

HEALING LEAVES

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Abstract

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Medieval French literature provides the modern researcher with references to the healing arts in many passages that are incorporated into prose or poetic works. Because there was no clear separation of the genres into modern classifications, references to treatment of sicknesses of body, mind or spirit are woven into many literary works, providing us with a kind of snapshot of the state of the art healing practices of the day. Texts make reference to herbs and plants used to cure the ailments of the body, gardens and flowers that refresh the spirit, miraculous unguents, cures through the intercession of the saints and the Virgin Mary and surgical procedures. Texts examined here include *Le Roman de la Rose*, *Erec et Enide*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, *Les Lais* of Marie de France, *Le conte du Graal*, *Le chevalier de la charrette*, *La Condamnation de Banquet*, *Yvain*, *Cligès*, *La Chanson de Roland* and *Treize Miracles de Notre-Dame*. The picture they provide of the medicine of the time has a certain charm and quaintness that many moderns seek in holistic treatments of today which harken back to this more rustic medicine.

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INTRODUCTION

Healing Leaves

Literature offers the reader a glimpse into the world of the time, and medieval literature of France and Spain often make reference to medical matters of the day. What were some of the treatments used to cure the body? How were the troubled mind and spirit put at ease? What were remedies for emotional unrest such as lovesickness and depression? How was the soul nourished and brought to fullness of life?

The medieval notion of health embraced each of these spheres, which were closely intertwined. The approach to healing was a mixture of folkloric and homeopathic style remedies alongside techniques which might be termed “scientific”, such as the surgery for bodily wounds that is mentioned from time to time. For the medieval mind, all techniques used were their state-of-the-art, and while some of the remedies used might seem primitive, they yet have a certain sophistication, especially for the time.

Ironically enough, in recent years modern society has seen a great renaissance in the holistic health field. A great number of people have returned to natural cures for health concerns. Many of these cures harken back to earlier times. While it is doubtful that what medieval medicine prescribed always promised good results, it is also true that medieval men and women had an intrinsic intuition for the things which might promote health, used wisely. What may come across to the modern reader as naïveté or simplicity, may in fact be a purist quality, a desire to look at the problem and to treat it with the basics. Perhaps with so much emphasis on the “scientific” side of medicine, society lost touch with the “natural” side of medicine, which stands out in the medieval world.

Today there are many branches of medicine. This specialization is helpful because it allows research into and development of medicine and techniques to treat specific problems. It allows for a more rapid progress into the solutions necessary to cure a variety of ailments. Medieval medicine as a whole was not so divided out. The continuum between body, mind, emotions, spirit and soul was not as clearly marked. It was a different mindset which influenced the approach to medicine. On the positive side, it had a holistic flavor which is something attractive to the modern world as well. But it is also true that there were a great many questions which medieval medicine could not answer.

Looking back, then, medieval texts shed light on how medicine was understood and practised in that era. While many passages may seem unspeakably simplistic, it should be remembered that at the time the ideas might have been progressive. Working in the dark, as it were, medieval cures had yet a dose of sophistication. There was also room for the miraculous, a notion to which modern medicine is often ambivalent. It was not forgotten that the total patient was also composed of soul. The following passages taken from medieval French texts reflect the medicine of the time. They prove that medical knowledge of the medieval ages was as sophisticated as the medical knowledge we possess today, although the emphasis was on natural rather than scientific cures as we understand “scientific” today. They resonate with the modern schools of thought which advocate back-to-nature remedies. A study of texts such as the following may suggest solutions to modern health problems which may be viewed in a different context from our present medical paradigms. It is hoped that by examining these texts the reader may combine ancient wisdom and practices with techniques that were developed in later years to improve the quality of life and health in the present century.

This work will explore references to healing drawn from French medieval texts. As the medieval world did not clearly separate the different spheres of health, healing of the body, mind, emotions, spirit and soul will be discussed together. The entries will be listed, therefore, not with reference to a particular problem, but, rather, in relation to a specific work. In other words, the entries will not be given thematically, but will be discussed within the framework of various literary pieces which highlight certain topics of interest. A chapter on medieval medical treatises will also be included in each section, where the treatises will be examined as a combination of literary and scientific writing or discourse. Each section will include textual citations in French to illustrate the points made in the text. A kind of quaint, impressionistic tone is what is desired, a tone that will emphasize the greatly overall holistic and folkloric approach to health in the medieval mindset. It is hoped that this vision may be used to enrich the modern theories of healing encountered in the world of today.

Le Roman de la Rose: Flowers and gardens leading to good health

Medieval medicine was a mixture of new scientific methods, similar to those of our modern medicine, and folkloric remedies developed in harmony with nature and composed of plant extracts, herbs and flowers. All of these medications and means of curing sicknesses were used to heal the human body as well as the mind and spirit. To comfort the mind and the heart that suffered from depression, for example, gardens played a central role, and flowers soothed negative sentiments and led to joy and well-being.

The theme of healing by the use of plants, and notably flowers, and by the comforting presence of the birds is of primary importance in *Le Roman de la rose* written between 1225-1228 by Guillaume de Lorris with a long continuation written by Jean de Meun between 1269-1278. The book uses allegorical characters and exhibits a poetic tone that is common to the *romans courtois* where the language and the images are very pretty and symbolic with the end of inspiring readers. The first book is examined here, basically because it is in the work of Guillaume de Lorris that there are references to the curative powers of flowers.

The first line that makes an allusion to love as a type of pain that requires a cure is found in the passage where the poet describes a pretty field where there is a very beautiful fountain. He tells the story of Narcissus. Echo, who loves Narcissus madly, wishes that the one “qu’elle avait trouvé si indifférent à l’amour, fût un jour tourmenté à son tour et affligé d’un pareil amour dont il ne pût attendre de médecin,” (lines 1457-59). Echo wants vengeance to put it simply.

This fountain, with its cristaline waters, shows the poet the rose bush and the rose. It is the rose, symbol of feminine beauty, that represents for the poet the source of all healing. The pleasant quality of the garden that leads to health is accentuated by the symbolic importance of the fountain, who presents the rose to the poet. In *Sur la terre comme au ciel* one reads that, “La présence bienfaisante de l’eau, comme dans le *locus amoenus* antique, est le dernier élément indispensable à l’agrément du jardin. Albert le Grand, puis Pierre de Crescens recommandent la construction d’une fontaine dans le verger, qui donne ‘grant plaisance’” (142). The fountain represents the source that springs up as joy in the human heart and that brings with it well-being. In medieval art the fountain is also often the representation of the sacrament of baptism and of the Holy Spirit who brings spiritual health. The fountain symbolizes purity and joy.

Guillaume de Lorris speaks more clearly of the pains of love when he relates that the God of Love wounds the poet, who complains: «je ne savais que faire ni que dire et ne pouvais trouver de médecin pour ma blessure, car je n’attendais médecine ni d’herbe ni de racine” (vers 1721-24). The poet believes that he is finding himself at the end of his life, but then he sees the rose and he ponders:

Si je l’avais eu en ma possession,
il m’aurait rendu la vie.
Sa vue, sans plus, et son parfum
allégeait fort mes douleurs. (vers 1727-1730)

The rose, feminine love, feminine beauty, is the cure for the wound that the poet has felt, the pain that he suffers. The poet has only to see the rose, enjoy its perfume, without even touching it.

One easily imagines that Guillaume de Lorris made reference to a physical pain caused by the arrows of the God of Love, but there is an emotional and spiritual side also:

Il m'était très agréable d'être
assez près du bouton pour sentir
le doux parfum qui en venait.
(vers 1804-1806)

car ce plaisir et cette joie
me firent oublier momentanément mes maux.
(vers 1810-1811)

The pleasure and the joy that the poet expresses soothe his heart and his soul. Here, the poet does not touch the rose, he inhales only its “doux parfum.” The poet repeats that it is the joy that cures him in these lines:

car les yeux, en vrais messagers
envoient immédiatement au coeur
des nouvelles de ce qu'il voit
et, de la joie qu'il reçoit.
le coeur ne peut alors qu'oublier ses douleurs.
(vers 2722-26)

The poet praises the beauty of the rose, the visual aspect that pleases him and that leads to the health of the mind.

Further on, in lines 3463-3464, after having given a kiss to the rose, the poet remarks, “car un parfum dans le corps me pénétra / en chassa toute la douleur.” The pain referred to here could be a double reference to physical pains and emotional or spiritual pains. It is something that soothes the body and also gives pleasure. These same thoughts are evident in lines 3755-57: “Et quand je me souvenais du baiser / qui m'avait insufflé dans le corps un parfum / bien plus doux que du baume.” The kiss given to the rose is like a perfume and this perfume acts as a balm that brings health.

That health is something emotional is revealed where the poet writes: “car je ne voulais point recevoir d'une autre source / honneur ni bonheur, santé ni joie” (vers 3973-4). Joy protects the heart from psychological maladies such as depression.

