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Physiology of Reading Pleasure and the Pleasure of Reading Physiology in the Middle Ages

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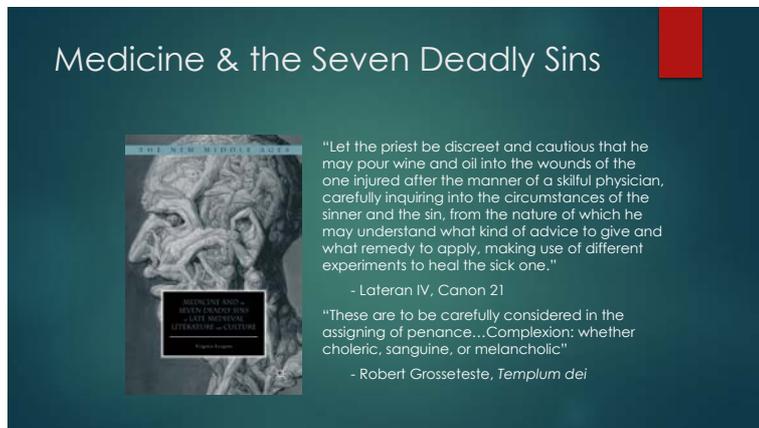
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PHYSIOLOGY OF READING PLEASURE and the PLEASURE OF READING PHYSIOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The following was delivered at Reading Pleasure – Pleasure Reading: Medieval Approaches to Reading” at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 25 May 2016



I will begin this talk with a brief background about how I approach this topic. Around the thirteenth century, there was an enormous revitalization of medical knowledge and priests and theologians and ordinary people had to make sense of it in terms of religious thought and moral structures. Medieval medicine inherited the system of the four humors or four liquids that related to the four elements of cold, hot, wet and dry.

These humors impacted human health and also temperament. The phlegmatics were wet, slow, dull, lazy, fat. The melancholics were cold, envious, thin and sad. The choleric were dry and angry. The sanguineous dominated by blood were hot, attractive, sexual. And this view of physiology raises questions of responsibility. If a balance of humor impacts your humor, can it be your fault? Likewise, emotions were thought to be physical reactions in the body, that responded to what was seen, heard, experienced through the senses. So, can you control how you feel or is it natural and instinctual?

There is quite lot of discussion among natural philosophers and theologians about responsibility, but these kinds of questions were not isolated to the universities. Because how you talk about your body and what it makes you do and feel is really important in a culture where you had to account for all of your bad activities and thoughts in confession.¹

On the slide, you have a quotation from Lateran IV that depicts the priest as a physician of the soul. But there is also material medicine being practice in confession, which is revealed in the next passage.

Most of the texts I will mention today are quite elite, but I think it is worth keeping in mind that there is a wider discussion about medicine and its role in more humble texts and social exchanges.

In want to in this talk present some medieval ideas about the physiology of pleasure before looking at some examples of the physiological impacts of both the pleasures and displeasures of reading and of texts. Finally, I will consider the pleasures of reading physiology and medicine

¹ Virginia Langum, *Medicine and the Seven Deadly Sins in Late Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

itself. I should state that the cultural tradition from which I am speaking is continental Latin and English vernacular, but I hope some of the general ideas might be useful to you. And I am very eager to hear from you what is reminiscent and what is not from your own sources.

Emotional and Physical Health



- ▶ "there is no riches above the riches of the health of the body; and there is no pleasure above the joy of the heart."
- ▶ "The joyfulness of the heart, is the life of a man, and a never failing treasure of holiness; and the joy of a man is length of life."
- ▶ "For sadness hath killed many there is no profit in it."
- ▶ "Envy and anger shorten a man's days, and pensiveness will bring old age before time."

- Ecclesiasticus, 30: 16, 23, 25

For many centuries, theologians and physicians discussed the roles of emotion and behavior in regards physical health. Theological passages on material medicine, as well as medical passages justifying their own practice, often cite the book of Ecclesiasticus. After claiming that "there is no riches above the health of the body" in 30:16, Ecclesiasticus warns against sadness, envy, and anger as detrimental to health and causing death, yet praises joy and abstinence for their contribution to health and the preservation of life.

The introduction and circulation of medicine from ancient Greece and the Middle East in Europe, particularly on the humors and the passions, strengthened these ideas.

Accidents of the Soul

- ▶ Joy
- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Shame



Vienna, Nationalbibliothek MS s.n.2644

The closest emotion that relates to pleasure is joy or *gaudia*, which is listed in medieval theories of the emotions or passions. The passions were considered one of the "non-naturals" that influenced human health and disposition; the others were diet, sleep, air quality, excretion and exercise. These passions responded to what was seen, heard, experienced by the senses, and their impacts were psycho-somatic. One of the most widely cited sources on the passions in the later Middle Ages, the Persian physician whose name was Latinized as Haly Abbas, describes the passions as forces that vital spirits and natural heat to move either toward or away from the heart. For Haly Abbas, the passions are joy, sadness, fear, anger, anxiety and shame. Whilst the passions are not themselves "natural," they can effect physiological changes in the body. Therefore, physicians often used the passions in medical treatments.

