MEDICAL AND MORAL INTERPRETATIONS OF PLAGUE AND PESTILENCE IN LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXTS

By

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long recognized that the bubonic plague was, to a greater or lesser extent, a cause of various socio-economic changes in the later Middle Ages. The degree to which these changes were perceived when they were occurring, however, is less clear. This dissertation argues that in popular awareness, at least in England, plague was understood as part of a familiar cosmology rooted in past authority, in ways that made the disease less catastrophically debilitating for its survivors than is sometimes assumed. Using vernacular English sources, the dissertation explores medical and moral notions about plague available to Middle English readers. Medical writers responded to plague within the framework of past medical theory; literary and didactic writers placed it within the framework of earlier stories and admonitory advice. Although not susceptible to treatment once contracted, plague was seen as being at least potentially avoidable, through proper physical and spiritual governance.

The first part of the dissertation (Chapters One through Four) sketches medical and historical backgrounds of plague and examines interpretations of

the disease in English medical works. In particular, Chapter Three considers Middle English plague treatises, especially those based on John of Burgundy's De morbo epidemiae. Chapter Four concerns more general medical treatises containing plague references: John Arderne's surgical treatises, the Middle English translation of Guy de Chauliac's Cyrurgia magna, the Middle English Liber de diversis medicinis, the verse treatise "In Hoote Somere," and the Middle English Liber uricrisiarum.

The second part of the dissertation (Chapters Five through Seven) analyzes interpretations of plague found in Middle English didactic and literary works, interpretations which move from medical advice on personal governance to more spiritually and morally oriented commentary. Following a brief discussion of ecclesiastical interpretations of plague (Chapter Five), Chapter Six considers plague references in several works by John Lydgate and other didactic and practical writers. Chapter Seven examines the role of plague in the Canterbury Tales (Fragment Six), Piers Plowman, and Lydgate's Dance of Death. The dissertation concludes by briefly comparing responses to plague in Middle English with later literary uses of plague as an emblem of social and moral crisis.

In memoriam

Patricia Klari Erdoss and John A. Yunck III

medievalists, scholars, friends

But nothing's lost. Or else: all is translation
And every bit of us is lost in it
(Or found--I wander through the ruin of S
Now and then, wondering at the peacefulness)
And in that loss a self-effacing tree,
Color of context, imperceptibly
Rustling with its angel, turns the waste
To shade and fiber, milk and memory.

James Merrill
from "Lost in Translation"

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ABBREVIATIONS

BHM	Bulletin of the History of Medicine
Diss.	Dissertation
EETS	Early English Text Society
es	extra series
L.	Latin
MED	Middle English Dictionary
n	note
ns	new series
N&Q	Notes and Queries
os	original series
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
P	Press
PL	Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus
Publ.	Publishing, Publishers
qtd.	quoted
rpt.	reprinted
ser.	series
U	University
var.	variation, variant

Abbreviations frequently used in text, notes, Works Cited and Consulted are listed above.

Introduction

> A great scourge never appears unless there is a reason for it.
>
> Henry Miller, The Air-Conditioned Nightmare (18)

A pandemic of plague from Asia struck continental Europe in the mid-1340's and arrived in England early in 1348, killing more than half the population in some places and depleting the entire population of England by as much as one-fourth.[1] The rapid spread of this disease

[1] The seriousness of this disease has made it one of the most devastating illnesses in European history, especially in England, where, as George Deaux explains, "the plague raged with its greatest ferocity, carrying off, in the space of little more than a year, close to half the total population" (116). Deaux provides an excellent summary of the spread of plague through the British Isles in The Black Death: 1347, Chapter 6 (117-44).

Commenting on the effects of plague in England, Charles F. Mullett writes: "A most striking characteristic of the Black Death was its uneven incidence and effect. Well-attested calculations have put the mortality in some regions very high and in others quite low, and though after 1349 it grew progressively less fatal through natural immunity, preventive measures, and limited extent, the deaths were still sufficient to dislocate the life of the country" (Bubonic Plague 19).

Most medical historians now agree that the total number of dead from Black Death in the later fourteenth century was about one-fourth the population. British microbiologist J. F. D. Shrewsbury (A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles) contests death rates of as much as one-half the population of England given by other medical historians; in his view, the bacillus

and its large death toll brought responses from physicians, church officials, clerks, chroniclers, poets, and others. These writers described and explained plague outbreaks in medical treatises, ecclesiastical records, sermons, prayers, chronicles, and poetry. This broad range of responses can be tracked through a variety of Middle English texts, permitting us to see how plague was addressed in different genres and for different audiences and purposes, a task made easier through recent editions of Middle English medical texts and recent scholarship on plague.

During the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the English language was increasingly used for disseminating this medical information on plague and other diseases to a growing audience of upper and middle class English readers. By the late fourteenth century, many writers were also using English to offer moral interpretations of this disease, with special emphasis on the perceived relationships between immoral living and plague. Not surprisingly, interpretations of plague found in Middle English texts reveal particular writers' conceptions of plague as a specific practical or moral problem. Taken together, these interpretations also reveal a broader common concern of Middle English

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became less virulent, resulting in a overall death rate closer to 20% for the second half of the fourteenth century.

writers on plague, whether practically or morally oriented or both: namely, their recurrent need to make sense of the chaos caused by widespread disease within the framework of an orderly creation.

Unlike most previous plague scholarship, which has focused primarily on Latin and Continental responses to plague, this dissertation brings together a wide range of vernacular English texts dealing in one way or another with plague: translations and adaptations of academic treatises on plague, general medical works with sections on plague, advice on avoiding plague described in didactic works, and references to plague in sermons and literary works. In discussing these texts, my principal concern will be not with social and economic effects of plague that have drawn the attention of so many historians of plague, but rather with the ways in which medieval English people--especially lay people--understood the plague in their own times and in their own language.

Before the discovery of the plague bacillus in 1884, most nonfictional writing about plague was concerned with medical aspects of the disease.[2] Once the

[2]Until the discovery of the bacillus, medical writers argued that plague resulted from various changes in the atmosphere, often accompanied by earthquakes. As

medical cause of the disease had been established, serious historical studies of plague became more common. Plague scholarship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to focus on the social-historical and economic-historical effects of the disease. Scholars in this period contended that plague brought about the rise of the middle class and other sweeping changes in social and religious life. Aiden Gasquet, for instance, felt that the depopulation of the monasteries led to a decline in monasticism (The Great Pestilence), and that the Black Death marked the end of the Middle Ages. Others made similarly broad claims for the effects of plague; as Dominick Palazzotto observes, some early plague scholarship asserted that plague

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recently as 1865, in a commentary on Niebuhr's History of Rome (a standard school text), Travers Twiss argued that plague was related to atmospheric disturbances, and possibly due to electrical interference:

> No person would deny that pestilences have burst forth without being preceded by volcanic phenomena, and that volcanic convulsions have taken place without being followed by epidemics, but it seems well worthy of our attention, whether, on some occasions, when all ordinary methods of explanation are applied in vain to account for the spreading of an epidemic, it may not have arisen from some great change suddenly effected in the electrical condition of the atmosphere. This by acting upon the human frame through the medium of the nervous system, may produce a general derangement of health in the mass, whilst it is destructive to a great number, who are unable from physical weakness or constitutional idiosyncrasy to accommodate themselves to the change, or at least to exist under the operation of it, till the atmosphere is restored to its ordinary condition (347).

brought about "a retrenchment of cities and the end of European internal expansion" (The Black Death and Medicine 22). On a more optimistic note, G. G. Coulton (The Black Death) contends that greater per capita prosperity for plague survivors brought about the beginnings of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation.[3]

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, plague scholarship began refining this earlier understanding of the social and economic effects of plague. Scholars like Anna M. Campbell and Sylvia Thrupp focused on more specific social changes resulting from the crisis of plague, including a new civic concern for public sanitation (Campbell, Men of Learning) and, in the economic sphere, the recurrent demands for higher wages from the reduced pool of laborers (Thrupp, "Medieval Economic Achievement"). More

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[3]The most complete bibliography of plague scholarship is Gottfried's "A Bibliographical Essay" (The Black Death 1983); but see also Philip Ziegler's bibliography in The Black Death (1969) and Nancy Siraisi's "Introduction" to The Black Death where she comments on changing emphasis in plague scholarship--from medical and historical in the earlier part of this century, to literary and cultural studies of plague in more recent decades.