The beauty of nature and its power to comfort the spirit is evident in the numerous references to beautiful plants, whether they are trees or tiny flowers. In *Sur la terre comme au ciel – Jardins d'Occident à la fin du Moyen Age*, the catalogue from an exhibition at Paris (2002) published by les Musées Nationaux one reads that:

La profusion des arbres et leur grande diversité lui apportent un nouveau sujet d'émerveillement: l'occasion est bonne pour l'auteur-narrateur de citer tous les arbres qu'il connaît, que ce soit ou non par le biais de l'érudition. Après avoir évoqué les beaux lauriers, les pins, les ormes et les cormiers, il détaille les plantes exotiques: pommiers chargés de pommes-grenades, noyers porteurs de fruits semblables aux noix de muscade. Amandiers, figuiers, dattiers, clous de girofle, réglisse, 'graine de paradis nouvelle' ou maniguette, zédoaire, anis et cannelle. Puis il poursuit avec 'les arbres de chez nous qui portaient des coings, des pêches, des châtaignes, des noix, des pommes et des poires, des nèfles, des prunes blanches et noires, des cerises fraîches et vermeilles, des sorbes, des alises et des noisettes'. Il ajoute, sans hésiter à se répéter: grands lauriers, pins, oliviers, cyprès, gros ormes branchus, charmes, hêtres, et 'des coudriers bien droits, des trembles, des frênes, des érables, des sapins élevés et des chênes'. Les petites plantes ont une place beaucoup plus modeste. Hormis le fenouil et la menthe odoriférants qui embaument le chemin menant au jardin où Amour et sa compagnie dansent la carole, les fleurs ne font pas l'objet d'une liste aussi précise et détaillée. L'Amant voit une grande quantité de fleurs s'épanouissant été comme hiver, certaines d'une blancheur extraordinaire, jaunes ou vermeilles, d'autres 'de toutes sortes de couleurs' et d'une 'senteur exquise'. Les seules nommées sont les 'violettes très belles' et les 'pervenches fraîches et nouvelles'. On retrouve la violette et la pervenche, entrelacées de feuilles de rosier, avec une troisième fleur des champs, le gânet, dans la description de la robe brodée, ornée d'une multitude de fleurs, dont Amour est luxueusement vêtu. Ainsi, toute l'importance est laissée à la rose et au rosier qui font l'objet d'une description pleine de sensibilité au moment où l'Amant les aperçoit d'abord dans le miroir de la fontaine d'Amour, puis au creux du jardin secret où il tentera de posséder la Rose. (90-91)

All of these examples of the flora and the trees show that the poet wants to create a true *locus amoenus*, a verdant countryside where love and pleasure can find their place. It is a place where the spirit finds rest.

The continuation of the poem by Guillaume de Lorris, written by Jean de Meun, does not mention this supreme beauty of the rose. However, he praises the plants of the prairie and the birds that dwell there:

Je m'en allai en aval dans la prairie
enluminée d'herbes et de fleurs,
en écoutant les doux oiselets
qui chantaient leurs musiques nouvelles.
Leurs doux chants, qui tant me plaisaient,
plongeaient mon coeur dans le ravissement.
(vers 9987-9992)

Nature has quite notable powers for comforting human troubles, be they physical or spiritual, emotional or psychological.

One can see that the rose is not as important for Jean de Meun, and there are critics who emphasize the misogynist character of this other poet. For Guillaume de Lorris the rose is of central importance. One finds examples of the curative powers of nature in his work, while Jean de Meun only suggests that nature is good for man. For Guillaume de Lorris the love of a woman restores health and brings joy to life.

But who is this woman? Charles Dahlberg in his article, "Love and the *Roman de la Rose*," observes that she might be a specific woman who is well-loved, or a generalized woman or even the Virgin Mary. (568) We might say that if we understand the poem as a song of praise to the Virgin Mary that would suggest the curative power of love at the level of the celestial world. God sends us the cure for our troubles if we search Him out and our journey towards Him is guided by beauty, and above all by the beauty of nature. It is a plausible theory which lends a richness to the text of Guillaume de Lorris.

There are many paintings of this epoch that locate the Virgin Mary in a rose garden, for example, *la Vierge au buisson de roses* by Martin Schongauer, 1473 and *la*

Vierge au palis de roses by Guillaume Durand in his *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* (Cologne, vers 1450) (*Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 66 et 67). One does not doubt that the rose is a symbol of the Virgin Mary, the purity of love.

Another work that mentions the beauty of flowers is *The Romance of Floire and Blanchefleur*, a poem from the twelfth century. In this work the author speaks of a great variety of plants such as the mandrake, the fig tree, the laurel, the almond tree, and the olive tree, and of spices such as pepper, cinnamon, rosemary and cloves. Their beauty lends to the characters a feeling of comfort and tranquility, but the author does not directly state their power for healing sicknesses of the body.

In one translation of this work into English one finds these lines that describe the power of love to create a sense of joy and of well-being in the heart of the lover, a reference to nature's blossoming:

Blanchefleur for some maid newly met,
He heard not, saw not, nor expressed
The slightest sign of interest.
He learned nothing from what he heard:
With sorrow all his thought was blurred.
Love has assailed him fore and aft,
Setting within his heart a graft
Which grew apace and blossomed well
In flowers of such delightful smell
That all joys save this were abated:
The fruit of this graft he awaited... (lines 372-382)

Later in the text the poet writes of the power of love to encourage the spirit and the heart, love being represented by nature, and in particular by beautiful red roses:

Floire left the graden. Now the man
Conceived a cunning guileful plan:
He prepared baskets, filled and laden
With blossoms, as seeming gifts to gladden
The hearts of the young girls who lived
In the tower.

(lines 2080-2085)

The poet sings of the power of nature which leads to emotional health or to joy.

Thus, beauty, plants and the world of nature and love are all means for curing sickness, be they of the body or of the mind and spirit. In *Tristan et Yseut*, in the version of Bérout, love is at the center of this healing. When Tristan and Yseut wander through the forest they find that, «La vie qu'ils mènent est âpre et dure, mais l'amour qu'ils ont l'un pour l'autre les rend insensibles à la douleur» (39).

Erec et Enide: Folkloric and Magical Solutions

In another novel, *Erec et Enide* by Chrétien de Troyes, one discovers references to healing agents that are less ideal in tone and more practical, especially to those agents which heal the body. Erec is cured in two ways. One is natural and the other is magical. When he is present at the court of King Arthur, Erec discovers an ointment made by the sister of the King, Morgue, who is a fairy with magical powers. Chrétien de Troyes writes:

Cet onguent, que Morgue avait donné à Arthur, était merveilleusement efficace: si une plaie en était ointe, soit sur les nerfs, soit sur les jointures, elle ne manquait jamais de se guérir entièrement au bout d'une semaine, pourvu qu'on y appliquât cet onguent une fois par jour. (110)

Less mysterious are the remedies offered to Erec by Guivret:

Guivret, pour sa part, choyait fort Erec. Avec des courtpointes qu'il avait, il fit faire un lit haut et long, car les herbes et les joncs ne manquaient pas: on y couche Erec et on le couvre. Puis on ouvre un coffre et Guivret en fait tirer trois pâtés: 'Ami, fait-il tâtez-moi un peu maintenant de ces pâtés froids. Vous boirez du vin coupé d'eau: j'en ai du bon, sept barils pleins, mais le vin pur ne vous serait pas profitable, vous avez trop de blessures. Beau doux ami, essayez donc de manger, cela vous fera du bien; et ma dame, votre femme, mangera aussi, car elle est passée aujourd'hui par bien des transes à votre sujet; mais vous vous en êtes bien tirés. Vous voici hors le péril: mangez donc, beaux amis, et je mangerai avec vous.' A côté de Guivret vient s'asseoir Erec, puis Enide, à qui plaisait fort tout ce que faisait Guivret; tous les deux engagent Erec à manger (135)

Chrétien de Troyes mentions the herbs that Guivret uses to make a bed for Erec, an example of the curative powers of plants. The other things such as nutritious food, pâtés and wine, have a folkloric quality. To eat well and to sleep well can prove to be a very

efficacious remedy for a great number of sicknesses. In *The Medieval Garden*, Sylvia Landsberg observes that, “Medieval precepts conducive to health, both then and now, were laid down in the tenth century and they recommended good air, exercise and rest, and moderation (not abstention) in all the feelings of joy, anger, fear and distress. This holistic attitude to medicine continued well into the nineteenth century, when it was replaced by faith in drugs and surgery, and it is only now coming to prominence again” (82). Guivret follows the wise counsels dictated by a nature that does not rely on commercial medicines, but that emphasizes a cooperation with the precepts of nature.

The sisters of Guivret play the role of doctors or nurses for Erec. Chrétien de Troyes writes in detail:

D’abord, elles enlevèrent la chair morte, puis elles y mirent du baume et une bande de pansement. Elles s’entendaient très bien à le soigner: en femmes de grande expérience, elles lavaient souvent les plaies et y remettaient de l’onguent, quatre fois par jour ou davantage. Elles le faisaient manger et boire, mais elles ne lui permettaient ni ail ni poivre. (136-37)

Nutrition is very important here and Erec should not eat spicy foods. All of these remedies have a scientific quality, as recommended by doctors. They are not really magical.