Joy and anger cause the vital spirit and heat to move from the heart to the extremities whereas fear and anxiety cause them to withdraw to the heart. The passions also have a relationship to

the humors, or the underlying physiology of the body. Rather than simply causing the passions, the humors affect the experience of the passions, the intensity and speed with which they are felt. So a sanguineous person, dominated by blood, is more likely to feel pleasure more readily and quickly. And a choleric person is more likely to feel angry in the same ways.

I hope from the assigned reading you took a general sense of the intertwining of the psychological and physiological. In his surgical manual, the fourteenth century surgeon John Arderne draws from Christian imagery to place suffering and healing in a wider context. He does so not only for a rhetorical purpose but a material one. Furthermore, the treatments revealed in this brief passage suggest not only the importance of what the medical practitioner advises and prescribes for the patient but how the medical practitioner conducts himself, what he does and says. Throughout the text of his *Practica*, Arderne employs the concept of the weak heart and the strong heart to indicate either physical weakness or physical fortitude. Weakness of heart is caused by a deficiency in vital heat and blood, and those with a phlegmatic and melancholic complexion are characterized by weak-heartedness, which makes them disposed to being cowardly or sad. The heart is both psychological and physiological. To be strong-hearted is to be courageous (derived from the Latin heart *cor*) and to be weak-hearted is to be weak. However, this emotional or psychological condition can be determined by physiology. Despair or fear results in a physiologically contracted, weak heart.

The text highlights the importance of determining whether a patient is weak of heart in order to identify the appropriate treatment. Using a line from Boethius, Arderne writes about cauterization, the burning of the body to close it, as follows: “a strong sickness responds to a strong medicine, and namely in strong men. I therefore call delicate men feeble. For all things are hard to a weak-hearted man. For strong men, therefore, nothing is heavy.”² However, regardless of individual physiology, Arderne implies that the weak heart can be bolstered through the use of pleasing words. Arderne counsels surgeons to offer patients a lengthy cure regardless of prognosis, doubling the estimated recovery time, so that patients do not despair when their health does not improve immediately.

Pleasing Medicine for Body & Soul



“For it is better that the terme be lengthed than the cure. For prolongacion of the cure giffeth cause of despairing to the pacient; when triste to the leche is most hope of helthe. And if the pacient considere or wondre or aske why that he putte hym so long a tyme of curing, sibe that he heled hym by the half, answer he that it was for that the pacient was strong- herted, and suffrid wele sharp pingis, and that he was of gode complexion and hadde able fleshe to hele; & feyne he othir causes pleseable to the pacient, for pacient; of syche worde; are proude and delited.

► Arderne, *Treatises of Fistula in Ano*

De arte phisicali et de cirurgia, Ms. X 118, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

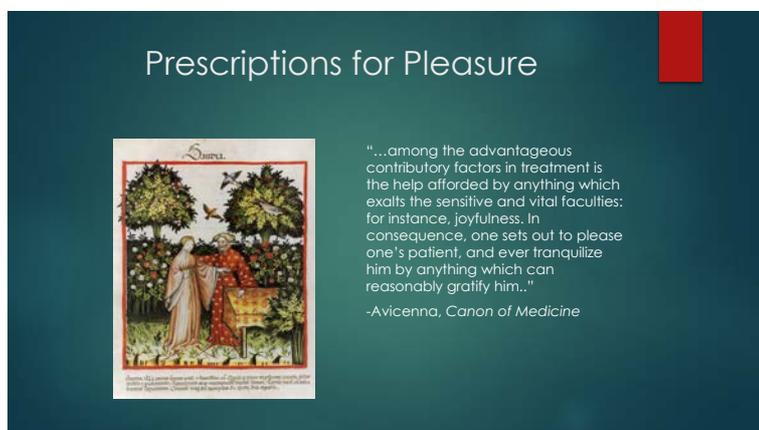
As he explains:

It is better that that diagnosis be lengthened than the cure. For if the cure takes longer than what is prognosed it gives rise to despair in the patients when trust in the doctor is the greatest hope for health. And if the patient wonders why the doctor estimated such a

² John Arderne, *Treatises of Fistula in Ano, Haemorrhoids, and Clysters*, ed. D’Arcy Power. EETS o.s. 139 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co: 1910).

long time, when he was healed in half such time, answer that it was because the patient was strong-hearted and suffered difficult things well, and that he was of good complexion and had an excellent healing body, and feign other causes pleasing to the patient, for patients are of such words proud and delighted.

While this dialogue occurs after healing, it is consistent with the idea that what the physician or surgeon says has a direct impact upon the body and the heart which affects its ability to be healed. The emotions of despair and pleasure are particularly critical to this healing. If despair causes the heart to contract and become weak, Arderne counsels that surgeon to temper the heart in the opposite direction. He says that “he ought to advise the patient that in his anguish he is great of heart. For great hearts make men hardy and strong to suffer harsh and grievous things.” Having a strong heart, then, is indicated simply by one’s ability to suffer. By convincing the patient to be spiritually strong, he becomes materially strong. In addition to the dialogue previously quoted, Arderne also includes a few philosophical snippets to be used in interactions and generally advises that the surgeon learn a stock of “good tales and honest tales to make the patient laugh” in order to “induce a light heart.”