R. Pollitzer's Plague sums up medical research on plague and discusses outbreaks of the disease historically. Jean-Noel Biraben's Les Hommes et la peste is probably the most comprehensive medical account of plague in Europe, giving various explanations for the disease from ancient sources to twentieth-century medical theories.

recent historians of plague, notably Robert S. Gottfried (The Black Death), have argued that the disease and its effects must be understood in a larger temporal framework. Gottfried speculates that plague was less a turning point than earlier scholars had imagined, owing to the resilience of human populations. Using ecclesiastical and public records as a basis for his argument, Gottfried concludes that plague can be understood only in a framework of a 300-year period of various ecological disasters, including famine, floods, severe winters, and storms, all of which preceded recurring outbreaks of plague in the fourteenth century. Like Gottfried, Raymond Delatouche argues that the real crisis of late medieval culture began in the thirteenth century, and that outbreaks of Black Death in the fourteenth century merely accelerated the collapse of an already crumbling society. For Delatouche, however, the crisis was less a matter of ecological stresses than of philosophical and religious tensions already evident in thirteenth-century life.[4]

[4] For other interpretations of the economic effects of Black Death, see Edouard Baratier, Guy Bois, Elisabeth Carpentier, and David Herlihy, who generally agree that the depopulation caused by plague led to the rise of the middle class, and M. M. Postan's Medieval Trade and Finance, which suggests that the plague resulted in decreased production and a decreased flow of immigrants across northern Europe. A. M. Campbell's earlier study, The Black Death and Men of Learning, describes the effects of plague on several professions and their concerns: lawyers (132), priests (138),

Another strand in plague scholarship since the early twentieth century has been the discovery, cataloging, and editing of medieval plague treatises and other medical works that deal tangentially with plague (e.g., Sudhoff, Singer and Anderson, Ogden, and Miller). The German medical historian Karl Sudhoff, for instance, edited a large number of Latin and Continental plague treatises during the early part of this century in a series entitled Pestschriften nach der Epidemie des "Schwarzen Todes" 1348. Dorothea Waley Singer and Annie Anderson's Catalog of Latin and Vernacular Plague Tractates in Great Britain (1950) lists references to plague in English vernacular works in addition to identifying Latin sources which were available in

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decline of monastic life (142), English in schools (177n107). See also A. F. Leach The Schools of Medieval England, esp. 201-03.

E. M. Thompson compares the psychological impact of Black Death in its time with the impact that World War I had on its survivors--particularly with regard to moral and psychological crises after the War.

However, George Deaux claims that the plagues of the later Middle Ages had a smaller effect on population and culture than most previous scholarship has suggested:

> The Black Death did not bring the Middle Ages to an end; it did not cause the decline of chivalry and feudalism; it did not hasten in the Renaissance; nor did it cause the rise of nationalistic spirit, humanism, science, the passion of exploration, realism in literature, national languages, or the democratization and secularization of society which we associate with the period that followed it. The Black Death did not bring about these developments in precisely the same way that no other single event caused them (The Black Death 205).

England. The catalog contains excerpts both from plague treatises and more general works with plague references, including some literary works.

The work of editors and catalogers like Sudhoff, Singer, and Anderson has borne fruit, especially in the last fifteen years, in studies by scholars like Dominick Palazzotto and Melissa P. Chase. In a dissertation on the medical authority of plague treatises written between 1348 and 1350, Palazzotto argues that while medieval physicians generally "conformed to the highly speculative method of scholastic medicine, in some cases...they demonstrated a willingness to rely on the empirical method of experience and observation and a readiness to discard theories that rationally, experimentally, or practically did not appear useful" (The Black Death and Medicine 27). Chase contends that medical explanations found in fourteenth-century plague treatises demonstrate that medieval physicians at first regarded plague as a disease which was already known, but by the fifteenth century, through more direct experience with the disease, physicians were able to differentiate plague from other diseases and to label it as a separate disease entity ("Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes" 163).

Studies of plague treatises by intellectual historians like Palazzotto and Chase reflect yet another

concern of plague scholarship in the last decade or two: the cultural effects of plague. Though some broad surveys in this area were undertaken earlier in this century (e.g., Gasquet on plague and the religious life, Campbell on plague and men of learning, and Crawfurd on plague in European literature and art), detailed and sophisticated analyses have been relatively rare. As Nancy Siraisi notes in the introduction to a recent collection of essays on the cultural impact of plague, "We are faced with the need for a new, more nuanced interpretation of the cultural effects of the Black Death in the light of current work on the intellectual and spiritual life of the later Middle Ages" ("Introduction," Williman 12).

The goals of this dissertation are most closely allied to the last of the three areas of scholarship outlined above: I am primarily interested here in the interpretations of plague which were available to lay English readers, in texts ranging from technical medical works to literature. Thus, the dissertation is narrower in focus than those studies which combine Latin, Continental, and English sources on plague for a pan-European analysis (whether medical, historical, or cultural).[5] On the other hand, by examining a broad

[5] Studies with a broader focus and a linguistically wider range of sources than this dissertation include Bois--decline of feudalism; Campbell--variety of

spectrum of types of writings on plague, and by concentrating more on texts that were accessible to a lay audience, I hope to provide a somewhat wider perspective than that found in editions of particular English medical texts, studies of medical practitioners alone, or specifically literary or iconographic studies.[6] The findings of the dissertation tend to support the claims of historians like Gottfried, Delatouche, and Deaux, that plague was less a specific cause of sweeping social, political, and economic change in the later Middle Ages than earlier scholars had thought. English writers on plague--at least in the vernacular--seem to have responded to it more

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academic plague tractates; Chase--emergence of plague as a separate disease entity; Crawfurd--the plague as portrayed by European art and literature; Deaux--the effect of plague recurrences over time; Girard--plague as a persistent theme in literature and myth; Paisley--plague's effects on European consciousness from the sixth to the twentieth centuries; Singer--various studies of plague treatises across Europe and a catalogue of plague references in Latin and English sources.

[6]Recent editions of Middle English medical works not specifically looking at plague or broader cultural effects, but simply at medical writing in English include Joanne Jasin's edition of the English Liber uricrisiarum and Elaine Martha Miller's edition of a fifteenth-century medical manuscript. Studies with a narrower focus than this dissertation include Beidler's "The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner"; Gasquet--the effects of plague on English monastic life; Mullett's--growing interest in plague prevention among English medical practitioners during fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; Palazzotto--analysis of plague tractates written between 1348-1350; Polzer--fourteenth-century iconography of death and plague.

conservatively than the physicians studied by Palazzotto and Chase. The vernacular texts which I have examined do not eventually see plague as something fundamentally new and different; rather, they continue to read it as a variation on an old theme, a serious problem to be sure, but one to which traditional explanations and preventive strategies can be applied. To turn the Wife of Bath's language on its head, "Auctoritee, though noon experience / Were in this world, was right enough for hem / To speke of wo that is in pestilence."

In the chapters that follow, I will argue that Middle English plague references show us how English writers and translators located plague in a familiar context, as a familiar disease or as a familiar moral problem, often in the light of past authority. In contrast to their Continental peers, who frequently observed and recorded contemporary experiences with plague, English literary and medical writers borrowed discussions of plague more exclusively from earlier sources. When they translated material from Continental writers, they naturally borrowed contemporary observations of plague included in those works, but they did not add observations on contemporary English experience with plague.[7] This dependence on familiar

[7]Observations on contemporary plague experience are more commonly found in Continental sources than in English writing (cf. Boccaccio's introduction to the

authorities provided stability from past traditions and was an important strategy whereby English writers--and their readers--made sense out of this dreadful disease.

Medical and moral responses to plague in the texts examined in this dissertation emerge from distinct but related traditions--the former essentially classical and naturalistic, the latter essentially Christian and biblical. What linked the two traditions was a common worldview dependent on past authority for explanations and on a cosmology that stressed order within the universe. Thus, even though outbreaks of plague in the fourteenth century elicited different responses from medical, didactic, and literary writers, these interpretations of the disease remained compatible, even mutually reinforcing. Indeed, medieval plague writings in English reveal a coherent and complex understanding of plague within a Christian cosmology which embraced both the body and the soul, the individual and society.

Decameron and Guy de Chauliac's description of plague in the Cyrurgia magna). It should be noted, of course, that English chroniclers like Robert of Avesbury described contemporary English outbreaks of plague and that descriptions of contemporary outbreaks do appear in ecclesiastical and public records; however, such descriptions are virtually non-existent in the kinds of writing examined in this dissertation.