Later in the text, Erec and Enide are sent into a garden by King Evrain. The author observes that, “La terre, aussi loin qu’elle s’étend, ne porte épice ni plante médicinale, efficace pour quelque traitement, qui ne fût plantée en ce jardin; et il y en avait en abondance” (151). Plants are very important, not only for their beauty but for their medicinal uses that the wise man knows how to extract from them. Science is important, but it is mixed with the other healing arts of the day. Considering that we are

in the medieval age, the cultivation of plants to cure sickness was truly state-of-the-art. Landsberg notes that, “In a holistic way the gardens of the wealthy were understood to aid health, as illustrated by John Malverne, Bishop Physician to Henry VI, who said that as an anti-plague aid the house air should be filled with the scent of roses, violets, bay leaves, fennel, mint and other aromatics. Even at a humble level this was implied since Chaucer mentions the flower-bedecked lodgings of Nicholas the Clerk at Oxford (83). The garden offered a bouquet that refreshed and healed.

Aucassin et Nicolette and the power of herbs

Aucassin et Nicolette tells of the curative powers of feminine beauty. In these

lines:

‘Nicolette, fleur de lis,
douce amie au clair visage,
tu es plus douce que le raisin
ou qu’une tranche de pain trempée
dans un hanap.
L’autre jour, j’ai vu un pèlerin
natif du Limousin;
il était atteint de folie,
gisant au fond d’un lit,
très mal en point
et gravement malade.
Tu es passée devant lui,
en soulevant ta traîne
et ta tunique fourrée d’hermine,
ta chemise de lin blanc,
si bien qu’il a vu ta jambe.
Ce pèlerin a été guéri aussitôt,
Il a retrouvé sa plus belle santé.’ (71)

Nicolette is compared to a majestic and pure flower, the fleur de lis. She cures a pilgrim with her presence alone. Aucassin suggests that she has the same charms for him. Her feminine qualities are capable of causing miraculous occurrences, although there is also a satirical element here.

Nicolette escapes from her imprisonment and flees to the forest. When Aucassin goes to look for her, he finds some shepherds, instructed by Nicolette to tell him that he must look for a strange animal in the forest:

- Ah, chers enfants, dit-elle, faites-le, je vous en prie!
Cette bête possède un remède qui guérira Aucassin de sa
maladie. Voici cinq sous que j’ai dans ma bourse! Prenez-les et
prévenez Aucassin! Il faut qu’il vienne chasser la bête avant trois
jours et si, d’ici trois jours, il ne l’a pas trouvée, il ne sera jamais
guéri de son mal. (93)

The beast does not exist in fact, or as some would say, the beast represents Nicolette. It is a ruse that Nicolette invents to bring him to her, where he will be cured.

In the forest, Nicolette gathers plants, flowers and herbs and with their curative powers she prepares a place where Aucassin might rest: “Elle cueille des fleurs de lis, de l’herbe de la garrigue et du feuillage aussi. Elle en fait une belle loge” (95). The loge is constructed of flowers and leaves. (99) Nicolette offers him a natural medicine to help him. Nature plays a very important role in the healing of his mind as well as his body:

Un chevalier le regarda, vint vers lui et lui dit:
‘Aucassin, j’ai eu autrefois la maladie que vous avez. Je
vais vous donner un bon conseil, si vous voulez me croire.’
-Seigneur, merci beaucoup, dit Aucassin. J’aurais bien
besoin d’un bon conseil.
-Montez à cheval, et allez vous promener dans la forêt!
Vous y verrez des fleurs et des herbes, et vous entendrez
vous aussi des paroles qui vous feront du bien. (99-101)

We can well understand what Nicolette suggests, a walk in the forest, since even in modern times one realizes that a day spent in the forest or the mountains or at the sea shore close to nature has a tranquilizing effect. Nature is the doctor par excellence. And while Nicolette does not mention it, nature is a gift of God, who gives it to us in order to comfort us.

In the notes at the end of his book, Philippe Walter remarks that, “Nicolette possède le don de guérir par les plantes comme de nombreuses fées médiévales (Morgane en particulier)” (198) This indicates a certain secularism and a magical quality depicted in the work by Nicolette. But the author realizes the supreme powers of God as expressed in this passage:

‘Ah, douce amie, dit Aucassin, je m’étais cruellement blessé à l’épaule, mais je ne sens plus ni mal ni douleur puisque je vous ai.’

Elle le tâta et s’aperçut que son épaule était démise. Elle le massa tant de ses blanches mains et le palpa en toute sens, selon la volonté de Dieu qui aime les amants, qu’elle lui remit l’épaule en place. Puis elle prit des fleurs, de l’herbe fraîche et des feuilles vertes et les appliqua desous avec le pan de sa chemise. Aussitôt Aucassin fut guéri. (121)

Here, Nicolette cures Aucassin by touching him, a means to soothe the body and the emotions. The author remarks that God blesses this type of cure because love between human beings is a sacred thing. Flowers and herbs are the means that nature provides, and all of these things are the gift of God to help his creatures. Nicolette uses herbs to cure her friend. Sylvia Landsberg comments that, “Although we tend to be sceptical about medieval herbal medicine, little do we realise how much our present-day health is based on medieval practices. In Western medicine we still use the pre-Christian Hippocratic ethics, adopted in Europe in medieval times; we live predominantly on plants, and treat our diseases with their derivatives” (82). Landsberg writes on the importance of the little garden or *herbier* for medieval life. She mentions a description in which Albertus Magnus describes the plants, flowers and trees that should be included in the garden. He finishes with the words, “If possible a clean fountain of water in a stone basin should be in the midst. It is delight rather than fruit that is looked for in the pleasure garden” (13). The fountain is a symbol of purity, and it is very important in medieval culture as a solace to the spirit, as is evidenced by the numerous spas frequented by the sick. One has already seen the importance of the fountain in *Le roman de la rose*. Herbs, then, were cultivated for their beauty as well as for their medicinal qualities.

For Aucassin nature has very strong powers, but without Nicolette he finds himself abandoned:

Il voit les herbes et les fleurs,
il entend les oiseaux qui chantent,
il se souvient de ses amours,
de la vaillante Nicolette
qu'il a aimée si longtemps;
il pousse des soupirs et pleure.
(153)

It might be said that for the author of this medieval *chante-fable*, love is at the center of all healing, whether it is human love or the love of God which guides us in the art of healing, God being the giver of the herbs and flowers necessary for the medicines we need.

Les lais de Marie de France: the torment of love and the medical school at Salerno

In the lais of Marie de France are found many references to cures. The collection is a group of lais, or short narrative poems, that examine love to a great extent and that have a message, or moral. In *Guigemar*, the central character is wounded when his arrow, that he shoots at a doe, recoils and wounds him. The doe tells him that he is going to suffer because of a woman and that only she can cure him:

Jamais n'aies tu medecine,
Ne par herbe, ne par racine!
Ne par mire, ne par poisun
N'avras tu jamés garisun
De la plaie k'as en la quisse,
De si ke cele te guarisse
Ki souffera pur tue amur
Issi grant peine e tel dolur
K'unkes femme taunt ne suffri,
E tu referas taunt pur li;
Dunt tuit cil s'esmerveillerunt
(lines 109-119)

Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante observe that, "The image of Love's medicine-tipped arrow that wounds and heals simultaneously is a commonplace of medieval love literature" (59). The author says that the herbs do not prove efficacious in this case as the love of a woman is the only solution. Guigemar escapes to a kingdom where the king has placed his wife under lock and key because he is jealous. The wife of a great lord finds Guigemar and helps him:

En bacins d'or ewe apoterent,
Sa plaie e sa quisse laverent;
A un bel drap de cheisil blanc
Li osterent entrer le sanc;
Puis l'unt estreitement bendé:
Mut le tienent en grant chierté:

Quant lur mangier al vespre vint,
La pucele tant en retint
Dunt li chevaliers out asez:
Bien est peüz e aberrez!
(lines 369-378)

As a result Guigemar finds himself in love with her. The cures are an act of nurturing, and it is natural to expect that Guigemar would fall in love with his nurse.

In *Les Deus Amanz* there is a king with a very beautiful daughter. He orders that no one can marry her except the man that can carry her to the top of a very high mountain. All of the knights who try to do this meet with failure. There is one among them who is very enamored of the girl. The girl loves him also. She tells him he must go to the house of one of her relatives in order to obtain a magic potion that will give him the physical strength requisite for the test:

En Salerne ai une parente,
Riche femme, mut ad grant rente.
Plus de trente anz i ad esté;
L'art de phisike ad tant usé
Que mut est saive de mescines.
Tant cuneuist herbes e racines,
Si vus a li volez aler
E mes lettres od vus porter
E mustrer li vostre aventure,
Ele en prendra conseil e cure

(lines 103-112)

Hanning and Ferrante note that, "According to many medieval writers, women studied and practiced medicine at Salerno from the eleventh century onward." (129)

On the subject of the medical university at Salerno, Joseph Walsh writes that, "Before the introduction of Arabian medicine the Salernitan school of medicine was noted for its common-sense methods and its devotion to all the natural modes of healing.