Prescriptions for Pleasure



"...among the advantageous contributory factors in treatment is the help afforded by anything which exalts the sensitive and vital faculties: for instance, joyfulness. In consequence, one sets out to please one's patient, and ever tranquilize him by anything which can reasonably gratify him.."

-Avicenna, *Canon of Medicine*

Arderne is not unique. Medical texts afford many prescriptions for pleasure. In the *Canon*, Avicenna instructs “that among the advantageous contributory factors in treatment is the help afforded by anything which exalts the sensitive and vital faculties: for instance, joyfulness. In consequence, one sets out to please one’s patient, and ever tranquilize him by anything which can reasonably gratify him.” Because of their physiological impacts, the passions are often prescribed as cures and preventative measures in various medical texts be used as cures.

Thus, for fearful and sad patients, who are wet and cold, the inducement of joy and anger can heat and dry the body. The particular conditions or diseases that responded best to pleasure were melancholic imbalances, such as lovesickness. Lovesickness was an established medical condition in the Middle Ages to which melancholics were considered especially prone. Lovesickness is a disease of judgment, a failure of estimation, characterized by the overheating of the brain and the fixity of the imagination on a loved object.

Sex was one of the most effective cures for lovesickness. According to Constantine, it forces fixed ideas out of the head. However, the Church was not so positive about this. Canon 22 of the fourth Lateran council, however, warns, that: “since the soul is far more precious than the body, we forbid under penalty of anathema that a physician advise a patient to have recourse to sinful means for the recovery of bodily health.” Such sinful cures included not only fornication, but also self pleasure and drunkenness.

However theology did not disapprove of other forms of pleasure. Theological texts also provide some instruction as to the role of the passions in general and pleasure in particular as far as

physical and spiritual health.

We can look to Aquinas's extensive treatise on the passions, enclosed in the *Summa Theologica* II-I, q. 22-48, which based on the medical and philosophical works of Avicenna and Aristotle, is the most extensive discussion of the passions in the Middle Ages. Aquinas suggests that there are two kinds of passions: passions of the body and passions of the soul. The passions of the body include hunger, thirst and pain, while the passions of the soul include love, hatred, concupiscence, pleasure, pain and sorrow, hope and despair, fear and anger. The passions of the soul are ethically neutral, psychosomatic responses to stimuli, what is seen, heard, experienced by the body. They belong both to the soul and to the body. A material movement of the body always accompanies an immaterial movement of the soul. Such bodily changes may include the enlargement or contraction of the heart, a decrease or increase in the pulse and the movement of the limbs. Humans and animals share the passions of the soul.

Following Avicenna, Aquinas categorizes the passions as either *concupiscible*, driven by the perceived pleasure or pain incurred by the perceived object, or *irascible*, driven by the perceived difficulty of acquiring or avoiding the perceived object. Irascible passions are experienced only after concupiscible passions. The concupiscible passions are love, hatred, desire, aversion, pleasure and sorrow; the irascible passions are hope, despair, fear, daring and anger.

Although the passions themselves are ethically neutral, the actions and thoughts that proceed from them are not. Therefore, the role of reason in the passions is fundamental to Aquinas' anthropology. To live an ethical life is not a matter of removing oneself from the passions, rather, passions are fundamental to ethics. It falls to human reason to rule the passions, guiding them to virtuous actions and thoughts. However, reason can be misguided and at times overwhelmed by the intensity of passion. In these cases, passions can facilitate sin.

Aquinas devotes one of his longest passages on the passions to questions of pleasure. One of the first questions he tackles is the question of joy and pleasure and its status as a passion and its relationship to the body. Drawing from Avicenna, he argues that joy or *gaudia* is a kind or species of pleasure/delight, but only that kind which follows reason. Belonging only to the soul, joy cannot be experienced by irrational animals whereas both animals and people experience pleasure or *delectatio*. There are two objects of pleasure, according to Aquinas: those which please reason, or intelligible pleasure, and those objects which please the senses, or sensible pleasure.

Pleasure when guided by reason is productive. Bodily pleasures may be perceived by reason and thus enjoyed by the intellect, passing from *delectatio* into *gaudia*. Sensible pleasure may impede reason in three ways: by distracting reason, by opposing reason and by fettering reason. Bodily pleasure provokes an intense physiological reaction than all the other passions, threatening reason even more than the passions. The paradigmatic example is the drunkard.

However, pleasure can be virtuous, "pleasure that follows an act of reason, strengthens the use of reason." For example, the pleasure of contemplation.

Pleasure in Pain and Sorrow



Whether all sorrow is contrary to all pleasure?

"we derive pleasure even from pains depicted on the stage: in so far as, in witnessing them, we perceive ourselves to conceive a certain love for those who are there represented."

