

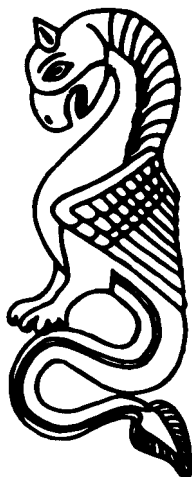
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Henry, duke of Lancaster's *Book of Holy Medicines*: The Rhetoric of Knowledge and Devotion¹

Catherine Batt

Guillaume de Lorris, in his earlier thirteenth-century *Roman de la rose*, evoking a garden of love reminiscent of the Earthly Paradise, makes passing mention of the healing properties of pomegranates:

Pomiers i ot, bien m'en sovient,
qui chargoient pomes guernades,
c'est uns fruiz mout bons a malades.²
[I remember well that there were fruit trees
bearing pomegranates,
a fruit extremely good for the sick]

Guillaume's wisdom raises several questions about knowledge and its perception. Would readers have assumed his primary debt was to the rhetorical handbooks of late Latin antiquity – such as Quintilian's – which recommend a particular rhetorical mode of praising a landscape, involving, as Ernst Curtius has said, a process of both 'technicalization' and 'intellectualization'?³ Would the mention of pomegranates' medicinal properties – together with a further remark about how certain spices aid digestion – reflect a scientific knowledge that educated people took for granted, and so capture the goodwill of a sophisticated audience? Or is this flourish designed to stress the poem's 'utility' as well as (even, as part of) its aesthetic charm?

It is difficult to determine the extent of medical knowledge, and among which groups, in the Middle Ages, in part because medical knowledge per se fuses the experiential and the bookish.⁴ At the same time, it is clear that a range of documentary channels exists for its dissemination, among them encyclopaedias and other texts that are not evidently professional 'medical' treatises. Moreover, in

its register, medicine brings together social and spiritual matters, on practical and on rhetorical levels, and so writes large the broader questions about how medieval culture views and deploys as 'permeable', and 'shared', what a modern sensibility might think of as discrete and separate categories of knowledge.⁵ Reciprocally, from scripture and the Church Fathers onwards, medical tropes have an expository doctrinal and spiritual function, the most powerful of which is the image of Christ the Physician, who himself provides, through his Passion, the medicine for a sin-stricken humankind.⁶ Bede, in his commentary on Mark's account of Christ's healing of the paralytic, notes that 'we are given to understand' that sins are the cause of many physical illnesses, and that bodily health may be restored once sins are forgiven.⁷ Medical treatises similarly assume that the poor physical condition of an individual may bespeak a moral or spiritual failing; it is not unusual for a medical text to warn that the patient should be confessed before treatment begins, for sin may be at the root of the sickness.⁸ And as Marie-Christine Pouchelle has explored (with specific reference to the work of the fourteenth-century surgeon, Henri de Mondeville), not only may medical and penitential writings share vocabulary and imagery, but the treatment of spiritual and of physical affliction follows similar procedures.⁹ The *Fasciculus Morum*, an early fourteenth-century English Franciscan preaching handbook, explains how confession expels spiritual sickness: sins are 'wounds' that need attention; the process of contrition, confession, and satisfaction are parallel to medical treatments of prophylactic, purgative, and diet.¹⁰ The healing efficacy of medical charms is often predicated on religious belief; a thirteenth-century Latin 'charme for a wounde þat it ake not', for example, exhorts the said wound: 'by the five wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the two breasts of his most Holy Mother', to heal cleanly, without pain, putrefaction, or scarring.¹¹ Carole Rawcliffe's research into the reading matter available in medieval hospitals notes a greater bias towards the spiritual than towards the strictly medical.¹²