It looked quite as much to the prevention of disease as its treatment” (161). Walsh also comments that:

A century or so later [13th century] it came to be the custom to call medical books after flowers, and so we had the ‘Lilium Medicine’ and the ‘Flos Medicinæ’ down at Montpellier, and this became the ‘Flos Medicinæ’ of Salerno. Pagel calls it the quintessence of Salernitan therapeutics. (161)

In our own days there is a great variety of remedies made of herbs and flowers, as for example the flowers of Bach, extracts of flowers and plants suspended in water that are used to heal both emotional sicknesses as well as sicknesses of the body. Walsh goes on to mention that medical studies at Salerno were as sophisticated and rigorous as those currently practised.

Doctors who were women were well known in these regions. Landsberg writes of one woman:

Eighty years earlier in about 1393 the fifteen-year-old wife of the Goodman of Paris was limited to the knowledge imparted by her husband - a few simple pottages and tisanes, the dried spice element of which revealed the Arab influence. But he explains to her how to distil without an alembic, and she, like the Paston women, could have made her ‘mel roset’ from 1 lb of rose petals to every 8 lbs of honey; water for the finger bowls from infused sage, rosemary and bay leaves and other sweet waters with plants and honey from her own garden. Here then we have women who were well-read in medicine, intelligent, critical, knowing their limits in buying some medicines and making others from their own garden plants, caring of relatives and manorial or parish peasants, and whose knowledge was widely respected. (85)

The woman in this lai was a woman who worked side by side with the men who healed the sicknesses of that time.

To continue the story, the lover tries to carry the girl to the top of the mountain but he does not succeed and he is too weak to drink the potion. The girl throws the bottle

with the liquid to him, and the text adds that, “Meinte bone herbe i unt trovee/ Ki del beivrë orent racine” (vers 228-29). The potion was effective, but not for the unfortunate knight.

In the lai *Eliduc* a red flower is used to revive a young girl, the friend of the central character. When the wife of Eliduc discovers that her husband has taken a mistress, she accepts it and decides to take the veil and become a nun. But before doing that, she uses a flower to revive the girl, who has fainted:

La dame lieve, si la prent,
Ariere va hastivement,
Dedenz la buche a la pucele
Meteit la flur ki tant fu bele.
Un petitet i demura,
Cele revint e suspira.
Aprés parla, les oilz ovri:
«Deus, fet ele, tant ai dormi!»
(lines 1059-1066)

The wife of Eliduc had observed that the flower had revived a dead weasel, whose mate brought it to him and therefore surmised that the flower could effect such a cure. The flower is here a symbol of life and has magical or spiritual powers. Hanning and Ferrante comment that, “The lover who grieves for his dead mate seems to represent Eliduc, but the ‘flower’ he finds to bring her back to life is his wife’s charity” (225).

Le conte du Graal (Perceval): Medieval doctors and their assistants

Written towards the end of the twelfth century by Chrétien de Troyes, the author of *Erec et Enide*, *Le conte du Graal* ou *Le roman de Perceval* has several scenes where references to healings are found. There is a battle between Perceval and l'Orgueilleux de la Lande. The latter is vanquished and he says to Perceval, "pour tout le mal que je lui ai fait subir, j'ai le coeur assombri de tristesse" (91). To heal the body and even the spirit, Perceval recommends to him the following remedy: "Va donc, dit-il, au plus proche manoir que tu as dans les alentours, fais-lui, dans le repos, apprêter des bains, jusqu'à sa guérison et sa pleine santé (91).

Later in the text Perceval fights against the sénéchal Keu and wounds him.

Chrétien de Troyes explains:

Mais le roi fut grandement affligé de voir le sénéchal ainsi blessé. Il en ressent douleur et colère, mais enfin on lui a dit de ne pas se tourmenter, car il guérira, pourvu qu'on lui trouve un médecin qui sache s'y prendre pour lui remettre l'épaule en place et réduire la fracture. Le roi, qui le chérissait et l'aimait au fond de son coeur, a fait venir auprès de lui un habile médecin, avec trois jeunes filles formées à son école, qui lui replacent l'épaule, et lui ont fixé des attelles au bras, après avoir remis bout à bout les fragments de l'os. Ils l'ont ensuite transporté dans la tente du roi et ils l'ont bien réconforté, en lui disant qu'il va guérir, sans qu'il ait besoin de s'inquiéter." (98)

In this passage perhaps the most interesting thing is the reference to the three young girls who are familiar with medical practices. As in the *lais* of Marie de France, who mentioned the woman at Salerno who had medical knowledge, the presence of women in the healing arts is evident. There were certainly midwives who helped in birthing, but

here there are three medical assistants with what might be assumed a more global medical knowledge.

In a third passage, Monseigneur Gauvain reveals his talent as a healer, now by using plants:

Mais monseigneur Gauvain savait mieux que personne guérir une blessure. Il aperçoit dans une haie une herbe très efficace pour calmer la douleur d'une blessure, et il va la cueillir. Ayant cueilli l'herbe, il continue sa route jusqu'à ce qu'il retrouve la jeune fille sous le chêne, en proie à ses lamentations. Elle lui a dit aussitôt:

'Ecoutez-moi, mon doux seigneur, je crois bien que le chevalier que voici est mort, car il n'entend ni ne comprend plus rien.'

Monseigneur Gauvain met pied à terre, il trouve que le chevalier avait un pouls très rapide et que ses joues et ses lèvres n'étaient pas vraiment froides.

'Jeune fille, fait-il, ce chevalier est vivant, soyez-en toute certaine. Il a bon pouls et il respire bien. Et s'il n'a pas reçu de plaie mortelle, je lui apporte une herbe qui, je crois, lui sera d'un grand secours et qui allègera en partie la douleur de ses plaies, sitôt qu'il la sentira sur lui, car on ne connaît d'herbe meilleure à mettre sur une plaie. D'après les livres, elle a une si grande vertu que si on la plaçait sur l'écorce d'un arbre atteint de maladie, mais non entièrement desséché, la racine reprendrait et l'arbre saurait encore se couvrir de feuilles et de fleurs. Votre ami, ma demoiselle, n'aurait plus à craindre de mourir, si on lui appliquait de cette herbe sur les plaies, en l'y attachant bien. Mais il faudrait pour faire un bandage, avoir une guimpe fine.'

(141, 142)

Monseigneur Gauvain is quite expert in medicine. It is interesting to see the rather sophisticated approach to medicine in the medieval ages. Monseigneur Gauvain proceeds in a very scientific manner. Moreover, he is quite familiar with the symptoms of the patient when he examines him. He deduces that the solution that keeps the trees healthy according to the books also has some healing value for humans.

It is clear that Chrétien de Troyes was well instructed in the practice of medicine of his days. He furnishes an almost modern portrait of the doctors and their assistants.

Le chevalier de la charrette (Lancelot): the miraculous unguent

As for Guigemar in the lais of Marie de France, one finds the character of l'Amour who makes the lover suffer as he looks for perfect and reciprocal love. This type of wound is healed only at the hand of the well-loved one. In the scenes where the knight falls madly in love with the maiden, Chrétien writes:

Amour bien souvent lui rouvre
La plaie que cette déesse lui a infligée.
Il n'applique aucun emplâtre sur sa blessure
Dans le but de la guérir,
Car le Chevalier ne désire ni ne veut
Recourir à remède ni à médecin,
A moins que sa plaie n'empire;
Mais il y a une dame qu'il consulterait volontiers.
(lines 1348-1355)

One suffers because of love but love is also the best medicine.

In this novel there are also some scenes that evoke events in *Erec et Enide* such as the application of a magic ointment:

Vous avez besoin de repos
Et de soins pour vos blessures
Pour en amener la guérison.
De l'onguent aux trois Maries
Vous donnerai-je, ou d'un remède encore meilleur
Si on peut en trouver, car je désire vivement
Votre confort et votre guérison.
(lines 3371-3377)

This unguent has a miraculous quality and is reminiscent of the intercession of the saints in healings. In her book, *The Art of Healing*, Marcia Kupfer speaks on this theme. There is an illustration of a pilgrim who offers a coin in recompense for the help of a saint. The miraculous ointments of the saints are in part based on the ointment offered to Christ by

Mary Magdalene. Along with the application of the unguent there are also some prayers that are said to implore the aid of the divine doctor.

One can see in these passages examined above that medieval medicine was based on nature, but in a sophisticated way. Plants, and notably flowers and gardens were important for well-being and the joy of the spirit. Herbs were cultivated for their natural powers in curing the body. Folkloric methods such as eating well and getting adequate rest were important in the healing process. Other scientific methods required a more profound knowledge of medicine, as it is practised in modern times, methods that were learned at centers such as Salerno. Finally, unguents, whether those of fairies or those miraculous ointments distributed by holy men, were efficacious in curing many wounds. French medieval literature offers many examples of the art of healing and offers a good idea of how medicine was practised in that era.