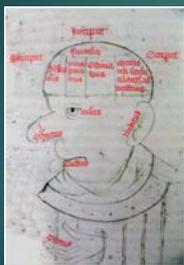
- Aquinas, ST II-I, qu. 35, art. 4

One last point worth making about Aquinas's treatment of pleasure is that he also accounts for a relationship between pain and sorrow and pleasure. Pain can be pleasurable, Aquinas argues, thinking specifically of stage plays. He argues that "we derive pleasure even from pains depicted on the stage: in so far as, in witnessing them, we perceive ourselves to conceive a certain love for those who are there represented." Furthermore, love is fostered by likeness, the identification of oneself in another. As he earlier argued in his description of love, likeness is a cause of love. And likeness is a cause of pleasure.

This is a significant distinction from Augustine who understood the pleasures that we derive from such sadness and misery depicted in drama as inordinate curiosity rather than love borne of likeness. Curiosity not love leads us to stare at mangled corpses. As he writes in the *Confessions*, "from this disease of curiosity are all those strange sights exhibited in the theatre."

But how do these pleasing texts and words impact physical and psychological health? How do texts and reading of texts induce a light heart? Or a likeness? How does reading produce pleasure or joy?

Senses, Passions and Imagination



"The innere witte is departid abre by bre regiouns of be brayn, for in be brayn beþ bre smale calles, be foremost hatte ymaginativa, berin pingis þat be vñir witte apprehendib withoute beþ i-ordeyned and iput togederes withinne..."

Ymacinacioun, berby be soule biholdib be liknes of bodiliche pinges þat beþ absent..."

-Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*

Trinity College Cambridge MS O.7.16
fol 47

Medieval accounts of how the body processes sensory data can illuminate this question. The sense organs of sight, hearing, smelling and tasting have sinews that connect them to the brain. These perceptions travel to the brain where they are collected by the common sense and from there are processed by the three cells of the brain or the inner wits. As Bartholomaeus Anglicus explains in his encyclopedia "the inner wit is departed into three regions of the brain: the imagination, reason and memory. the first *ymaginativa* is where "things that the outer wit apprehends without is ordered and put together within."³ Furthermore, through the imagination

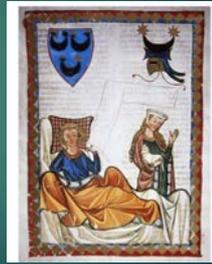
³ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M.C. Seymour, et al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–1988).

Pleasures, Poetry and Lovesickness

Cures for lovesickness:

"listening to music, conversing with dearest friends, recitation of poetry; looking at bright, sweet smelling and fruitful gardens having clear running water; and walking or amusing themselves with good looking women or men."

-Constantine, *Viaticum*



An extended example of the curative power of narratives for the specific illness of lovesickness is found in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.⁵

The poem is structured around both the associations of illness with love and cure with confession. Recognizing that he has a "maladie" that "might make a wise man madd", Amans pleads to Venus as "man's health".

While Constantine considered coitus the most successful cure for lovesickness, given the confessional frame of the poem, this was not a suitable cure.

Constantine also lists less morally suspect cures for sickness, to rectify the melancholic imbalance: "listening to music, conversing with dearest friends, recitation of poetry; looking at bright, sweet smelling and fruitful gardens having clear running water; and walking or amusing themselves with good looking women or men."⁶

That his lovesickness has been cured through poetry that is somewhat between "lust and lore" or "pleasure and learning" might also illuminate the final parting passion or emotion of the poem.

The lover initially complains to Venus who encourages him to "show" his "sickness" to her priest Genius. Genius both takes the lover's case history and heals through stories or *exempla*, stories designed to reveal "likeness". Yet from the very beginning the poem emphasizes the physiology of the body and its relation to the wider world. The poem opens with a description of a divided and fragmented world, which is mirrored in the health and appearance of the human body. The poem, composed in the late fourteenth century, consists of a prologue and eight books. Seven of these books consider a different sin framed around a lover's confession, and a further book summarizes the knowledge needed by a king to rule well. In the Prologue, the poet describes how the body is divided from others through the separation of countenance and character, but it is also divided within its very physiology. Original sin is blamed for this division and disease. Scholastic and late medieval theologians characterize the source of physical and spiritual illness resulting from the disordered humors and the separation of sense and intellect that accompanies the Fall. The poet dismisses protestations to "fortune" or

⁵ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russel A. Peck TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006).

⁶ Mary C. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

“constellacion” as the cause of this state of affairs. For Gower, man is the own cause of his own “happiness and sadness.” He writes: “That we we call fortune/ Out of the man himself it grows” (Vol. 1, 548-9). If this impetus, the source of happiness and sadness, is organic and “groweth” from within the human, it would suggest a pathological or physiological basis.