The texts considered in this study are ordered by genre and audience, beginning with the most technical works, and then moving on to more general medical texts, didactic works on personal governance, and finally to plague references in the works of Chaucer, Langland, and Lydgate. Chapter One explains words and concepts associated with the plague, from ancient to modern times. This chapter provides a context for understanding the medieval notion of plague as part of a broader cosmology. Chapter Two provides background for understanding the medieval conception of disease and health by examining the contents of a typical medical treatise. Chapter Three considers academic treatises on plague available in English translation. These gained importance in the fourteenth century and were later incorporated into treatises on other epidemics such as English sweating sickness, but seldom found their way into leechbooks and other popular medical works. In Chapter Four, I discuss references to plague in general medical works in English. The advice on plague found in these works reached a wider audience than the plague treatises themselves, and ultimately made its way into nonmedical works as well.

Chapter Five introduces the second major division of this study: the moral interpretation of plague. In conjunction with other widespread diseases and troubles

of fallen humankind, plague was frequently described in moral terms and as the result of poor physical and spiritual governance. Chapter Six examines the incorporation of references to plague in didactic writings, primarily of the fifteenth century. Writers like John Lydgate included advice on plague in their more general didactic works, works which characterized the prevention of illness as a part of the proper governance of both body and soul.

Middle English sermons and poetry, which I examine in Chapter Seven, also contain implicit and explicit advice on personal governance. However, they present plague primarily as an emblem for the general failure of spiritual and political governance. Middle English literature frequently describes plague in the context of other divinely imposed catastrophes, often with apocalyptic overtones; these disasters serve as a warning for the individual soul and as an opportunity for the community to reestablish social order by overcoming sin.

Although remedies for plague found in medieval sources are no longer taken seriously, the profound effects of wide scale epidemics like plague remain in human consciousness. The Epilogue suggests that these effects are most tangible in literature, where plague has retained its power over time as a metaphor for other

moral and social crises, which, in their own times, have appeared as disastrous as outbreaks of plague in the Middle Ages.

Chapter 1: Backgrounds

1. What is Plague? The Twentieth-Century Interpretation

The symptoms of plague have long been recognized and were described at length in ancient and medieval medical treatises, but its cause and mode of transmission were not discovered until the late nineteenth century.[1] The plague bacillus, Yersinia

[1] Jean-Noel Biraben's Les Hommes et la peste is perhaps the most complete study of medical explanations of plague given over the centuries. It is wise to caution ourselves against judging medieval writing on plague as simplistic or naive. Until recent times, the medical interpretation of plague changed little from the earliest sources. In the late nineteenth century, J. F. C. Hecker, a noted German physician, is referred to by B. G. Babington, the English translator of his Der Schwarze Tod, as "the most learned medical historian, and one of the most able medical writers in Germany." Yet Hecker's own account reads much like the accounts of plague in medieval plague treatises:

> It is recorded that, during this earthquake [in Greece and Italy, January 25, 1348] the wine in the casks became turbid, a statement which may be considered as furnishing proof, that changes causing a decomposition of the atmosphere had taken place; but if we had no other information from which the excitement of conflicting powers of nature during these commotions might be inferred, yet scientific observation in modern times has shown, that the relation of the atmosphere to the earth is changed by volcanic influences. (J. F. C. Hecker, The Epidemics of the Middle Ages, Trans. B. G. Babington 15-16).

Hecker writes elsewhere in his book of the naive and incorrect interpretation of plague found in the writings of medieval physicians, though his own was no less so,

(formerly Pasteurella) pestis, was discovered almost simultaneously by the Japanese Shibasaburo Kitasato and the Swiss Alexandre Yersin during an outbreak of plague in Hong Kong in 1884.[2] Before the nineteenth century, it was assumed that both rats and men died from breathing the same "pestilential atmosphere." Yersinia pestis is found in the parasites of rodents, "endemic in rats and appearing in human beings only after the rat population is decimated" (Campbell 34). Infection may occur by inoculation, inhalation, ingestion, or by slight abrasion of the skin. Once the body is infected, the bacilli move into the lymphatic system where they multiply and enter the blood stream. The action of the

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an apt reminder that we ought to caution ourselves against such arrogance concerning the past.

[2] Today, antibiotics are used in the treatment of plague, usually with good results. But this development is quite recent with respect to plague's long history as a medical enigma. George Deaux provides a frightening deposition on the long search for the cause and cure of plague:

> ...the bacteriological warfare experts of the U.S. Army are reported to have developed a strain of plague bacillus that is resistant to present medicine and control measures. If it should ever be released, the results would be unpredictable but, considering the prognosis of the disease, probably disastrous. The world is full of cruel ironies. Barely have scientists liberated mankind from a scourge as ancient as history than they employ their technical skill to recreate it, in an even more frightening form (68).

bacilli damages the walls of the blood vessels, frequently causing hemorrhages.[3]

The microbe is "one of the most pervasive, persistent, and dangerous life forms in the world" (McGrew 37). It generally lives in the bloodstreams of rodents, but most commonly in the rat. Rodent hosts spread the bacteria to humans through an insect vector, Xenopsylla cheopis, commonly known as the rat flea, but

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[3]R. Pollitzer's Plague sums up medical research on this disease through 1954, describing in detail outbreaks since the Middle Ages.

In 1970, British microbiologist J. F. D. Shrewsbury published A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles in which he disputes claims that the death tolls could be as great as from one-fourth to one-half of the population during outbreaks of the disease in 1348-1349, rates most medical historians accept. Shrewsbury argues that the plague bacillus was not as virulent as medical researchers had thought it to be during the Middle Ages. He concludes that the death toll from Black Death in Middle Ages was no more than twenty percent of the total population of Europe.

Other medical historians have also reconsidered the biological significance of Black Death in the Middle Ages and after. Among the most spurious of these is Graham Twigg's (The Black Death: A Biological Appraisal). Twigg makes an extreme claim for plague's infrequent occurrence, arguing that the disease was unimportant in medieval Europe and that the Black Death itself was probably anthrax. For a discussion of Twigg's doubtful claims, see Robert S. Gottfried's review, "Graham Twigg, The Black Death." For the purposes of this study, it really matters little whether or not plague was actually anthrax or even some other epidemic disease, as medieval people would have referred to all these epidemics under the aegis of plague or pestilence.

In a recent article, Colin McEvedy argues that later strains of the plague bacillus, Yersinia pestis, evolved in less virulent form than previous strains, and, being less virulent, conferred "on infected animals and humans a relative immunity to more virulent strains" ("The Bubonic Plague" 123).

the disease can be carried to humans by nearly 200 other types of fleas, though with less efficiency. The discovery of the flea as the carrier of plague bacillus, from rodents to rodents and then from rodents to humans, was made by Paul Louis Simond and M. Ogatia in 1897.[4]

Normally, the bacterium can live in rodents without deleterious effects to them, but, for reasons not yet fully understood, Yersinia pestis sometimes becomes especially virulent and epizootic among rodents (i.e., attacking a large number of its animal hosts simultaneously). When this happens, the rodents' blood is poisoned, and the mortality rate reaches nearly 100 percent. "Perhaps it is sufficient for our purposes to say that plague is primarily a disease of rodents," Michael Dols explains, "and man enters only accidentally into the cycle" (70).

The fleas, which normally live on rats, feed on the rat's blood, ingesting the bacterium from their host. The organism multiplies in the flea's stomach and plugs its digestive system. When this occurs, the flea becomes increasingly hungry but is no longer able to ingest blood from animal hosts. The flea regurgitates, or less often, as it attempts to feed, it defecates live

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[4]Simond's research was published in the Annals of the Pasteur Institute, October, 1898.

bacteria either into the blood of a new host or onto the skin.

Rats are more efficient incubators of the bacteria than humans. The bacteria can reproduce easily in a rodent's blood, but apparently not as well in humans: "Even humans dying of plague have too little of the bacterial agent in their bloodstreams to continue the infective chain" (McGrew 38).

Once plague has spread to humans, it can assume one of three forms: bubonic, pneumonic, or septicemic. Michael Dols remarks that "misleading use of the word 'bubonic' has given rise to the erroneous idea that true plague is necessarily bubonic and that non-bubonic forms are a different disease" (The Black Death 72). The bubonic form of plague is caused by flea bite, and rarely transmitted from human to human. It affects the lymphatic system first, causing the characteristic plague buboes, inflamed lymph nodes usually appearing in the groin and less often in the armpits, sometimes becoming as large as an orange. Approximately 20 percent of those infected recover. Since bubonic plague depends on the insect vector, it subsides when fleas die out or during the winter when they are in hibernation.