The troubadours, the trouvères and the trobaritz: sicknesses of the heart

On considering sicknesses of the heart a special case is found of love as a type of balm that nourishes in the poetry of the troubadours. The troubadours wrote in the tradition of courtly literature. Frederick Goldin observes in *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères* that, “The troubadours were poets and composers who wrote their songs for courtly audiences throughout the southern part of France, beginning in the eleventh century. These lyrics, though they benefitted much from literary tradition, had no real antecedents, for they were composed for an audience that had never existed before, a courtly society with the leisure to place a great value on refinement, and eager to pay for the depiction of its own image.” (p. ix). Goldin continues by saying that while the troubadours wrote in Provençal, the poets that followed them wrote on the same themes in other languages. The trouvères of northern France imitated them, writing in French. (p. ix) Robert Briffault in the chapter on “Moorish Origin” (*The Troubadours*) points out the resemblance between their poetry and Arabic forms like the *zajal* and the *murabbá*. These forms were used to express very romantic feelings. (44,45)

The great majority of the poems of the troubadours and the trouvères have to do with the suffering occasioned by unrequited love. The poet comments on the pain and the anxiety of love while mentioning at the same time the sublime joys which are possible because of it. In these lines drawn from the poetry of Bernart de Ventadorn, one finds the role played by love as a remedy for the suffering of the lover:

Aquest' amors me fer tan gen
al cor d'una dousa sabor:
cen vetz mor lo jorn de dolor

e reviu de joi autras cen,
Ben es mos mals de bel semblan,
que mais val mos mals qu'autre bes;
e pois mos mals aitan bos m'es,
bos er lo bes apres l'afan. (126)

The poet always has hope, and this hope gives him courage. He prefers to love, even if he must suffer, for he thinks that this will lead to the culmination of his desires, an idea which brings him an immense joy. One also reads in Guiraut Riquier (c. 1230-1292):

Be.m degra de chantar tener,
quar a chan coven alegriers;
e mi destrenh tant cossiriers
que.m fa de totas partz doler
remembran mon greu temps passat,
es gardan lo prezent forsat
e cossiran l'avenidor
que per totz ai razon que plor.
(324)

The poet finds himself in a state of depression because of the indifference of his lady.

There are also some lines that speak of the suffering of the lover who knows that his love is in vain without the response of the beloved. In the poetry of Jaufré Rudel (fl. mid-twelfth century) the following is found:

Amors de terra lonhdana,
pers vos totz lo cors mi dol;
einoin puesc trobar mezina
si non au vostre reclam
ab atraich d'amor doussana
dinz vergier o sotz cortina
ab dezirada companha.
(102)

The same sentiment is present in the verse of Giraut de Bornell (fl. 1165 – après 1211), but he insists that it is the hope of receiving the love of his lady that is the only thing that brings life to his soul:

Bona domna, lo vost'aneus
que.m donetz, me fai gran socors;
qu'en lui refranhi mas dolors,
e can lo remir, sui plus leus
c'us estorneus
e sui per vos aissi auzartz
que no tem que lansa ni dartz
me tenha dan m'acers ni fers,
(190-192)

The poet considers himself, “plus leus/ c'us estorneus,” that is to say that love brings him well being and lightness of spirit. He is not depressed because the hope that fills him when he sees the ring belonging to his lady, a token of her love, brightens his spirit.

Gace Brulé (fl. 1180-1213) is another author that writes of the emotional malaise that follows after the rejection of his lady. This trouvère reveals that:

Ire d'amors qui en mon cuer reper
ne mi let tant que de chanter me tiengne.
Grant merveille est se chançon en puis trete,
ne je ne sai don l'acheson me viengne,
car li desirs et la grant volentez,
dont je sui si pensis et esgarez,
m'ont si mené, ce vos puis je bien dire,
qu'a paine sai que noistre joie d'ire.
(396)

In the lines that follow, Gace Brulé explains that he has hope of winning his lady, and this hope gives him courage. The imagined joy of receiving the love of his lady is enough to comfort the poet's heart, who is lovesick, in English terminology.

The lover suffers from the loss of his lady's love and he falls in the abyss of despair in the following lines of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (b. 1155-1160; fl. 1180s-1205):

No m'agrad' iverns ni pascors
ni clars temps ni fuoills de garrics,
car mos enans mi par destrics
e totz mos majer gauz dolors,
e son maltrag tuit miei lezer
e desesperat miei esper;
e siim sol amors e dompneis
tener gai plus que l'aigail peis!
E pois d'amor me sui partitz
cum hom issillatz e faiditz,
tot' outra vidaim sembla mortz
e totz autre jois desconortz. (268)

The poet must live with a sense of desolation and of despair, a spiritual malaise. The only way in which he may be cured is by requited love, and the poet admits that he has lost all hope of that.

There is at least one poem where the poet finds the love that he seeks. The trouvère Blondel de Nesle (second half twelfth century) says that:

Chanter m'estuet, quar joie ai recouree,
qui me soloit foïr et esloignier;
ire et douleur ai maint jour comperee,
bien est maiz tans, que la doie laissier,
quar la bele, cui lonc tens ai amee,
qui de s'amour me soloit desfier,
nouvelement s'est a moi acordee.
or me voudra douner et otroier
sa fine amour, que tant ai desirree,
qui me faisoit jour penser, nuit veillier.
(368)

. A song that stands out because of its mention of a doctor that can cure the poet who suffers the maladies occasioned by love was written by Guillaume IX, de Poitou, the first of the troubadours to compose verses. He comments that:

Malautz soy e tremi murir,
e ren no sai mas quan n'aug dir;
metge querrai al mieu albir,
e non sai tau;
bos metges es qui im pot guerir,
mas non, si amau. (Goldin, 24)

For the troubadours and the trouvères love is the medicine that leads to emotional health, as for Jean de Meun in *Le Roman de la rose*. The well being or the joy that they seek is a key concept and L. T. Topsfield in *Troubadours and Love* describes in these words the quality that joy has for the troubadours:

In their love lyrics Guilhem IX and Jaufre Rudel are concerned primarily with the quest for *Jois*. *Amors* is a phenomenon which can be sensed, or imagined, or aspired to as a source of *Jois*, or of inspiration or goodness. If through *Amors* they discover a person or an ideal who may reveal *Jois* to them, they are concerned with the quality of this *Jois* and they hope that it may be a supreme and lasting happiness, which will also bestow advantages, goodness and reassurance. (67)

The songs of the troubadours present a study of the sentiments of men who love without receiving the affection they are looking for. The majority of the troubadours were men, but there were also some women who wrote in the same tradition, the trobairitz. Among the trobairitz is found Castelloza (née c.1200) and these lines that describe the instance of a woman who courts an elusive male:

Tot' autr' amor teing a nien,
e sapchatz ben que mais jois noim soste
mas lo vostre que m'alegr' e.m reve,
on mais en sent d'afan e de destric;
(120)

The joy that the woman experiences along with the hope of possessing the lover acts as a miraculous medicine that cures her depressed state. Joy brings her happiness and well being.

Another trobairitz, an anonymous poet, describes the depressed state in which she finds herself because of the indifference of the desired love:

Si.m fos grazitz mos chanz ieu m'esforzera
e dera.m gaug e deportz e solatz,
mas aissi.m sui a non-chaler gitatz...

Ailas! Cum muor quan mi membra cum era
gais e joves, alegres, envesatz!
e quan m'albir qu'ieu sui de joi loignatz,
per pauc mos cors del tot no.s desespera;
(156)

The trobairitz realizes that the joy is not of lasting quality and she falls into a depressed state.

The troubadours, the trouvères and the trobairitz have left us a beautiful collection of poetry that expresses the most profound sentiments of the human heart concerning love, and in particular, unrequited love. Anxiety and depression follow the rejection or the indifference of the beloved. The hope of winning this love brightens the soul of the poet. Only the love of the fair lady (or of the man for the trobairitz) can cure heartsickness. Love is a sweet medicine, a concept present also in works such as *Le Roman de la rose*. The emotions and the mind and spirit suffer from a loss or an absence

of love. Hope shows itself to be a temporary remedy for this suffering, something that allows the poet to continue to love without a response from the beloved. Written almost a thousand years before modern times, these beautiful poems are still true and inspiring.

Le jeu de la feuillée and La Condamnation de Banquet: Two medieval plays that examine themes touching upon health

A poet who continued the tradition of the trouvères was Adam de La Halle (le Bossu – 1275-80) who was also a musician according to Paul Zumthor. (280) Zumthor remarks that, “Les inspirations les plus diverses se rencontrent dans son oeuvre, mais y sont polarisées par des éléments tirés de la tradition lyrique courtoise, dont Adam est le dernier représentant valable.” (280)

One of the works of Adam is the comic play *Le jeu de la feuillée* (1262), described by Zumthor as, “une succession complexe de scènes sans grand lien mutuel, tour à tour satiriques, burlesques, féeriques, d’une extrême vivacité de ton et farcies de refrains chantés.” (281) In the jeu there is the character of the doctor, who promises Maître Henri that he can cure him from a moral malaise. When Maître Henri tells Adam that he cannot give him the money that he needs in order to go to live in Paris, the doctor adds:

Votre mal s’appelle avarice.
S’il vous plaît que je vous guérisse,
Avouez-le tranquillement.
Je connais plus d’un traitement.
J’ai des gens là-haut et là-bas
Souffrant de ce mal dans Arras,
Ils n’espèrent nul réconfort.
(8,9)

Although the doctor swears that he can find the remedy he admits that he knows a lot of people who cannot seem to escape the sickness. It is interesting to find this reference to a moral sickness, which is a sickness of the spirit, because it reinforces the knowledge not

only of medicine for the body but also for the spiritual and psychological side of the human being, something which might be assumed to be a more modern understanding of medicine.