To understand responsibility, the poet suggests, we must understand the relationship of sin to the body and its sicknesses. By attending to human physiology, Gower prompts the recognition of shared human weakness, particularly in reference to the passions (emotions) and the predisposition to sin, and thus co-passion or compassion. Throughout the many *exempla* in the poem, characters have conversions which enable their understanding of their likeness to other people, which are enabled through their recognition of their own weaknesses.⁷ Constantine serves as an example.

Bodies and Co-Passion

Mai non eschue that fortune
Which kinde hath in hire lawe set;
Hire strengthe and beaute ben beset
To every man aliche fre,
That sche preferreth no degree
As in the disposicioun
Of bodili complexioun.



Chapel of St Sylvester, Church of Four Holy Crowned Ones, Rome, Italy, 13th century

After claiming that “there is physic or medicine for the sick/ And virtues for the vices also,” the confessor relates the famous tale of the Emperor Constantine who is struck by leprosy. As a cure, physicians advise him to bathe himself in the blood of children under the age of 7.

However, Constantine is moved to compassion when he hears the wailing mothers, and the story ends with spiritual and physical cure. Gower uses the story to reflect upon human bodily weakness. Constantine makes conventional reflections upon death as the great leveller of humanity. He specifically remarks upon human vulnerability to pathology and illness:

None may escape
What nature has set in her laws;
Her strength and beauty are bestowed
To every man equally,
She does not exalt social rank
As for the disposition
Of bodily complexion

This understanding of human pathology assigns to nature responsibility for the gifts of complexion, such as strength and beauty. Complexion, as the passions, are unavoidable facts of being human.

Constantine’s compassion is ultimately a recognition of human passion, the capacity to suffer physically and emotionally. This compassion enables him to recognize the choice of acting

⁷ Virginia Langum, “Medicine, Passion, and Sin in Gower.” *SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature* 28 (2013): 117–130.

upon reason against the interests or instincts of the body to exercise ethical responsibilities.

Likeness and Love

Bot certes he hath grete matiere
To ben of good condicioun,
Which hath in his subjeccioun
The men that ben of his semblance.
And ek he tok a remembrance
How He that made lawe of kinde
Wolde every man to lawe binde,
And bad a man, such as he wolde
Toward himself, riht such he scholde,
Toward another don also.



This reflection leads him to conclude that

But certainly he has great grounds
To be of good condition disposition
Who who he has in subjection
The men that are of his likeness.
And also he remembered
How He who made the law of nature
Wanted everyone to follow the law
And told a man to behave toward another
As he would himself.

An appreciation for what he has in common with them, their semblance or “likeness” that leads to his compassion and love.

However, it is not only Constantine that exhibits compassion with the mothers, but the mothers show compassion for each other. They do not rejoice for their own joy at having their children spared but rejoice for each other as well.

“Each one for joy of the others laughed.”

It is this compassion, the appreciation of another’s sadness or pain in likeness to his own, that the lover needs to learn to restore his health.

Likeness as Cure and Pleasure

- ▶ “wonder mirour”
- ▶ “I made a liknesse of miselwe”
- ▶ “And whan Resoun it herde sein
That loves rage was aweie,
He cam to me the rihte weie,
And hath remeued the softe
Of thilke unwise fantasie...
I was mad sobre and hol ynowh.”
- ▶ “I stod amasid for a while,
And in myself y gan to smyle”



Arundel 83 f.126v

And it is a long slog – the poem is over 30,000 lines and the lover still cannot quite see past

himself near the end. He writes his final complaint with his tears rather than ink. He speaks of his “woeful pain of love’s malady” and complains how every one else is happy in love except for him. He is hopelessly myopic and singular in respect to his own unfulfilled pleasure.

When Venus serves him some cold medicine, reminding him that he is really too old for this sort of nonsense, he swoons in despair, and awakes to a procession or parliament of lovers, many of the same characters who have been told throughout the poem. These are led by Youth and Old Age.

When he is finally handed “a wondrous mirror” to behold himself, he finally achieves this understanding of the necessity of his own physiology and own aging.

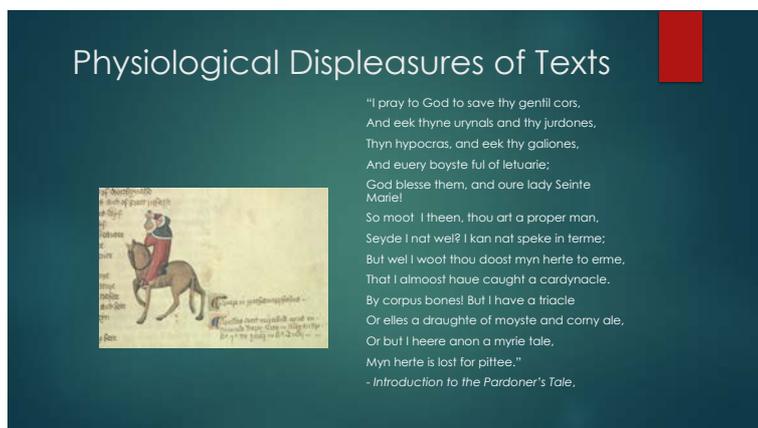
He sees in his heart’s eye (or the imagination) that his color is pale, his eyes are dim, his hair gray and his face wrinkled and defaced by age.