The pneumonic form of plague is a more virulent form of plague. For reasons still unknown, the pneumonic form arises from the bubonic form, often with symptoms

like those of secondary pneumonia, and can be transmitted aerially, through coughing, from human to human. The onset is sudden and includes symptoms such as shivering, difficulty in breathing, and expectoration which is often blood-streaked. Death usually occurs within three days after onset with a mortality rate of nearly 100 percent.

The septicemic form of plague is most virulent. A victim may die suddenly with few visible symptoms. The patient's temperature rises rapidly, becoming very high, and petechial hemorrhages may occur (i.e., small hemorrhages in the skin or mucous membranes). The septicemic form of plague results from the introduction of the bacillus into the bloodstream. In this form, the bacillus is injected by the flea and fails to localize in the lymphatic system (bubonic form). In the septicemic form, the human flea (Pulex irritans), usually an inefficient carrier, may become a vector and consequently an effective means of transmission from human to human.

2. Words and Concepts Associated with Plague Historically

The first plague pandemic appeared during the reign of Justinian the Great (AD 527-65). According to Jean-Noel Biraben, this pandemic swept across southern Europe, but never reached England. He notes that an epidemic disease which ravaged the British Isles in AD 664, described in the writings of the Venerable Bede, could not have been the bubonic plague because the plague never reached as far north as England ("The Plague in the Early Middle Ages" 72).

The second plague pandemic, which constitutes the subject of this study, occurred in the mid-fourteenth century. Outbreaks began near the Caspian region sometime around AD 1346. From there, the disease swept through Europe along trade routes, traveling across southern Europe and then north, through France and England in a horseshoe-shaped pattern, finally moving through Scandinavia and Russia in the mid-1350's.

Though the plague had occurred in sporadic outbreaks before 1346, its first large-scale occurrence took place in that year among Tartars attempting to deport Italian merchants from the Crimea. The merchants took refuge in a citadel at Kaffa (Feodosia), according to the contemporary chronicler Gabriel de Mussis, but when plague forced the Tartars to withdraw their siege,

the Tartars were reported to have catapulted the corpses of plague victims over the walls of the citadel, thereby infecting the itinerant Christians who later fled home to Italy by way of the Mediterranean (McGrew 40). While Gabriel de Mussis' account cannot be taken as unquestionable fact, mainly because the corpses of those who had died from plague likely would not have infected others, plague did follow a course along trade routes, as de Mussis believed, arriving in England in the spring of 1348. It recurred there periodically until the early fifteenth century, but the initial outbreak of 1348-49 claimed the greatest number of lives.

The plague recurred again in less virulent outbreaks during the late fourteenth century, and outbreaks are reported throughout the fifteenth century. George Deaux summarizes the number of plague outbreaks occurring from the fourteenth century onwards:

> ...the pestilence was to recur again and again: there was plague in Europe for thirty-two years of the 14th century, and forty-one years of the 15th, for thirty years of the 16th; and Italy, which lost at least half its inhabitants during the years 1348-50, like the rest of Europe, was not to regain the population that it held before the Black Death until the beginning of the 16th century (94).

England experienced several recurrences in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Plague broke out between 1405 and 1407, killing 30,000 people in London

in 1407 alone. Another serious outbreak occurred in 1420. The petition of the Marches for 1421 noted the "great numbers of persons dead by the great mortalities and pestilences which have raged for three years past and still reign" (Guthrie Vine xi). Plague appeared in England again in 1430 and 1440, and yet again from 1464 until 1478, according to Guthrie Vine, "with little intermission" (xii). The next major plague epidemic did not occur until 1665. During that time, the disease appeared in London with great force, where 68,596 deaths were recorded. Just as rapidly, it disappeared, making this the last major outbreak in the British Isles.[5]

In more recent times, epidemics of plague have occurred in China, spreading to the rest of Asia between 1856-66; Europe remained untouched, in part, because of higher sanitation standards, but also, some have argued, because the bacillus had become less virulent and natural immunity had increased (McEvedy 123). Sometime between 1866 and 1894, it spread from Asian rodents to rodents in the Western United States, probably along Pacific trade routes from Asia. No major outbreaks have

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[5]Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year is a documentary of the London Plague. Defoe was only a small child during this outbreak, but his account is often taken to be true, as it was in his own time. For a description of the London Plague and its aftereffects, see F. P. Wilson's The Plague in Shakespeare's London.

occurred in this country although isolated cases are occasionally reported in the West.[6]

At the turn of the century, severe epidemics developed in Manchuria (1899) and Fujian (1901). Outbreaks of pneumonic plague occurred between 1910 and 1921 in Manchuria. Asian and African countries have reported minor occurrences since, but none has been as severe as the second pandemic of the fourteenth century.

Since the discovery of the causes and transmission of this disease in the late nineteenth century, the meaning of the word plague has generally narrowed over time to cover a specific set of symptoms. In the Middle Ages however, the term plague meant something broader than it does in the twentieth century, though popular usage today still retains some of the archetypal horror of plague, frozen in popular expressions such as "She was plagued with that problem."[7]

References to the fourteenth-century plague pandemic can be understood, in part, through specific

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[6]For a discussion of plague in the U.S., consult Charles T. Gregg, Plague! The Shocking Story of a Dread Disease in America Today and Plague: An Ancient Disease in the U.S.

[7]Use of the word plague in this sense, its most common use in contemporary English, appears in "The Lost Cottage," a recent short story by David Leavitt, which serves here as another example of plague in contemporary English: "'Yes,' Douglas says, 'we have repaired the evil leak which has plagued this house for centuries'" (66), and cf. "a plague on both your houses."

terms writers in the Middle Ages chose to describe it. Often they described plague in the same terms as ancient writers.

As Penelope B. R. Doob explains, notions of disease have traditionally been associated with sin and guilt (Nebuchadnezzar's Children 1), and words associated with plague have been no exception. Plague (Middle English plage) in its oldest and most general sense, referred to a "stroke, blow, injury, or disaster" the meaning of Latin plaga from which it is derived. Latin plaga, in turn, derives from the Greek πληγή, "a blow," often in the sense of widespread disaster (Skeat, Etymological Dictionary, s.v. plague). The ultimate source of plague as this sign of God's chastening power over sinful man comes from the Old Testament and ancient sources.[8]

Classical sources also mention wide scale epidemics, but unlike the plagues of the Bible, not always as scourges but as vivid reminders of the power of death. Stephen D'Irsay traces the use of atra mors (black death) as a term for diseases with a fatal prognosis in various ancient sources, which, he speculates, may have begun with Homer. As Homer refers to it, Atra mors (Greek πλεῖοι μέλανος) could

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[8] See Chapter Five (138-140) for a discussion of plague in biblical sources.

denote "a sweet, soothing, silent brother of sleep, descending as a 'brazen sleep,'" (qtd. in D'Irsay 329). In this case, death appears like the blackness of night. In the later Roman poetry of Tibullus, Horace, Silius, Italicus, and Statius, the phrase atra mors signifies "the horrors of death in general" (D'Irsay 331). Still later, in Ennius and Livy, the term is associated with epidemics of various sorts, and especially in Thucydides' description of the first plague pandemic (D'Irsay 331).[9] In classical poetry, while epidemic diseases were described as horrible, they were described as resulting from natural forces, an interpretation also found in medieval medical treatises, rather than from the scourging hands of the gods.

In Middle English, the term plage appears in much the same context as it did in biblical sources: to betoken "an affliction or torment," especially "one of divine punishment or retribution" (MED, s.v. plage, 1.a). It occurs in this sense in The Golden Litany of the Holy Magdalen:

> I shalle take fro them alle tribulacions, sorowes, and plages that thei in this world for ther synnes and offences haue deseruyd to suffyr. (MED, s.v. plage, 1.a)

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[9] D'Irsay lists specific sources for the terms sanguine atro and atra mors in the works of these poets and those mentioned above (330-31).

In Middle English, plage may also refer to a wound or sore and, in a wider sense, to a morbid condition. Using the word to mean "sore," a Middle English translation of Lanfranc's Surgery explains that, "Plage commounly is taken for an oold wounde" (MED s.v. plage, 2.b).[10]

In Old French, plaga became plage (var. plague), with plaie ("wound") as the normal phonetic descendant of plaga (OED s.v., plague). Plage and plague are therefore variants based on the earlier Latin form.