Another medieval play that addresses the question of sickness, and here the sickness of the body, is *La Condamnation de Banquet*, of which Nicole de la Chesnaye (1507) is the author. It is a *moralité*, and G. Gassies des Brulies in *Anthologie du théâtre français du moyen age* observes that:

Les premières ont la prétention de donner un enseignement à l'aide de personnages allégoriques, comme ceux qui figuraient dans *le Roman de la Rose*, mais les moralités ne sont pas toujours strictement morales, au sens où nous l'entendrions aujourd'hui. Celle que nous donnons ici, et qui est la plus célèbre de toutes, a pour objet de nous mettre en garde contre les excès de table. Aussi a-t-on cru longtemps qu'elle était l'oeuvre d'un médecin, ce qui paraît inexact, comme nous le verrons. (341)

Gassies explains that research indicates that the author of the play was “plutôt un juriconsulte.” On this matter, Koopmans and Verhuyck explain that there was some confusion about the authorship of the work, as there were two men named Nicolas de La Chesnaye, a father and son. They conclude that the work came from the hand of Nicolas father, who was an advisor to several kings, but also a “maître d’hôtel.” These critics observe that the father therefore, “connaissait donc la cuisine et le tribunal.” (27)

La Condamnation de Banquet offers the lesson to its audience that there is a correct way to have meals that leads to the health of the body:

Nous voulons faire le procès
De Banquet et de Gourmandise,
Condamner les fâcheux excès
De quiconque boit et se grise,

Mange trop de chair et de pain
Et consomme plus qu'il n'a faim.
En revanche sera vanté
Le bienfait de sobriété,
Qui rend l'homme léger et sain.
Médecine ne défend pas
Que l'on dise suffisamment,
Car un raisonnable repas
Ne vous fatigue nullement.
Mais il faut souper sobrement,
Aussi bien riche qu'indigent,
Sans banqueter aucunement,
Car Banquet fait périr les gens;
Tempérants nous voulons vous rendre;
Ecoutez-nous et parlez bas.

(346-7)

There follows a dialogue between several sicknesses who are allegorically represented, characters such as apoplexy, paralysis, pleuresy, colic, quincy, dropsy, jaundice, gravel, gout and epilepsy. It is surprising to see the rather sophisticated level of knowledge of each of these sicknesses. Each character speaks of its effects on the body and advises the audience that in health matters it is necessary to have moderation. Quincy, for example, exclaims:

Sachez que plusieurs maux je forge,
Moi, Esquinancie l'inhumaine,
Car je prends les gens par la gorge
Et jusqu'au tombeau je les mène!
Au boire, au manger, à l'haleine
Tout chemin je clos et je bouche,
Et fais mourir de mort vilaine
Ceux qui font les excès de bouche.

(360-1)

The guests at the banquet continue to eat and to drink to excess. A doctor appears on the scene and advises them, saying:

O gens pleins de mondanité,

Voulant vous remplir à foison,
Délaissez cette vanité
Et gouvernez-vous par raison!
Car pour vivre longue saison
Et passer les jours sainement,
Soit aux champs soit à la maison.
Il n'est que vivre sobrement.
(392)

De la Chesnaye emphasizes the importance of moderation for the health and for good living, a precept also followed by many in the classical Greece of Plato.

*Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain and healings for the body and the heart and Cligès
and the false sickness*

Turning again to the works of Chrétien de Troyes, one finds that sicknesses are mentioned in two of his other romances, *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion* and *Cligès*.

Beginning with *Yvain*, it may be observed that Chrétien enters into a game that is rather frequent in medieval literature, that is, love as a kind of sickness that is difficult to cure.

The knight, Yvain, enters into combat with an adversary whom he conquers. The wife of this adversary loses her husband, but Chrétien writes that:

Il en garde le souvenir cuisant en lui-même, mais
l'amour qui l'a envahi et le maîtrise adoucit de son miel cette
amertume. Son ennemie emporte son coeur: il aime la créature
qui le hait. La dame, à son insu, est vengée de la mort de son
mari et bien mieux qu'elle n'eût pu le faire, puisque l'Amour
s'en est chargé, l'entremise des yeux. Cette atteinte est plus
redoutable que coup de lance ou d'épée: un coup d'épée se
guérit vite, quand le médecin y met ses soins et sa peine,
mais la plaie d'Amour empire d'autant plus que le médecin
est plus proche.

(68)

Love brings with it pain, above all if it is unrequited love. This type of love wounds profoundly and it is more difficult to heal than any bodily sicknesses. The lady wants to avenge herself of Yvain for the death of her husband and thus rejecting the amorous advances of Yvain is a sweet vengeance, as he is madly in love with her.

Finally Laudine grants a marriage with Yvain. After the wedding Yvain has to leave but he says to Laudine:

Ma très chère dame, vous qui êtes mon coeur et mon âme, mon
bien, ma joie et ma santé, promettez-moi une chose pour votre
honneur et pour le mien. (85)

One sees here the joy and the health that follow when love is given and received as it should be, a state of mind that leads to happiness.

A little later in the narrative Yvain is at the court of King Arthur and he receives word from his new wife. She is angry with him because he had promised to return in one year's time but he has not kept his promise. Yvain becomes crazed, a sickness of the mind. A lady and two young girls find him in the forest. They exclaim:

Ne soyez pas en souci; si messire Yvain ne s'enfuit, je
crois qu'avec l'aide de Dieu nous lui ôterons de la tête cette
démence. Mais il faut aller vite en besogne. La savante
fée Morgue m'a donné, il m'en souvient, un onguent
fameux à qui, m'a-t-elle dit, nulle rage de tête ne résiste.
(92)

A reference is found here to the miraculous unguent of the fairy Morgue, sister of King Arthur, an ointment used in *Erec et Enide* to cure Erec.

The text continues:

La dame ouvrit un écrin, en tira une boîte et la remit
à la demoiselle, en la priant de ne pas prodiguer l'onguent, d'en
frotter seulement les tempes et le front, et de garder précieusement
le reste. Elle la chargea encore d'une robe de vair et d'un manteau
de soie teinte. (92)

The young girl follows the directions of the lady and, "Elle lui frotta les tempes, le front et tout le corps jusqu'aux orteils, si bien que le rage et la mélancolie lui sortirent du cerveau." (93) The treatment given resembles that of a modern spa or of aromatherapy that soothes the soul by means of an exterior body treatment. In *The Spa Encyclopedia* one finds the following words on aromatherapy:

Aromatherapy, or the science of using essential oils of

flowers and plants for their therapeutic effect, induces healing and well-being. Essential oils can be inhaled or added to lotions during facials, treatments, and massages, and massaged into the skin. (15)

The psychological world has a need for these remedies, and the application of a miraculous ointment proved efficacious in curing this sickness, “invisible” in physical terms. Many nowadays criticize psychological medicines and opt for more “natural” ways to heal spiritual and mental malaise. The unguent of Morgue is considered to be something natural that has a magical quality. But it can also be said that this substance possesses scientific characteristics that are not very well recognized. They are called “magical” only because their effects cannot be logically explained. At any rate, this cure resembles the homeopathic remedies of today which are popular.

Alongside these methods with their folkloric quality, there is a use of more “advanced” medicine in the adventure of Yvain and the lion that accompanied him. They are both wounded in a battle and they take shelter in a house that opens its doors to them. Chrétien writes of the head of the household and his family that:

Ils l'accueillirent avec empressement. Ils le menèrent dans une chambre tranquille, et par reconnaissance logèrent le lion avec lui. Deux pucelles, filles du seigneur, savantes en chirurgie, s'employèrent à le soigner de leur mieux. Messire Yvain et son lion séjournèrent là, je ne sais combien de jours, jusqu'à ce qu'ils fussent guéris tous deux. (115, 116)

Here the art of surgery is mentioned, and even women who practise it are alluded to. The daughters of the man are versed in the technicalities of this kind of healing. This indicates a more modern approach, closer to the medicine of later times.

This degree of sophistication in curing the wounded is also found after another battle between Yvain and Gauvain later in the text. Chrétien relates that:

Il fallut mener les chevaliers en infirmerie et en chambre de malade, car ils avaient besoin de médecin et d'onguent. Le roi fit mander un savant chirurgien qui mit tous ses soins à les guérir, et ferma et assainit leurs plaies au mieux et au plus tôt qu'il put. (143)

This surgeon, a man, works to heal the knights. It has already been explained that with the founding of the medical school at Salerno, the science of surgery had become well developed. Medieval medicine was a mixture of folkloric methods alongside a “scientific” and “technical” medicine that might be considered more modern. It is curious that in our days people often search out folkloric or “natural” methods of healing because they are seen as preferable to medicine as it is practised in many hospitals. In the medieval era doctors such as surgeons were state-of-the-art and one had great confidence in scientific medicine. Chrétien displays a sophisticated familiarity with the methods available to cure the sicknesses found in the medieval world.

