boyle’s ‘reflection’ towards what he regarded as a more appropriate meditation on Man’s fallible nature.

Some twenty years later, the notion of Man as *arbor inversa* was given its most forceful and memorable expression in the paradox of a mad Gulliver, whose fate reveals that pure rationality is incommensurate with the nature of humankind: Man’s desire to be regarded as reasonable is a symptom of madness. In a sense, even if the *Meditation* does not pre-empt *Gulliver’s Travels*, it does anticipate it,⁴⁴ and like it, the *Meditation*, ends in a misanthropic, even nihilistic stance, which, in a complete reversal of the *raison d’être* of Boyle’s reflections, is marked by a complete absence of divine consolation.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Charles Peake, “Poetry, 1700-1740,” *Dryden to Johnson*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 2nd ed. (London: Sphere Books, 1986 [1971]), pp. 137-59 (141).

⁴² The relevant criticism on this aspect is listed in Hermann J. Real, “‘An horrid Vision’: Jonathan Swift’s ‘(On) the Day of Judgement,’” *Swift and his Contexts*, eds John Irwin Fischer, Hermann J. Real, and James Woolley (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 65-96 (79, 93 and nn 134-35).

⁴³ A. B. Chambers, “‘I Was But an Inverted Tree’: Notes toward the History of an Idea,” *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), 291-99 (p. 296).

⁴⁴ Gregory Lynall, “Talking Flowers and Topsy-Turvy Trees: Swift, Shadwell, and Robert Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects*,” *Swift Studies*, 26 (2011), 7-21 (p. 18).

⁴⁵ And also like *Gulliver’s Travels*, Swift’s *Meditation* was therefore often misunderstood, as, for example, by Boyle’s biographer Thomas Birch: “Dr. Swift’s pious *Meditation on a Broom Staff*, who has certainly not shewn in that piece a just regard to the interests of religion, any more than to the character of Mr. Boyle, by allowing himself to treat such subjects ... with the most licentious buffoonery” (*The Works*, I, lxxii).

The biographical penumbra, then, so long attached to the *Meditation*, has discouraged careful reading, and replaced the need for understanding the work by distracting attention from these central issues.

The Reception of *A Meditation upon a Broomstick*: Translations⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ This bibliography lists only the holdings of the Ehrenpreis Centre; it does not pretend to be complete. Wherever possible, we record the date of the first edition; later reprints have been omitted.

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