Middle English plage is seldom applied in descriptions of the fourteenth-century pandemic. Plage is, however, the preferred term for this epidemic in fifteenth-century texts, possibly because it had a stronger moral connotation than pestilence, and didactic religious works written during this time use plague as an example of God's punishment during evil times. Occasionally, when writers use plage to mean an outbreak of Black Death, they combine the words plage and pestilence.[11]

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[10]The Old French plaie is used similarly in the following passage from Henry of Lancaster's Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines (Ed. E. J. Arnould) where we see this common use of the word in Old French:
Et pur ceo qe ascuns purroient dire qe eawe nest mye bon a plaies laver... (144.32-33).
("And because some people might be able to say that water is not as good [a medicine] to wash wounds..." (trans. mine)).

[11]See, for example, The Vision of Edmund Leversedge a1500(a1450): "...I the seyd Edmund in the monythe of may, that is to sey the 3ere of our lorde god a

The Middle English words plage (plague) and pestilence were in use before the disease first struck England in 1348. Pestilence is the most common term Middle English writers use for the Black Death, probably because it was the most general term for denoting epidemic diseases and a term applied to them before outbreaks of plague in the fourteenth century (OED, s.v. pestilence, sb. 1).

Pestilence has two major uses in Middle English. In its literal sense, the word could be applied to various contagious diseases. Middle English pestilence has a general meaning, often describing any fatal epidemic afflicting man or beast and killing many victims. Its use in the following incipit from the Vernon Manuscript is typical:

> þe rysyng of þe comuynes in londe, þe Pestilens,
> and þe eorþe-quake...Beo-tokenes þe grete vengaunce
> & wrake þat schulde falle for synnes sake.
> (MED s.v. pestilence, 1.b)

In a figurative sense, pestilence refers to various manifestations of wickedness, as in the phrase "þe

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M.c.c.c.c.lx.v [1465]...by the hand and vysytacyon of almyghty God was smyton with the plage of pestylence" (23). Speaking of the disease as God's punishment for sin, later in the Vision Leversedge explains:

> God had givin power and commaundment to persecute and smyt the people for the synne that dayly renyth a mong them with the infirmyte and plage of pestilence, the whych synne and people gretly displesith God (33).

pestilens of lecherye" (MED s.v. pestilence, 2.b).[12] Like plage, when used figuratively, pestilence meant "wickedness, iniquity, or evil" (MED s.v. pestilence, esp. 2.a) as it does in Chaucer's description of Circe Boece:

> But al be it so that the godhede of Mercurie, that is cleped the bridde of Arcadye, hath had merci of the duc Ulixes, bysegid with diverse yveles, and hath unbownden hym fro the pestilence of his oostesse...
> (Boece, 4m3.16-21)[13]

"The foule deth," and the "first deth" are also Middle English terms for bubonic plague.[14] In Piers Plowman, B-text, Dame Study reminds the Dreamer that even the threat of plague is not enough to humble prideful mankind: "Ne for drede of the deeth withdrawe noght hir pride" (X.81). "The deeth," in the context of this passage, refers specifically to plague.[15] Walsingham's Chronicle (c1400(1379)) describes an outbreak of plague in these terms: "God and Seynt Mango,

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[12] Chapter Seven examines the relationship between lechery and pestilence in Middle English sources, especially in conjunction with Fragment Six of the Canterbury Tales and Piers Plowman.

[13] Quotations from Chaucer's works, here and elsewhere in this study, are from The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson.

[14] In Spanish, the plague is usually referred to as la mortalega Grande, and in German, das grosse Sterben (Deaux 5).

[15] Chapter Seven (210-23) discusses references to plague in Piers Plowman.

Seynt Romayne and Seynt Andreu scheld us this day fro...the foule deth that Ynglessh men dyene upon" (MED s.v. deth, 6.a). Here, the author applies the metaphor of feasting to describe the way in which plague spreads, naturally and as frequently as the appetite returns, urging the body to eat once again in what must have appeared to be an endless cycle of sickness and death.

A Middle English translation of Guy de Chauliac's Cyrurgia magna uses the phrase "þat grete dethe" in describing the plague: "And we haue seyne þat openly [many deaths] in þat grete dethe...which appered to vs in Avyoun in þe 3ere of oure Loord 1348, and in þe sexte ȝere of þe popedome of sire Clemente þe sexte, in whose seruice I was" (MED s.v. deth, 6.a). "Grete dethe" and "foule deth" appear less frequently in Middle English than pestilence and plage as terms for plague.

To our way of thinking, the terminology of Middle English is often imprecise in references to the Black Death, since the disease itself was not considered separate from other epidemic diseases until the fifteenth century.[16] The various uses of plage and

[16] In a discussion of plague treatises dating from mid-fourteenth to the fifteenth century, Melissa P. Chase comments on the understanding of plague found in these treatises:

> The fourteenth- and fifteenth-century practitioners of Montpellier, confronted with a devastating and complex disease, successfully explained this

pestilence in Middle English create certain problems when attempting to interpret their meaning. Therefore, where possible, this study relies on the consensus of editors in determining whether the Black Death is meant rather than some other disease when plage and pestilence appear in Middle English texts. The context of certain passages (e.g., their appearance in medical works on pestilence) or the occasions for which specific works were written also let us identify some of the instances where plague was intended. For example, although plague is not mentioned specifically in the Book of the Duchess, it is generally agreed that Chaucer wrote it in honor of Blanche of Lancaster, who had died from plague.

In English translations of Latin sources made in the early fifteenth century, the original Latin source may not always refer to Black Death when it mentions pestilence (L. pestilentia, pestis). Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works describing plague often incorporate passages from earlier texts on epidemic disease into commentaries on Black Death.[17] While it is not always clear whether Middle English writers meant Black Death when they used the term pestilence, those

> experience within the framework of the medical tradition of their predecessors.
> ("Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes" 163)

[17] See, for instance, Lydgate and Burgh's translation of the Secrees of Old Philosoffres in Chapter Six (164-71).

who lived in the late fourteenth century would have experienced the disease themselves or would have known of others who had, since its occurrences were so widespread. Therefore, we can assume, more often than not, that the words plage and pestilence in Middle English texts written between 1350-1450 are associated with contemporary outbreaks of the Black Death, since that was the most common and severe epidemic in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[18]

From the fifteenth century on, pestilence widens in meaning again and this term and the Latin forms associated with it are again applied more commonly to other epidemic diseases. The writings of Rhazes (AD 860-932) on smallpox and measles, for instance, were given the title De peste when first published in a Latin translation by John Channing in 1766 (Thornton, "Medical Books" 9). In the works of writers before the nineteenth century, the terms the pestilence, the plague, great pestilence, great death denote the plague pandemic of the fourteenth century, or, in distinction from later visitations, the mid-fourteenth-century plague is

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[18]Besides plague, other epidemics, including typhus, malignant syphilis, and smallpox, spread through Europe during the later Middle Ages, though plague was the most severe among them, and caused the greatest number of deaths (McGrew 108).

sometimes called 'the furste moreyn' or 'the first pestilence'" (OED s.v. Death I.6.b.).[19]

The terms Black Death, plague or bubonic plague are commonly used today to describe the epidemic which swept through medieval Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. The later, virulent outbreak of the plague in London (1664-65) is now referred to as The Great Plague or The Plague of London. Not until the nineteenth century do the terms plague and Black Death come specifically to describe the plague of 1348-49 and its later English outbreaks in the fourteenth century: 1361-62, 1369, and 1375-76. In particular, The Black Death is a phrase used only after the nineteenth century to refer specifically to the bubonic plague of the fourteenth century. According to the OED, "The name 'black death' is modern, and was apparently introduced into English history by Penrose (Mrs. Markham) in 1823, and into medical literature by Babington's translation of Hecker's Der Schwarze Tod in 1833.

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[19]On the origin of the term Black Death, see Stephen D'Irsay, "Notes to the Origin of the Expression: 'Atra Mors.'"

3. Medieval Cosmology

While the specific denotations of the word plague are wider in the Middle Ages than in the twentieth century, its broadest medieval connotations extend its meaning even further. To speak of plague or pestilence was to suggest those forces which disrupt the workings of an orderly universe, causing disease in the body and social disruption outside. Medieval writers attempted to understand plague in the framework of an orderly universe. In imaginative literature, writers stress the importance of order and balance. References to plague in Middle English poetry serve as a metaphor for disorder brought into the world by sin. As plague was thought to disrupt the orderly workings of the body, so its causes, rooted in sin, could disrupt the mind and spirit, and cause further disorder in the human community.