Henry, duke of Lancaster's Anglo-Norman devotional treatise, written in 1354, asks to be read within this richly allusive devotional-medical context. It embraces a wealth of colourful explicatory imagery, but its dominant metaphor is that of spiritual sickness and cure; the abject sinner, the narrator, suffers sin-produced wounds, which he describes in some detail. He begs mercy of God, and thanks Christ the Physician who, with his blood, provides the healing balm for the wounds of his wretched human soul. The Virgin Mary, imagined as supportive nurse, reinforces, with her care, the healing Christ undertakes. If it is not possible to recover firm evidence of Henry's ownership of medical texts, the internal

evidence of the treatise alone suggests its author is cultured and medically knowledgeable. A book so dense in allusion that one nineteenth-century librarian catalogued it as a medical text, its very title, the *Livre de Seyntes Medicines* [*Book of Holy Medicines*] arguably plays on Matthaueus Platearius's twelfth-century Latin *Liber de Simplici Medicina* (in French, the *Livre des Simples Medicines* [*Book of Simple Medicines*]).¹³ Henry's work intensifies the question of the cultural import and reception of particular encodings of knowledge, and how ostensibly different categories of knowledge interrelate. The *Livre* has no obvious identifiable single source, and appears to draw on a broad range of materials, sophisticated and commonplace, which makes it a key text for investigating how aristocratic lay spirituality constitutes and articulates itself in late-medieval England. Henry's medical knowledge constitutes an important aspect of his cultural and devotional background, and also shapes his devotions.

Henry's editor, E. J. Arnould, suggests that the writer's medical knowledge is 'popular' rather than specialist, embellished with details drawn from his personal experience.¹⁴ A division between 'lay' and 'professional' medical knowledge and practice is perhaps not straightforward, and Arnould also underplays Henry's integral imbrication of religious trope and medical language. There are many examples from the *Livre* of forms of expression and register that (if startling to us) find parallels in both devotional and medical texts. An example is the exposition of theriac, a powerful medieval medicine used primarily as an antidote, which works by driving out one poison by means of another.¹⁵ Henry's account explains how theriac made with a scorpion is especially potent against that animal's sting, and how preachers, analogously, incorporate mention of the devil into their teaching, the better to work against his capacity for poisoning with his temptation to sin. However, if a patient is severely poisoned, theriac risks reverting to its poisonous state, and so the patient is twice envenomed: 'I am so invaded by poison that the theriac cannot help me, and only through God's grace will I expel from my body the spiritual sloth that prevents me from making a good confession' (p. 58). While mention of scorpions (rather less common in England than is the devil, Henry notes) might convey personal experience, or knowledge of a text such as Bartholomew the Englishman's encyclopaedia,¹⁶ Laurent d'Orleans' *Somme le roi* of 1279 (which in turn is drawing on Guillelmus Peraldus's writings on vices and virtues) already exploits the properties of theriac, in a spiritual simile. The recalcitrance of a sinner overcome with pride, resistant to instruction and discipline, is likened to the patient so sick that any medicine turns to poison within him [a qi touz triacles tourne en venin].¹⁷

Henry's medical imagery arguably keeps in check the allusive and otherwise loosely connected metaphors of his treatise as a whole. In Mary Douglas's elegant formulation: 'The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system';¹⁸ Henry's wounded body both generates and controls his articulation of sinfulness, and while he makes it simultaneously the place for an intensified awareness of human abjection and the possibility of salvation, he also imparts a spiritual intensity to the technical knowledge he marshals. Preoccupied as Henry is with his body as site of sin, and with the expository potential of the physical in general, some of the material on which he draws would not seem out of place in books of household management, and regimens for general health, as well as recipe-books and medical treatises. So, for example, a discussion of the healing value of Mary's tears hinges on a recipe for rosewater, which, Henry observes, has a cooling effect on a feverish patient. His explanation of how, having threaded rose petals on string, one can make rosewater either by the heat of the fire or by the heat of the sun, follows the same method for distillation as the Menagier de Paris touches on, in much the same language, later in the century.¹⁹ This becomes the basis for spiritual exposition of how the 'roses' of Christ's wounds will distil into the grief of Mary's tears:

j'ai dit devant qe homme prent de roses [. . .] et les mette
homme sur un fil, qelles sont celles rouges roses? Ces sont
les hidouses et senglantes plaies de Jesus, qe feurent tout
mys sur un fil – c'estoit le fil Seinte Marie qe vous, douce
Dame Seinte Marie, par la grande humilité qe en vous estoit,
ceo douz fil en vos douz flanes doucement filastes. Mes qi
afila celles rouges roses sur le fil blank? Ceo estoymes nous,
peccheours [. . .]. (pp. 150-51).