And once this likeness is corrected, reason arrives moving the “folly of his unwise fantasy (the lovesickness), Whereof he was want to complain. And he is made sober and whole or healthy.”

At the end of the poem “I stod amazed for a while/ And in my self y gan to smyle” . Rather than distress, the lover has finally realized in his own likeness a love that expands beyond himself.⁸

But perhaps the greatest evidence for a wider understanding of how the physiology of reading and pleasure works in the experience of texts is through an example of displeasure.

Physiological Displeasures of Texts



“I pray to God to save thy gentil cors,
And eek thyne unynals and thy jurdones,
Thyn hypocras, and eek thy gallones,
And every boyste ful of letuarie;
God blesse them, and oure lady Seinte
Mariel!
So moot I thee, thou art a proper man,
Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme;
But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme,
That I almost have caught a cardynacle.
By corpus bones! But I have a triacle
Or elles a draughte of moyste and corny ale,
Or but I heere anon a myrie tale,
Myn herte is lost for pittee.”
- Introduction to *the Pardoner’s Tale*,

Just as the pleasures of reading can positively influence the body and its health, the displeasures of reading and texts may also affect the body negatively when the imagination produces negative images.

We find a literary example of this in the Host’s violent reaction to the tale of the Physician in the *Canterbury Tales*, where a group of pilgrims setting to the shrine of St. Thomas Beckett in Canterbury have agreed to tell tales to pass the time.

The Physician tells a tale of Virginia’s death at the hands of her father Virginius in a preemptive honor killing of sorts so that the evil judge cannot fulfil his designs on her virtue.

Like many modern readers, the Host himself reacts poorly to the tale, swearing as though he

⁸ See Jessica Rosenfeld, “Compassion Conversions: Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and the Problem of Envy.” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 42.1 (2012): 83-105.

were mad at the injustice of the story. He addresses the Physician:

I pray to God save your gentle body,
And also your urinals and your vessels,
Your hypocras and your galiones,
And every container of medicine;
God bless them all and our lady Saint Mary
So may I prosper, you are a gentle man
Did I not say it write. I cannot speak in proper terms
But I know that you make my heart hurt.
That I almost caught a cardiacle.
By Christ's bones. But I have a remedy
Or else a pint of fresh and strong ale
Or I hear a merry tale
My heart is lost for pity.

Although comic in delivery, it is a pointedly unhealthy reaction to a tale told by a doctor. Potentially deadly, 'cardiacle' is a medical condition, a passion of the heart, by which superfluous melancholy or fleumatic humours press upon the heart. He plays with the idea that literature and texts can impact physiology. As Bartholomaeus Anglicus explains that passions of the heart can be caused by "the accidents of the soul, such as dread that closes the heart quickly."

Furthermore, the Host plays upon learned medicine and popular understanding. While he claims that he "kan nat speke in terme" – he makes some clever references to particular types of drugs named after major medical authorities such as Hippocrates and Galen and mocks the techniques of collecting and analyzing urine, gesturing to the emptiness of the trinkets of his trade. His delights in claiming that the physician has hurt his heart yet he can cure himself easily with simple cures of a merry tale and a drink of ale. Both cures would be curative for cardiacle, the merry tale alleviating pressure on the heart and the ale warming the body.

While authors have praised the therapeutic value of texts for centuries, late medieval medical manuals were particularly interested in the effect of the doctor's speech on the health of patients. As we have seen, medical manuals advise that doctors adjust their speech in order to 'induce a light heart' in the patient.

The Physician has knowledge of the virtues of moderate diet and drink as exhibited in the general prologue. He is said to advise his patients to follow a "measurable diet...nourishing and digestible." He also knows about astronomy, yet there is no mention of the other non-naturals, such as the passions, particularly the role of pleasurable storytelling and the moderating of melancholy that physicians were supposed to practice for the health of their patients.

The physiological displeasures produced by the Physician suggests a certain antagonism between popularly available knowledge and academic medicine. In lieu of a medical practitioner, Lydgate recommends three other doctors in his popular verse *Doctrine for Pestilence*, the first of which is a glad heart.

Reading as a Pleasure Garden



- ▶ "assaye and serche the hool orchard and taste of sich fruyt and herbis reasonably affir youre affecioun, and what you liketh best, afterward chewe it wel and ete thereof for heelthe of your soule."
 - ▶ "I go to laboure, in purpose to performe this gostli orchard...to youre gostly lernynge and comfortable recreacion."
- *The Orchard of Syon*, c. 1420-40

However, the physiological benefits of pleasure in reading need not be only a remedy for heart disease, melancholy, or lovesickness. They can exist for pleasure's sake alone.