The belief that God had created man in His image served as a basis for medieval theories of man as a microcosm of God's universe. Medieval theories of cosmology, influenced by ancient Greek and Hebrew philosophy, demonstrated that the structures and processes of one portion of the universe were analogous to others on a greater or lesser scale.[20] Most prominent

[20]Philip Grierson remarks that, "this inheritance [of earlier cosmologies] was of a double character, Greek and Jewish, but each was in certain respects

among these theories was the idea that "man is a microcosm, or 'little world,' in one way or another epitomizing a macrocosm, or 'great world' --i.e., the universe or some part thereof" (Conger xiii).

Various medieval commentators point out similarities not only between God and man, but among all the components of creation. According to the Midrash Bereshit Rabba, a Jewish commentary from the third century AD, when God said, "Let us make man in our image," He was speaking according to the counsel of "the works of heaven and earth" (in Conger 38).[21] A later commentator, R. Natan, believed that God created in man everything that had been created within the universe. In the Abot, Natan drew a number of parallels between man and the particular objects in God's creation. He suggested, for example, that the forests correspond to man's hair, the wind to the nose with which man breathes, the sun to the forehead, and the sky to the tongue (Conger 38-39). In later commentaries, Joseph ibn Zaddik (d. 1149) suggested that man's body represented the entire material universe, and his soul, the world of spirits. Man therefore ought to know himself in order to

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modified by developments in early Christian theology" ("The European Heritage" 227).

[21] "And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him" (Gen. 1.27a).

know the will of God and that God alone is truth (Conger 42).[22]

While medieval Christian writers may not have been directly influenced by the writings of these Jewish commentators on Genesis 1: 27, they would have agreed that the structure of the human body paralleled the structure of creation. George Conger has observed that, in the Middle Ages, "the microcosmic theory served as a convenient and uncritical method of reconciling religion with the natural sciences, which even then were beginning to raise questions and difficulties for the faithful" (52). Nevertheless, notions of parallels between human beings and the universe persisted well beyond the Middle Ages. Many of these notions are found in the commentaries of the Church Fathers, but Latin translations of Aristotle and Plato were also an important and pervasive influence in the Middle Ages, and the authority of these ancient writers can be traced through the works of medieval thinkers.

Philip Grierson explains that the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Summa Theologiae (Quaest. 65-74), and especially the commentary on Aristotle's De Caelo, defer to Aristotle's conception of the universe (255n20). In the Dream of Scipio, the concept of

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[22]Analogues can be found in ancient Islamic philosophy (Conger 46-52).

crystalline and translucent heavenly spheres and the ether found in the spaces between them also reflects a strong Aristotelian influence (Grierson 238).

Plato's cosmology was perhaps more familiar to medieval writers than Aristotle's. The only Platonic dialogue known in the Latin West before the twelfth century was the Timaeus, a work of substantial cosmological interest (Grierson 231). In the Timaeus, Plato argued that the cosmos was a model of divine likeness, based on the premise that something greater than the cosmos was responsible for creating the cosmos itself:

> Again, these things being so [i.e., the whole application to the world of the three premises given in Timaeus' commentary], our world must necessarily be a likeness of something. (Cornford, ed. 23.29b)

The arguments concerning the operation of the universe set forth in the Timaeus follow the teachings of Aristotle, but while Aristotle's works contain a number of microcosmic elements, "it can be said," George Conger argues, "that Aristotle employed the term, but not the arguments" (10).[23] G. E. R. Lloyd has further argued that Greek cosmological theory shared several

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[23]Conger explains that although Aristotle may not have made use of arguments concerning the microcosm, he, in fact, may well have "first used the expression which afterward became the term microcosm" (cf. Aristotle's Physics, Book 8, chap. 2) (ctd. in Conger 11).

distinctions: 1) that the cosmos was ruled by one supreme being; 2) that the cosmos contained a balance of equal and opposing forces; and 3) that within the cosmos, war and strife were universal (204-05).

These notions emerge in two influential sources for writers on cosmology in the Middle Ages: the Commentary on the Dream of Scipio (Somnium Scipionis) of Macrobius and the Marriage of Mercury and Philology of Martianus Capella. The authors of both were pagans, but, like Aristotle and Plato, "their Neo-Platonism had many elements in common with Christian philosophy and they in fact dominated Latin cosmological thought throughout the Dark Ages" (Grierson 232).

The Dream of Scipio depicts the experience of the younger Scipio, who, while visiting Massinissa, was taken in a dream to the uppermost part of the heavens. There he learned of his future career and of the structure of the heavens, including the spheres of the planets. The spheres, concentrically revolving around the earth, were thought to produce musical tones that served as a model of harmony and proportion throughout the rest of the universe.[24] Scipio learned that all

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[24]Chaucer describes the workings of the universe in his summary of the Dream of Scipio in the Parliament of Fowls:

> Thanne shewede he hym the lytel erthe that here is,
> At regard of the hevenes quantite;
> And after shewede he hym the nyne speres;
> And after that the melodye herde he

aspects of creation were orderly, proportional, and interrelated.

The Marriage of Mercury and Philology is an allegorical work describing how Mercury, the God of Eloquence, wedded Philology, who brought with her the seven liberal arts as handmaidens: Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy, and Music. These disciplines, which concerned various aspects of the created world, were themselves thought to be interrelated.

Both the Dream of Scipio and the Marriage of Mercury and Philology explain the structure and shape of the universe and the orderly system of learning which reflected it, and the structure and shape of the universe described in these works served as a model for medieval writers concerning the appearance of plague in the Middle Ages.

Not only were the non-living elements in this universe balanced and proportional, but the living creatures populating it also had their specific and proportional locations. This divinely created order of

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That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre,
That welle is of musik and melodye
In this world here, and cause of armonye.
(57-63)

See also Nancy Siraisi's Taddeo Alderotti and his Pupils, and "The Music of the Pulse" where Siraisi explains that, in medical practice, the rhythm of the pulse was thought to reflect the harmony of the spheres.

living things came to be known as the Great Chain of Being, a term used to explain this natural hierarchy, which served as a "scala naturae from the lowest possible grade up to the ens perfectissimum" (Cuddon, s.v. Great Chain of Being). At the top of this hierarchy were various grades of superior beings, including God and the angels. Man was beneath the angels but above the creatures of the lower orders. Humans, therefore, stood at the center of God's creation, beneath the angels and above fish, fowl, and beasts.[25]

This divine scheme of things in the universe was taken for granted by medieval writers and even long after their time. Philip Grierson remarks that "it is necessary to remember that the traditional picture of the universe was not just a matter of literary or poetic allusion; it was thought to be hard matter of fact" (243).

The medieval model of the world, as explained by C. S. Lewis, Robert Burlin, R. W. V. Elliott, and others, suggests that medieval writers found a sense of order in the authority established by books, which they applied

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[25]The classic work on The Great Chain of Being from ancient thought onwards is A. O. Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being. See also E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, chaps. 4-5.

within the boundaries of cosmological framework.[26] We might imagine that the teachings of the Church would be the principal authority for these writers. But as C. S. Lewis explains, the overwhelmingly "bookish or clerkly character of medieval culture" is to be found not in the authority of the Church alone, but also in other authorities (Discarded Image 5), including those of the literary and medical traditions. Adherence to a model of an orderly world encouraged a reverence for conclusions made by past authorities, like those to whom Chaucer defers when he calls on "auctors" and "auctoritee." But

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[26] For a fuller discussion of this model and its dependence on books and fondness for order, see C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image, Chapter 1. Robert B. Burlin discusses the uses of "Experience and Authority" in Chaucerian Fiction (3-22).

Additionally, Loren C. MacKinney emphasizes the importance of the encyclopedic tradition within this orderly world created from bookish sources, particularly in the medical tradition ("Medieval Medical Dictionaries").

A fondness for order may have encouraged a listing of the sources of authority. As MacKinney explains: "Most of the medieval medical compendia took one or the other of two major trends; either the topical organization of the original classical encyclopedia or the alphabetical arrangement of the modern encyclopedia or dictionary" (243). The order in which a subject is presented becomes as important as the subject itself, and as MacKinney concludes, "It may be said that medieval compilers manifested conflicting tendencies; very few were medically minded; their chief interest was lexicographical" (266-67).