[I said above that a man will take roses [. . .] and a man will
put them on a thread; what are those red roses? They are the
hideous and bleeding wounds of Jesus, which were all put
on one thread – this was the son of Holy Mary, the sweet
thread which you, sweet Lady Holy Mary, sweetly span in
your sweet womb, in your great humility. But who threaded
those red roses on the white thread? It was us, sinners.]

This account involves a pun on 'thread/'son' [fil/s] and the act of spinning [filastes] that English cannot fully reproduce, as connectives to link his extraordinary conceit that acts to endorse this metaphorical representation of Christ and the Virgin Mary. In this extract, the pun works to legitimise the metaphorical reading of the scientific process; technical and devotional 'knowledges' appear mutually valorising.

Henry claims experiential knowledge (p. 199) for his assertion of the cooling properties of pomegranates, which correlates with Bartholomew's account of the fruit, that it: 'abateþ þe hete of feueres and [. . .] restoreþ wonderliche'.²⁰ He likens himself to a man sick with 'a feverish pleasure in sin', for whom Christ's scourged body, which has the appearance of a pomegranate, so closely packed together are the wounds, offers the means to quench his thirst (pp. 200-01). Other imagery recalls and confirms the knowledge of the herbal. So, for example, Henry's mention of how people drink goat's milk in May (when the goat has eaten powerful herbs) as preventive medicine – this in the context of his request for milk from the Virgin Mary (p. 135) – echoes medical recommendation of spring-time herbs as particularly efficacious.²¹ Some of the most arresting images concern Christ's sacrifice. An apparently well-known cure for delirium is to kill a cockerel, disembowel it, and place it immediately, blood still hot, feathers and all, on the head of the patient: Henry declares himself the delirious wretch who needs the 'cockerel' of the crucified and bloodied Christ, as covered with wounds as a bird is with feathers: 'il me covenera prendre cel cook ensi appareillé et mettre sur ma fieble teste, pur conforter les espritz, et les sens de la teste mettre a poynt' [I need to take this cockerel, thus prepared, and place it on my weak head, to lift my spirits, and to put me in my right mind] (pp. 162-63). The fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Euporiston* offers a parallel to this in recommending, for the treatment of 'frensy', a freshly disembowelled cockerel (or, failing that, a sheep lung).²² But where the medical text offers the cockerel cure as part of a list of possible remedies, in the *Livre* it initiates an allusive, metaphorically impelled meditation on Christ as our cockerel, who leads us from darkness to dawn, and who has triumphed over sin, the devil, and death. The thought that one has to kill the cockerel to make his medicine efficacious brings the sinner back to the memory of Christ's passion and the importance of the salvific blood of his wounds, which is all that can heal the sinner's soul. A classic recipe for chicken soup, necessary food for the convalescent/sinner (pp. 194-95) achieves a similar effect, the capon shut up in a bain-marie a metaphor for the Incarnation, the yielding of nutritious juices through cooking compared to the 'sweat like blood'

Christ exudes in the Garden of Gethsemane.²³ The ordinary is transformed into the extraordinary, human knowledge expanded into divine knowledge, by means of meditation and faith.

In the *Roman*, mention of pomegranates may well witness to writing within an identifiable rhetorical tradition and simultaneously be refamiliarising the audience with a practical application. Henry, in his treatise, certainly seems to depend on a reader's recognising the secular wisdom (and its registers) that form part of his detailed descriptions, to reinforce the epistemological frameworks already familiar from devotional material. His innovation lies in the exhaustive detail with which he describes, and then investigates, his imagery. Henry's model of his own body, however, which he continually insists is breachable and permeable, rendered integral only by Christ the Physician, perhaps ultimately impedes higher spiritual progress; that is, the treatise seems to stop short of being a full autobiography of spiritual development because, although it notes the importance of individual volition, and of human contrition, and of returning human love for divine love, the deployment of its metaphors emphasises divine mercy, rather than the active exercise of virtue, as primarily reconstitutive of human wholeness. The appropriation of knowledge from encyclopaedias, recipe-books, and herbals is part of the process of Henry's spiritual engagement. In so far as Henry can incorporate elements of his knowledge of natural and medical science into his spiritual exposition, his book witnesses to the recuperability, mutual validation, and intercalatedness of human knowledge in general, making it integral of itself, and consciously part of a Christian belief system eager to find confirmation in the physical and the material. In so far as all of this information, in Henry's metaphorical programme, may itself work to confirm Henry's abject sinfulness, it delineates the reach and the limits of Henry's uses of his own spiritual awareness and scientific knowledge.