For example, the Middle English translator of *The Orchard of Syon* based on Catherine of Siena's *Dialogo* develops the conceit of the garden and his work as "gardener" to explain both his work and the experience of reading the text. In so doing, the pleasure and leisure of reading is paramount. If the text is an orchard, the reader is invited to take the fruit which she desires to taste, which she should do "reasonably after her affection.." Rather than the arduous work of contemplation what is emphasized is the leisure and pleasure of reading and self-direction. *The Orchard of Syon* translation blends typical aristocratic leisurely activities with more traditional contemplative pursuits. The labor and business of the monastery is contrasted to the private space of the garden, a place of subjective and individual pleasures.

However, the imagery aligns the act of reading with processes of physical healing and cure. Specifically the translator likens the text to an herb garden with properties that align with medicinal herbs: "some fruit or herbs seems to some sharp, difficult or bitter, yet they are effective and profitable to the purging of the soul, when they are taken in moderation and received by counsel." Therefore, he advises that readers negotiate the text with discretion, just as doctors would not prescribe all medical herbs indiscriminately to every patient, t the readers should "try and search the whole orchard and taste of such fruit and herbs reasonably after your own pleasure, and what you like best, chew it well and eat thereof for the health of your soul."

Yet beyond this, the act of reading is also a form of pleasure. The translator concludes the prologue with its purpose, not only for "spiritual learning" but also for "comfortable recreation." The idea of the vineyard of Syon is thus not only a space for learning but for pleasure and enjoyment.

The sanative properties of gardens were commonly described in medical regimes of health. In some, the construction of pleasure gardens were advised to both please the soul and preserve the health of the body. Albertus Magnus wrote about these pleasure gardens in his treatise *On Vegetables and Plants*, that they are to be "places of no great utility or fruitfulness but designed for pleasure." These gardens are "mainly designed," Albertus writes "for the delight of two senses: sight and smell."

Senses of Reading



"...the truth which shines forth in books desires to manifest itself to every impressionable sense. It commends itself to the sight when it is read, to the hearing when it is heard, and moreover in a manner to the touch when it suffers itself to be transcribed, bound, corrected and preserved."

- Richard de Bury, *Philobiblon* (c. 1345)

The multi-sensory pleasure experienced through the reading or experience of texts is also recorded by Geoffrey of Vinsauf: "the final labor of poetry is to see that a voice managed discreetly may enter the ears of the hearer and feed his hearing, being seasoned with matched spices of facial expression and gesture.."

Richard de Bury even invokes touch: "the truth which shines forth in books desires to manifest itself to every impressionable sense. It commends itself to the sight when it is read, to the hearing when it is heard, and moreover in a manner to the touch when it suffers itself to be transcribed, bound, corrected and preserved."

Indeed, we know from manuscript evidence, that books were not simply listened to and read, but also kissed and rubbed.⁹

But what might the pleasures of reading physiology itself entail?

During the later middle ages on the continent and in England, there is tremendous circulation and translation of texts, including medical, surgical, physiognomic and dietetic texts, as well as tracts on particular techniques such as bloodletting and uroscopy. While it is not always clear who owned these texts, we know that they were not only owned by practitioners, such as doctors, physicians but also priests and households.

What was the appeal of these texts? Were they only practical? What were their potential pleasures for medieval readers?

Secret and Elite Reading Communities



Additional 47680, ff. 10v

"And wite thou welle that the cause wherfore y shewe my secretes figuratilly & clerky, and bi derke ensampelis: It is for y dowte me, that if this book come vnto the hondis of vntrewe men, and prowde, whiche were not worthi nor able forto knowe the secretis of god almyghti, for they are not worthi therto. And wite thou welle pat y putt me in gret dowte and indignacioun of god, forto shewe thee his secretis, as he of his excellent goodnes hath shewid hem to me."

- *The Secrete of Secretes*

⁹ Kathryn Margaret Rudy, "Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges, and Carrying Talismans: Considering Some Harley Manuscripts Through the Physical Rituals They Reveal," *Electronic British Library Journal* (2011): 1-56.

The first pleasure we might consider is curiosity. Particularly, the *Secretum secretorum*, or *Secrets of secrets* genre appeals directly to the readers' curiosity. They draw readers into an exclusive reading community, sharing the secrets allegedly written for Alexander the Great by Aristotle, those "secretis of god almyghti." Such texts promise to impart this knowledge in plain English. Furthermore, they invite the reader into an elite reading community distinguished by virtue and discretion.

And understand well that the reason that I show my secrets figuratively and opaquely and by obscure examples: it is in the event that this book come into the hands of untrue and proud men, who are not worthy or able to know the secrets of God almighty. And understand that I have put myself in great displeasure with God to show his secrets, that he because of his excellent goodness has shown to me.