Chaucer is also aware of the limitations of authority and of the demands of experience.[27]

Chaucer's references to "auctoritee" often demonstrate the importance of books and the order they helped create in the writings of medieval authors. But Chaucer, like other writers, was not afraid to select the best of past authorities as a means for creating order based on his own experience:

> By God, men may in olde bookes rede
> Of many a man more of auctorite
> Than evere Caton was, so moot I thee,
> That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
> And han wel founden by experience.
> (Nun's Priest's Tale 2974-78)[28]

In books, poets found sources for their stories as well as a world view, but reworked their sources to fit new schemes through the guidance of rhetoric, logic, and the

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[27] Chaucer's interests in a diversity of sources, combined with his own experience, is evident in much of his work. Robert B. Burlin explains Chaucer's concern with experience and authority in these terms:

> For a man like Chaucer, with his evident curiosity about scientific instruments such as the astrolabe, his fascination with astronomy and alchemy, and his wide acquaintance with natural philosophy, there seems to have been available a tradition that allowed 'experience' a respectable place on the epistomological ladder.
> (Chaucerian Fiction 21)

[28] Robert B. Burlin discusses the dual role of experience and authority and the tensions between them in Chaucerian Fiction (5-22) and concludes that twentieth-century critics have sometimes lost sight of the importance of experience in medieval texts as a way of knowing, and as important as authority in the background of a particular work.

other disciplines which reflected divine order. Chaucer describes this process as a metaphorical harvesting:

> For out of olde feldes, as men seyth,
> Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yer.
> And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
> Cometh al this newe science that men lere.
> (Parliament of Fowls, 22-25)[29]

New wisdom, selectively derived by separating the good wheat from the chaff, was also important for physicians in Chaucer's day, and the importance of this order is reflected in medical treatises. Chaucer's own Physician in the Canterbury Tales was no exception. The narrator describes this "Doctour of Phisik" in terms of the ancient and contemporary authorities to whom the Physician subscribes:

> Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,
> And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,
> Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,
> Serapion, Razis, and Avycen,
> Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,
> Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn.
> (General Prologue 429-34)

Chaucer's Physician is an example of the power of authorities outside the traditional teachings of the Church. As Chaucer's narrator explains several lines

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[29] Chaucer's Wife of Bath's argument that women ought to have mastery in marriage is based on her experience, which she attempts to support with quotations from various bookish sources.

after enumerating the Physician's medical authorities, "His studie was but litel on the Bible" (GP 438).[30]

Nevertheless, even though various authorities served as sources for orderly frameworks, one dominant concept in medieval thought was the perceived relationship between the internal workings of the human

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[30]The meaning of this passage has long been debated among scholars. C. David Benson remarks that this line seems to pair the Physician's extensive learning about the body with his ignorance of the God who created that body (General Prologue 438n).

Walter C. Curry suggests that this passage points to the Physician's atheism, citing the following passage from John of Salisbury's Polycraticus 2.29 as support: "While they [physicians] attribute too much authority to Nature, [they] cast aside the Author of Nature" (Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences 30). But Curry also explains that the portrait may not be entirely negative. The physician, he argues, may be a pious man who has no time for reading the Bible or a rank materialist who contemns religion--we are not sure" (36). Citing Curry's discussion in her interpretation of the portrait, Jill Mann concludes:

> ...just as the ambivalent vocabulary in the Friar's portrait showed us, the "human contradictoriness" is something which belongs to Chaucer's audience as much as, if not more than to the Doctor. It is we who have mental frameworks, which will admit admiration both for the "verray parfit gentil knight," and for this "verray parfit praktisour." (Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire 99)

Whether Chaucer is actually criticizing the Physician in this passage appears yet open to question. I would argue that Chaucer is also pointing out various kinds of authority to which medieval people may have deferred (i.e., the Church, ancient medical authorities, and ancient philosophers), and perhaps not with any intention of slighting the Physician. One may ask how many people besides clerks actually studied the Bible very much in the late fourteenth century. Most of what people knew about the Bible was learned during church services, and perhaps through attending cycle plays and religious festivals, but not through a formal study of Holy Scripture.

body and the external universe. In medieval medical theory, the notion that the functions of the body reflected the workings of nature provided medieval physicians with a convenient model for organizing the body and its functions into distinct categories.[31]

The two illustrations below demonstrate the perceived relationship between elements in the universe and the human body, proportionately arranged.

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[31] For a discussion of humoral theory and its relationship to medieval cosmology, see Chapter Two of this study.

The persistence of this tradition is shown by the Renaissance physician Paracelsus (1493-1541), who, like earlier Christian commentators, believed that man had been created in the image of God, not in the image of nature, but that there were many analogues between the human body and the external world. And like medieval physicians, Paracelsus believed that the workings of nature directly influenced the inner workings of the body. Both the universe and the human body were composed of the same four elements: earth, fire, air, and water. Just as there were four elements, so there were four humors (blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile). An imbalance of these humors, caused by outside forces such as planetary movement and weather, resulted in disease. For health to return, the balance of humors had to be restored.

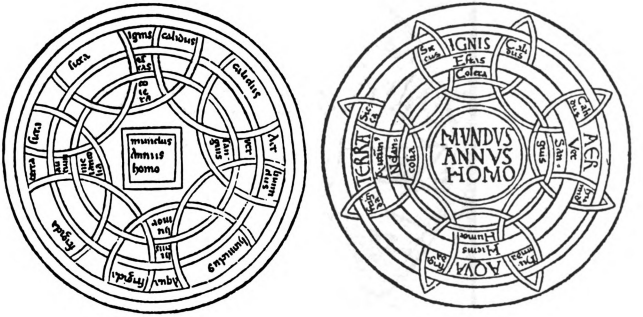

Figure 1: Mundus-annus-homo. Diagram from 8th C. Munich codex (in Herrlinger 53), showing the geometrical relationship between man and the four elements. This illustration demonstrates the close relationship between the inner workings of the body and the external elements surrounding it. Each of the elements is linked with one of the humors and with the temperament controlled by that humor: air, hot and moist, with blood (sanguine); fire, hot and dry, with choler (red or yellow bile) (choleric); earth, cold and dry, with black bile (melancholy); water, cold and moist, with phlegm (phlegmatic).

Figure 2: Christ as Salvator mundi in the Zodiac (in Herrlinger 57). Christ is surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac with their respective symbols. The names of the internal organs each astrological sign was thought to influence are written around the circumference of the circle. The four seasons are shown in the corners (14th C., Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

The theory of parallels between the workings of nature and the human body, and an emphasis on the orderliness of creation are found in both medical and moral interpretations of plague. In both these interpretations, writers emphasized balance and proportion, which were, in turn, reflected in their writing. Medieval medical treatises emphasized the restoration of humoral balance as a means for promoting health. As the human body reflected the orderliness of the created world, so medicine was an orderly model for understanding the body. A sense of balance and proportion is evident in illustrations found in medical works depicting Bloodletting Man, Wound Man, and in charts from uroscopies which emphasize degrees of change in the color and texture of urine. Medical treatises, including those on plague, were proportionate like the body, whose workings they were designed to explain. The illustration below demonstrates the fondness for order, typical of illustrations in other medieval medical treatises.

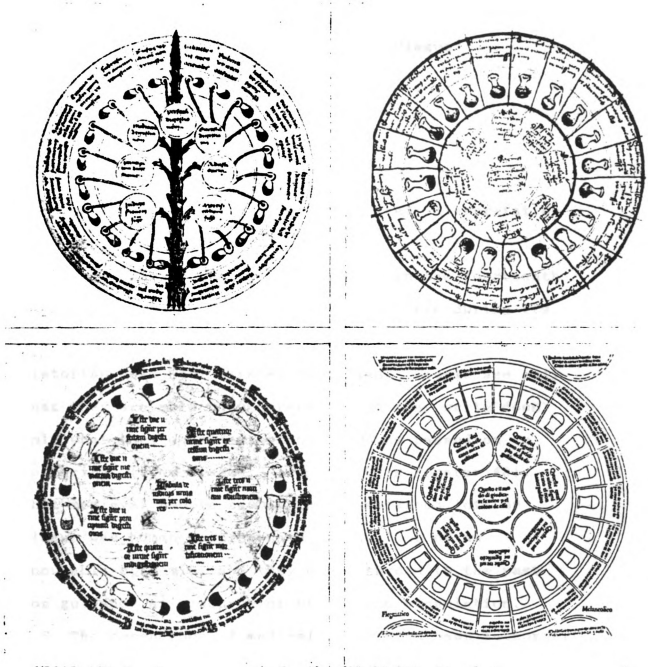

Figure 3: Four examples of uroscopic charts (rotula) in rosette-shaped diagrammatic form (pre-15th C.) (in Herrlinger 75). An imbalance in the urine, indicated by its color and texture, was thought to reflect an imbalance in the humors of the body. Matulae (urine flasks) of varying shades indicate nuances in the colors of urine. These are linked to seven circles, inscribed with the terms of pathology. Herrlinger notes that one may easily associate this form "with the tracery in the window rosettes of Gothic cathedrals" (29).