NOTES

¹ This is a revision of a paper delivered at a session of the 2005 Leeds International Congress, a forum for intellectual discussion that Joyce Hill worked so hard to establish, support, and promote.

² Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Félix Lecoy, 3 vols (Paris: Champion, 1973-82), 1, ll. 1328-30.

³ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 183-202 (p. 193). Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. by H. E. Butler, 4 vols (London: Heinemann, 1921), 1, Book III, 7, 27 (p. 479), notes that one may praise places for their 'beauty and utility; [. . .] utility in healthy or fertile localities [. . .] things of every kind may be praised [. . .] physicians have written eulogies on certain kinds of food'.

⁴ See further, Monica H. Green, 'Books as a Source of Medical Education for Women in the Middle Ages', *Dynamis*, 20 (2000), 331-69, on medieval women's relative lack of access to 'formal medical literature', and the need to look 'beyond the written word' to attempt to assess the extent of their knowledge (p. 360).

⁵ Linda Ehrsam Voigts, in an account of medical and scientific writings in Middle English, notes the extent to which elements of what we think of as Fachliteratur can be manifest in diverse writings which would not necessarily be regarded, either then or now, as 'scientific': 'Scientific and Medical Books', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 344-402.

⁶ See Rudolph Arbesmann, 'The Concept of "Christus Medicus" in St. Augustine', *Traditio*, 10 (1954), 1-28.

⁷ 'In Marci evangelium expositio', *Patrologia Latina*, 92, col. 148b.

⁸ See, for example, the Anglo-Norman and Old French translations of the *De instructione medici*, in *Anglo-Norman Medicine: II*, ed. by Tony Hunt (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 21, 59.

⁹ Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Rosemary Morris (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 55: 'the doctor and the confessor are, from a structural point of view, in exactly the same position relative to those in their care' (p. 55), and p. 227, notes 43 and 45.

¹⁰ *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, ed. and trans. by Siegfried Wenzel (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), pp. 597, 465.

¹¹ British Library, MS Sloane 962, fol. 63r; Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), p. 95.

¹² Carole Rawcliffe, 'Written in the Book of Life: Building the Libraries of Medieval English Hospitals and Almshouses', *The Library*, 7th Series, 3:2 (2002), 127-62: 'The quest for salvation [. . .] predominated' (p. 139).

¹³ See Jeanne Krochalis and Ruth J. Dean's account of the text's cataloguing: 'Henry of Lancaster's *Livre de Seyntz Medicines*: New Fragments of an Anglo-Norman Work', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 18 (1973-74), 87-94 (p. 90).

¹⁴ E. J. Arnould, *Étude sur le 'Livre des Saintes Médecines' du duc Henri de Lancastre* (Paris: Didier, 1948), p. lxxx. The study contains extracts: Arnould edited the full text as *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1940). References are to this edition, by page number, in the body of the essay. Translations are my own.

¹⁵ Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), pp. 152-55. For Langland's deployment of theriac, see Roseanne Gasse, 'The Practice of Medicine in *Piers Plowman*', *Chaucer Review*, 39.2 (2004), 177-97.

¹⁶ *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus 'De Proprietatibus Rerum'*, ed. by M. C. Seymour, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-88), I, 434, explains that scorpion is the best antidote to scorpion sting.

¹⁷ British Library, Additional MS 28162, fol. 17r.

¹⁸ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Ark, 1984), p. 115.

¹⁹ *Le Menagier de Paris*, ed. by Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 272-73.

²⁰ *On the Properties of Things*, II, 990.

²¹ Hunt, *Popular Medicine*, p. 77.

²² *Euperiston*, in: Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine: II*, pp. 139-40.

²³ For chicken soup as convalescent food, see Terence Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), pp. 188-89.