Pleasures of Readerly Sophistication



"it by-houep hem for to deme & for to examyn in fullong tyme or mych tyme how mych pinges forsob concorde to those þat shewyn openly, how mych forsob ben different[.] And so forsob for to chese þis, and þat forsob for to eschewe *Et sequitur*. To sich a man forsob I haue trust oure wordes for to be-comen hugely profitable[.] To oþer forsob þis conscripsoun .i. writing shal be made so supetfue as if he tales to an asse"

- Guy de Chauliac, *Chirurgia Magna*

72. WIKER, *SPICILEGIUM RECTORUM, CLERICORUM (UNIVERSITATIS DE ZARISSE)*, 1490

The same can be said of surgical and other medical treatises. By criticizing other works and books, they demarcate a superior audience with superior knowledge. Guy de Chauliac appeals to the vanity and pleasure of his readers in the motivation for writing his treatise. "Every man may not have all the books, and if even if they did, it is irksome and annoying to read them." He then proceeds to write derisively of five medical sects currently in practice who fail in their treatments for various reason. The fifth sect, for example, is comprised of "women and may idiots, who leave sick men of all sicknesses to saints alone." Therefore,

it behoves the readers to judge and examine over a period of time for themselves the contents of this text, how they agree to what is experienced openly, and what does not. And so therefore to choose what to accept and what to ignore. For such a man, I have faith that these words will be hugely profitable. For others, this writing is superfluous as if it were told to an ass.¹⁰

¹⁰ Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, ed. Margaret S. Ogden, EETS o.s. 265 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Failure of Physic



Sweleth the brest of Arcite, and the soore
Encreseeth at his herte more and moore.
The clothered blood, for any lechecraft,
Completh, and is in his blouk yclaf,
That neither veine-blood, ne ventusinge,
Ne drink of herbes, may been his helpinge.
The vertu expulsif, or animal,
Fro thike vertu cleped natural,
Ne may the venim voiden ne expelle,
The pipes of his longes gan to swelle,
And every lacerie in his brest adoun
Is shent with venim and corrupcioun.
Him gaineth neither, for to gete his lif,
Vomil upward, ne dounward laxatif.
Al is to-brosten thike regloun.
Nature hath now no dominacioun.
And certainly, ther Nature wol nat wirche,
Fare wel phisik! Go bar the man to chirche!

- *The Knight's Tale*

However, there are possibly other pleasures. The interleaving of medical texts within other miscellanies of poetic and religious works invites a dissolving of boundaries of genres between the practical, the pleasurable and the didactic. Furthermore, readers of medieval medicine at least in the context of fiction might be satisfied by its failure. Despite the growing accessibility of popular medical knowledge, there is still a distance in the erudite medical knowledge and the public. Such as delighted in by the Host in response to the Physician. A poignant example of this is found in Chaucer's description of Arcite's body shutting down near the end of the *Knight's Tale*:

The swelling of Arcite's breast increased the pain in his heart more and more. The clotted blood left in the trunk of the body, despite the efforts of medicine in letting blood and administering herbs, cannot be voided by the expulsive spirit. The tubes of the lungs began to swell and every muscle in his breast is destroyed by the venom. Neither purgatives nor laxatives help. Nature has no dominion now and certainly will not work. Farewell Physic, Go bear the man to church!¹¹

All this piling on of physiological knowledge: parts of the body, physiological processes, various cures, end in a stark conclusion. Farewell physic is failure of physic. Such a conclusion might be a comfort when simple treatises such as that produced by Lydgate, often emphasize the lack or expense of books and doctors.

But what pleasures does the reading of medieval physiology and other medical texts have for contemporary readers?

Literary critics and historians have been recently attending to the more literary elements of medieval medical texts. First of all, they contain many of the features that we enjoy of literary fiction: narrative, rich description and metaphor.

However, there is an elusive pleasure in reading medieval medical texts that I think is best captured by a contemporary novel set in a quasi-medieval setting: *The Afflictions* by Vikram Paralkar. The novel documents a fictional encyclopedia of obscure diseases as revealed by a novice apprentice called Maximo who is shadowing a librarian at the great central library. The bulk of novel consists of encyclopedia entries. There is no plot of which to speak. Some examples include *Amnesia inversa* which causes everyone around you to forget that you exist or *Corpus ambiguum* which causes sufferers to no longer recognize the boundaries of themselves and the world.

¹¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

During his recitation of the entries, the novice who by this point is now a master and is instructing another novice, interrupts his own cataloguing to say:

Some day you should consider reading it from beginning to end. It's an illuminating experience. The Encyclopedia is organized in a careful hierarchy. The first level is based on anatomy, the next on pathological mechanisms, and further branches on minutiae concerning each particular class of afflictions. The branches grow ever finer, until maladies listed on adjacent pages differ from each other in their subtlest nuances. If you read the Encyclopedia from beginning to end, you get the feeling that every affliction known to man is part of a single, infinite progression. Or that every disease is a different facet of one great and terrible malady.¹²

Not only does reading medieval medicine allow an entry into medieval thought but also into the continuities and dissonances of our own. There is something intensely satisfying about facing a medieval encyclopedia, whether a general encyclopedia or an anatomical encyclopedia, in its careful accumulation and delineation of knowledge. You can either pick up one section or read from beginning to end.

But as Aquinas argues about the pleasure of watching pain, reading medieval inventories and descriptions of the passions and miseries of the body bridges a gap, inspires a likeness to that one great and terrible malady of being mortal.

¹² Vikram Paralkar, *The Afflictions* (Philadelphia: Lanternfish Press, 2014).