One thing remains to be said concerning *Yvain*. Chrétien comments on the preparations necessary to heal the soul of the husband of Laudine, killed by Yvain at the beginning of the book. Chrétien writes that:

L'eau bénite, la croix et les cierges allaient devant
avec les dames d'un couvent, puis venaient les
textes et les encensoirs, et les clerks qui donnent
l'absoute à l'âme infortunée. (65)

The priest enters the role of the doctor who prepares the soul of the deceased with his rites and his unguents that revive the dead man in spiritual terms.

Chrétien addresses themes associated with sicknesses of the body and the mind in his novel *Cligès* which dates from the year 1176. Alexandre, who goes to the court of King Arthur to be dubbed a knight falls madly in love with Sordeamors, the niece of Arthur and the sister of Gauvain. It is for him an unrequited love. He reflects that:

Eh quoi? Je cacherai ce dont je souffre
sans oser, dans mes souffrances,
chercher de l'aide et du secours?
c'est être fou que d'être atteint de maladie
sans chercher à recouvrer la santé.
s'il est un lieu où la trouver...
(lines 633-639)

Je sens que mon mal est si grave
que jamais je n'en aurai guérison
par remède ni par breuvage,
ni par herbe ni par racine.
Tout mal ne trouve son remède,
le mien est si enraciné
qu'il ne peut pas être soigné.
(lines 642-648)

Alexandre explains that l'Amour:

m'a si grièvement blessé
qu'il m'a tiré sa flèche en plein coeur,
et il ne l'a toujours pas retirée.
(lines 688-690)

But he is seeking the only cure there is, the love of his lady:

Je ne cherche pas à ce que le mal me quitte,
je préfère qu'il me tienne ainsi toujours
que de voir la santé me revenir
d'un autre lieu que de celui
d'où m'est venue la maladie."
(lines 864-868)

But love does not take Alexandre as his only victim. In the romance the central character is Cligès, the son of Alexandre and Sordeamors, and he suffers because of love. He loves beyond all question the beautiful Fénice and like a true romantic he complains, “De la blessure que me fit Amour pour vous,/ je ne pense jamais guérir,/ non plus que la mer ne saurait tarir.” (lines 5192-94) He exaggerates his suffering, which is nevertheless profound.

Fénice is promised in marriage to an important man, but she falls in love with Cligès and a stratagem is invented to escape the unwanted marriage. She drinks a liquid that her servant, Thessala, gives her and this produces a false state of death:

À ce qu’aucun médecin ne remarque rien, elle ne veut ni manger
ni boire pour mieux abuser l’empereur, au point qu’elle devient
pâle et livide. (lines 5640-5643)

This concept of the false death is a stratagem that has not been examined up until this point in the present work. Chrétien describes it at the end of the book. In order to show that it is truly state of the art, Chrétien adds that:

comme il est écrit dans le livre,
sont arrivés trois médecins
d’un très grand âge, venus de Salerne
où ils avaient longtemps vécu. (lines 5736-39)

The physicians are among the most competent of the time. They examine the body of Fénice and decide to subject her to torture so as to confirm that she is in fact dead. These tortures bring about the real death of Fénice. Thessala prepares her for a second burial:

Mais voici Thessala qui apporte
un onguent extrêmement précieux

dont elle enduit avec douceur
le corps et les plaies de la jeune femme.
(lines 5984-87)

But it is not Fénice's last moment as Thessala is able to cure her. It is also in the story the first days of spring and the new leaves welcome the promise of love.:

Au renouveau de la belle saison,
quand fleurs et feuilles sortent des arbres,
et que les oiseaux font fête
en s'égayant dans leur latin,
il advint qu'un matin Fénice
entendit chanter le rossignol.
Un bras autour de la taille, l'autre autour du cou,
Cligès l'enlaçait avec douceur
(lines 6268-6275)

The importance of nature for healing the body and comforting the soul again stands out.

With *Cligès* Chrétien introduces the idea of the false sickness that imitates death which is found in other literary texts such as *Romeo and Juliet*. The project risks ending in disaster but Fénice is resuscitated with the help of Thessala. One does not know whether or not in reality the doctors would have acted in such a cruel manner to examine their patient, and this is perhaps an extreme and bizarre method that Chrétien exaggerates so as to bring out a dramatic element. In any case he creates a suspenseful story in which sickness and ways of healing this sickness play an important part.

La Chanson de Roland: Faith as salvation and healing

La Chanson de Roland, the great epic poem of French literature, has two notable moments where the poet speaks of healing. In lines 2169-2175 one reads:

A l'arcevesque Turpin alat aider:
Sun elme ad or li deslaçat del chef,
Si li tolit le blanc osberc leger,
E sun blialt li ad tut detrenchét,
En ses granz plaies les pans li ad butét;
Cuntre sun piz puis si l'ad embracét,
Sur l'erbe verte puis l'at süef culchét.

Roland takes care of the Archbishop Turpin who has been wounded on the battlefield. He helps him in a simple way; the cares that he takes are to dress his wounds and to stretch him out on the grass where he can rest, as on a bed. Roland is a noble leader who tries to save the lives of his men.

Perhaps the most notable passage in the text is found at the beginning of the work where the French poet writes the words that the emperor, Charles, pronounces about King Marsilie:

Mais il me mandet que en France m'en alge:
Il me sivrat ad Ais, a mun estage,
Si recevrat la nostre lei plus salve;
Chrestiens ert, de mei tendrat ses marches.
Mais je ne sai quels en est sis curages.
(lines 187-191)

“La nostre” is a reference to the Christian faith, which saves the soul and leads to the health of the heart and spirit. The poet does not mention explicitly the additional power of faith to heal the maladies of the body, but this can be easily deduced. With the Crusades Europe saw the attempt to promulgate the Christian faith with the belief that it would lead all to salvation. The Christian sacraments were instruments of God’s blessings on his

people and led to spiritual life and the health of the body. Christians were encouraged as well to embrace the precepts of the Church whole heartedly. Non-Christians were urged to seek a transforming conversion, albeit with a superabundance of zeal. By those with sincere hearts the Christian faith was seen as the source for all blessings, even though the Crusades are today viewed by many as an abuse of power in the name of God.

***Healings through the intercession of the saints and miraculous
medicine: Medieval French theater and the Treize Miracles de Notre-Dame***

The theme that faith in God can have effects on the sicknesses of the body is found in some plays from the religious theater of medieval France. In *Le Théâtre religieux en langue française jusqu'à la fin du XIVe siècle* Alfred Jeanroy describes the case of Saint Pantaléon: the young Pantaléon, son of an official named Eustore, at the age of fifteen years goes to live in the house of Morin, who must teach him medicine in seven years. He meets a priest named Hermolaüs, who instructs him in the Christian religion and assures him that the sign of the cross will cure all of his sicknesses. (53)

Jeanroy also explains the cures of Saint Valentin:

Le fils de Chalon est torturé par un mal qui a contracté ses membres et qui résiste à tous les remèdes. On apprend au malheureux père qu'il y a dans le pays de Nervie un saint homme, nommé Valentin, qui guérit toutes les maladies. Le quatrième et le cinquième écolier vont le guérir. Sur un ordre de Jésus, transmis par la Vierge, il les accompagne à Rome; mais, mis en présence du malade, il ne consent à le soigner que si toute la maison de Chalon se convertit. Au long exposé que lui fait Valentin, le sage répond qu'il est prêt à croire si son fils guérit. Il suffit à Valentin de se mettre en prières et d'imposer les mains à l'enfant pour le rendre «sain comme pomme.» (55)

These miraculous occurrences indicate that the people who heal are instruments of the Divine. All healing is produced because of the interaction of God who works through the men and the women who know the secrets of nature, a knowledge given to them in order to provide for His creatures. These plays give us the occasion to reflect on the greatness of God and of His love for human beings.

In considering the importance of the accounts of miraculous cures, and of the fact that the saints fill the role of intermediary in many stories, one must include the cures attributed to Saint Mary. Among the collections of these miracles is *Treize Miracles de Notre-Dame* published by Pierre Kunstmann, a collection of tales wherein the Virgin Mary comes to the aid of the needy. In the edition studied here there are three stories that center on physical cures.

The first physical cure is found in miracle VI. Kunstmann explains:

Un vieilleur noble, talentueux et beau, et de surcroît dévot à la Vierge, se rendait souvent en Angleterre pour jouer notamment à la cour du roi Richard, qui l'appréciait fort; il revenait ensuite en France auprès du roi Philippe, qui le connaissait depuis l'enfance. Advint un jour que notre vieilleur médit du roi d'Angleterre, lequel se vengea en lui faisant trancher la langue et en le condamnant au bannissement. L'artiste, muet, entra en religion. Un samedi, Notre-Dame lui greffa une langue plus belle que celle qu'on lui avait ôtée. Et le moine, rétabli dans son intégrité, d'ameuter aussitôt tout le couvent. Le roi de France le convoqua pour apprendre de sa bouche la vérité, alors que Richard, ayant appris le miracle, ne chercha pas de réconciliation. Le vieilleur mourut en paix dans son ordre. (10)

The Virgin Mary is generous to those who believe in the power of God. To reward the faith of the monk she comes to his aid, saving him from the anger of the king. In the text one finds the following verses that express the gratitude of the monk who praises her:

Et li moines, qui fu gariz,
Cria tantot a haute voiz:
"Sainte Marie! Voire croiz!
Veez, bones genz, acoutez!"
Li couvanz fu tot asamblez
Et tuit a haute voiz chanterent
De Nostre Dame et la loerent,

Et cil parla mioz que devant,
Se fu ariere et avant.
(lines 110-118)

Faith is the instrument of healing. Devotion to the holy lady saves the monk from the loss of his tongue, a physical cure.

In miracle VIII there are three cures. The first is the case of a woman who is liberal with her sexuality. She is inflicted with a malady that ravages her face. She prays to Mary, who touched by the sincerity of the woman, heals her :

Et tant c'un samadi assoir
D'une grant feste Nostre Dame,
Einsi comme son cors et s'arme
Monta es ciex an paradis,
A la charriere fu avis,
S'ele se peust de rien aidier,
Ourer alast an ce moustier
Ou les vespres ooit sonner.
Alors se prit a demanter
Et dit: "Roïne glorieuse,
Tres douce amie glorieuse,
Quar regardez ceste chetive
Que miox vaudroit morte que vive.
Dame, je ne vos puis servir:
Cist maus me tient jusqu'au morir.
(lines 38-52)

The woman expresses her regret at not being able to serve Mary because of the sickness.

In this miracle, the body of the woman is made entirely new, and her soul is also fortified.

Healing takes place on two levels. There is a physical cure, of the body, as well as a moral and spiritual healing of the soul. The Virgin Mary comes to help those who implore her.

The second miracle tells of the healings effected by means of a denier that the sick touch. The poet explains:

“Cist deniers, il atoicha
La ou Nostre Dame toicha.
Je toichera, commant qu’il aille,
Seur ma douleur, si puet s’en alle.”
(lines 171-174)

The healing is caused by means of a holy object that Mary has blessed, a type of relic that was in physical contact with the saint. All of these relics have their power to heal only with the authorization of God, and it must be remembered that they are not magical charms.

The third miracle in this group tells the story of a mother with a child who is blind. After attending mass, a denier is applied to the eyes of the child, restoring his sight. A combination of sincere prayer and the presence of the sanctified object, both of which evidence the faith of the mother, is the catalyst for divine aid:

Messe chanta devotement,
Après la messe a l’anfant vint
Et lo denier a sa maint tint
Et si li mit sor la figure
Ou li oel prenent lor droiture.
(lines 202-206)

The townspeople recognize the power of God and they adore him as the true power with the intercession of his mother, the Virgin Mary. One sees once more the double healing, that of the body and the soul.

The third miracle that mentions a physical cure is miracle XIII. It consists in the healing of an amputated foot, a motif found in other manuscripts of the era. Once again

the healing comes as the answer to sincere prayers. Perhaps the true miracle, as has been seen in the aforementioned miracles, is having a faith that is so intense. This miracle concludes that:

La mere Deu, la debonere,
Que tex cortoisie fet fere
N'oncques nul jor ne se recroit.
Il est divés qui ce ne croit;
Qui ne la croit ou ne querra
Ja paradis ne conquerra
Ne nus ne puet estre sauvez
Qui ce ne croit que Dex fut nez
De la Virge, pucele monde
Qui nos conduit parmi ce monde
(lines 75-84)

God looks for the sincere conversion of all men, the healing of the soul. All hearts that come to Him receive of His bounty.

The miracles examined here illustrate the role of faith in healing, whether it is physical healing or spiritual in nature. It is true that for Christians and spiritual men God has the power to help his creatures by using mystical means as well as through the use of natural remedies or of doctors and their medicines. God works with nature as a source of well being for all of His creatures.

*Medieval medical treatises: Scientific content
in a literary form*

One further topic remains to be considered here, that of medical treatises written during the medieval era, and more specifically, the treatises written in French. In order to understand the importance of plants in medieval medicine one should consult the excellent essay of Anne Van Arsdall, “Reading Medieval Medical Texts With an Open Mind” in the book *Textual Healing*. Van Arsdall comments that:

Indeed, the medical tradition revealed in medieval texts is closely related to healing practices that exist today outside the Western mainstream. In addition, many of the plants found in medieval texts are the basis of modern pharmaceuticals, such as Valerian for valium and foxglove for digitalis. In medieval times, the plant world was seen as a vast storehouse of food and drugs, there to use if one mastered the secrets, and the ancient and medieval medical remedy books based on plants reveal how that world was used to the fullest. (16)

Van Arsdall also remarks that many medieval medical treatises seem to be a short formula expressed in the oral tradition, the masters communicating the secrets of nature to their apprentices. (18,19) She indicates also that, “The role of faith and ritual in healing – what today calls holistic medicine – is an important consideration, more important than merely as an aside in a paper about medieval medicine.” (23) She adds that the faith realm was important for cures and that while modern science does not always take it seriously, among the sick “who would turn down a prayer on their behalf?” (24)

Thus it can be seen that medical tracts in the medieval era were not to be read as highly technical documents full of chemical data but rather were understandable by a wider public than the scientific journals of today. They may almost be read as works of literature. They combined state-of-the-art medical knowledge with folk remedies and faith based cures. Medieval medical treatises may be considered a genre in themselves. They are indicative of the medieval vision of medicine as a discipline closely interwoven with various related fields, exemplifying a myriad of dimensions. The medical treatises are, in a word, colorful. They capture the understanding of and the solutions to medical problems that when examined more closely reveal an underlying philosophy that is broad based and perhaps even in a sense, poetic. Like an attractive snapshot they capture the medieval world of their time and still retain a beauty, a freshness and a fascination for us today.

Concluding remarks

Medieval medicine was a mixture of new “scientific” methods similar to our modern methods, alongside folkloric remedies and procedures that were developed in accord with nature, for example the use of extracts from plants, herbs and flowers. All of these methods and medicines were used to heal the human body. In order to heal the minds and the hearts that suffered from depression or from unrequited love, gardens played a role that stands out, and flowers comforted negative sentiments and led to a state of joy and well being. In medieval French literature there is a great variety of passages that take as their subject the pain or the sickness that is cured by means of scientific, to express it thus, or folkloric and homeopathic treatments. The treatments are brought about through the healing power of God, acting by means of natural agents such as plants and human healers. As has been seen, medieval French literature provides textual evidence of medical practices during the medieval epoch. Because there was no specific genre that dealt with a wide variety of medical topics, medical knowledge lies expressed in literary works, a snapshot of the medicine of that era.

In these references to medicine and healing, whether of body, mind, heart or soul, one may make the comparison between medicine of our day, “scientific” so to speak, and a medicine that at first glance seems rather primitive or “quaint.” In several works such as in *Le roman de Perceval* and *Yvain* there are references to surgery, which seems to have

been something state-of-the-art, taught at the great medical schools such as those of Salerno and Padua. But along with this rather advanced medicine, there existed other more folkloric methods of healing.

Plants played a very important role in the medieval world. Homeopathic beverages served to heal sicknesses of the body and flowers, for example in *Le roman de la rose* and *Les Deus Amanz* and also *Eliduc* (les *Lais* de Marie de France), soothed depressed spirits. Gardens were a place of repose and they furnished medications for common sicknesses. Good nutrition was very important for avoiding many evils and to fortify the constitution as was seen in stories like *Erec et Enide* and the play, *La Condamnation de Banquet*.

Many maladies found their cure also in prayers and miracles. Medieval physicians recognized the emotional and spiritual side of their patients. These cures appear in such works as *Le chevalier de la charrette*, *Treize miracles de Notre-Dame* and French medieval theater which includes plays on the intercession of saints like Pantaléon. Also present was the use of magical ointments, for example in *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*.

All of these aspects of medieval medicine found their expression in the literary texts of the time. Medieval *romans* often include characters who suffer from emotional or physical maladies. Love often brings with it pain, above all when it is unrequited as the verses of the troubadours and trouvères illustrate. The solutions used as remedies have a certain quaint and folkloric quality. They often resemble modern and natural methods of comforting the body and the heart, thus restoring health and well being without tablets and other accoutrements of so-called “scientific” and advanced modern medicine.

Reading excerpts from these medieval texts, one enters a more rustic world, one that is close to nature. The methods used to heal have a refreshing simplicity and charm. One appreciates a side of medicine that we would do well to conserve in our times. Even medical treatises have a gentle rather than a cold and clinical quality. The reader of these texts will come away with a medical philosophy that is more well-rounded and will see the value of the holistic approach that is evident in accounts of medieval responses to maladies.

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