Part I: The Medical Interpretation of Plague

Chapter 2: The Background of the Medical Interpretation

When plague came to Europe again in the fourteenth century, it was as incurable as it had been during its earlier pandemic in the sixth century. As the medical historian Jean-Noel Biraben has noted, "People see only what they are able to understand, and they write down only what they consider worthy of being passed on to posterity" ("The Plague," trans. Elborg Forster 48). What medieval people saw in the devastation left by plague was human helplessness in the face of an incurable epidemic, and they often turned to the past for guidance as a source of wisdom and consolation.

The dependence of medical writers on past authority is especially evident in Middle English descriptions of plague in which physicians offer explanations traceable to ancient medical authorities. Hippocrates explained epidemic diseases in relation to weather conditions

(I.142-44), as did Bede (PL 90, cols. 266-67).[1] In the sixth century, Gregory the Great wrote concerning plague during its first pandemic. Obsessed with plague and the coming of the Last Days, Gregory "was truly the Pope of the Plague. For him, the sores of Job were buboes" (Biraben "The Plague" 61). The most extensive discussion of this first pandemic appears in Lucretius' De natura rerum (6:1090-1246--Trans. Frank O. Copley, The Nature of Things 173-75). Writing centuries later, during another outbreak of plague, the celebrated Arab

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[1] Hippocratic writings include a chapter on epidemic disease in which the author relates epidemics to weather conditions and planetary influence. See Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed. Great Books of the Western World, 10: (Hippocrates and Galen) "Of the Epidemics," 44-63.

Hippocrates writes, "The whole constitution of the season being thus inclined to the southerly, and with droughts early in the spring, from the preceding opposite and northerly state, ardent fevers occurred in a few instances..." (44), later describing the weather conditions preceding an outbreak of "ardent fevers" in the following terms:

> In Thasus, a little before and during the season of Arcturus, there were frequent and great rains, with northerly winds. About the equinox, and till the setting of the Pleiades, there were a few southerly rains: the winter northerly and parched, cold, with great winds and snow. Great storms about the equinox, the spring northerly, dryness, rains few and cold. About the summer solstice, scanty rains, and great cold until the season of the Dog-star. After the Dog-days, until the season of Arcturus, the summer hot, great droughts, not in intervals, but continued and severe: no rain; and Etesian winds blew; about the seasons of Arcturus southerly rains until the equinox (47).

According to Hippocrates, a year of disruptive weather conditions led to an outbreak of paraplegia (motor and sensory paralysis) in the winter months following, which "attacked many and some died speedily" (47).

physician Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (AD 980-1037) reported that when the plague reached epidemic proportions among animals during an outbreak at the beginning of the tenth century, "the rats and all the other animals that lived in the ground left their holes and reeled about like drunks," as they were slain by pestilential atmosphere (qtd. in Henschen 78). Avicenna's Canon of Medicine attempted to order all medical knowledge handed down from Aristotle and Galen, and in that work he wrote that plague came from pestilential atmosphere and decomposition of the air and soil, which could be prevented by fumigations of "sedge, frankincense, myrtle, rose, and sandalwood" (trans. Gruner 445), ingredients described in medieval recipes for plague preventives and remedies.[2]

The remedies for plague suggested by Avicenna, Galen, and other earlier physicians derive from works like those of the first-century medical botanist, Dioscorides, whose Materia medica (A.D. 60) was well-known to medieval people, often through a tradition of folk remedies.[3] Dioscorides, for instance, recommended

[2] Avicenna also wrote that "During the time when pestilences are about, one may use vinegar in both food and drinks, for this preserves one from danger" (trans. Gruner 225), advice also found in the treatises of medieval physicians.

[3] See John M. Riddle's Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine for an extensive study of Dioscorides' philosophy of pharmacy and his contributions to

mixing wine or vinegar with various herbs like betony or myrrh (Riddle, Dioscorides 145-46). Medieval physicians described such medicinal wine drinks as useful for treating plague.

As Chapter Three of this study demonstrates, medieval physicians turned to the writings of Avicenna, Hippocrates, and Galen for advice on plague, and to other standard medical treatises such as Johannitius' Isagoge for explaining plague within the framework of a well-established cosmology. Writers of general medical treatises, also attempting to make sense out of plague, provided complicated pharmaceutical remedies based on the writings of Galen, Avicenna, and Dioscorides, but rarely on the advice given in plague treatises themselves.

1. Humoral Theory and Plague

Medieval people maintained a world view based on an orderly and proportionate universe, as Chapter One of this study explains (29-35). Medieval physicians subscribed to the belief that bodily processes occurred in an orderly manner, a notion established by ancient medical authorities.

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medicine.

The doctrine of the humors originated in the Greek medical tradition. Pre-Hippocratic physicians based their teachings on Greek cosmology, which explained that disease resulted from a disturbance of the natural balance of humors in the body (McGrew 142-43). Hippocrates explained the humors systematically, and Aristotle placed this doctrine in a larger, philosophical system (McGrew 142). In the second century AD, Galen applied the notion of humors to a variety of diseases, believing that a balance of humors was essential for health. Thus, humoral doctrine taught that disease was a natural process not essentially different from our modern conception of physiology (Sigerist qtd. in Marti-Ibanez 126-27). Disease was therefore seen as an imbalance in natural bodily functions attributable to variations in the four humors. Popular remedies and treatments for plague explained in leechbooks and other practical guides reflected the doctrine of humoral theory.

Physicians believed that plague vapors or miasmas entered the body through the pores, which resulted in a superabundance (superfluity) of humors in one or more of the three principal organs: the brain, heart, and liver. These organs, attempting to restore balance, expelled superfluities through the emunctories or cleansing places of the body, known today in terms of the

lymphatic system. Swellings in the groin, which sometimes occurred in the course of plague, were thought to be caused by an excess of humors in the liver, swellings under the arm, by superfluities in the heart, and swellings behind the ears, by superfluities in the brain. Thus, the disruption of the atmosphere caused by plague miasmas was repeated in the body through a disruption of the humors.[4]

2. The Typical Academic Medical Treatise as a Model for English Plague Treatises

English plague treatises often follow the conventions found in Latin medical treatises from which they were derived. The Isagoge of Johannitius became one of the most influential of these Latin treatises in the

[4]Humoral theory was based on a perceived duplicity between the human body and the four elements that surrounded it. The four elements, air, fire, earth, and water, were the most basic substances in nature and, in various combinations, formed all living and non-living things. A fifth element (quintessence) existed above the sphere of the moon and was thought to be a combination of the four "lower" elements. The most significant aspect of this belief was in its perceived understanding of the interdependence of the elements. All things, animate or inanimate, were thought to be related so that a change in one brought about changes in another.

In the human body, the four humors corresponded to the four elements: blood, like air was hot and moist; choler (yellow or red bile), like fire was hot and dry; black bile (melancholy) was, like earth, cold and dry, and phlegm, like water, was cold and moist. The four humors, in turn, affected both physical and mental, or temperamental, states.

Middle Ages. In its original form, an Arabic commentary by the Nestorian Christian Abu Zayn ibn Ishaq (Hunayn), the Isagoge summarized important precepts from Galen's theories. After its translation from Arabic into English in the twelfth century, it became known in Western Europe as the Isagoge of Johannitius, a conduit through which much of Galen's teachings were known to medieval physicians.[5]

The Isagoge, an attempt to codify medical knowledge systematically, began by explaining the two major divisions of medicine: theory and practice. Theoretical medicine includes the study of "naturals," "non-naturals," and "contra-naturals," with practical medicine being derived from these theoretical divisions. The study of the relationships between these three categories constitutes the science of the causes and signs of disease, health, and the neutral state, which occurred in between.

Hunayn, the author of the treatise, divided the "naturals" into seven categories: elements (which exist outside the body but have influence over it), temperaments, humors, parts of the body, faculties,

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[5]L. J. Rather provides an outline of the Isagoge and describes the contents of other important Latin medical treatises such as Avicenna's Canon in "Systematic Medical Treatises," esp. 290-94. The outline of the Isagoge given below is taken, in part, from Rather's outline.

operations, and spirits. Each of these subcategories was further divided in the treatise. The "non-naturals," the second major division of theoretical medicine, included forces outside the body which directly affect the "naturals:" various changes in the air (due to seasons, stars, winds, earth, and their exhalations), exercise and bathing, foods, sleep, coitus, and affectations of the mind.[6]

"Contra-naturals," the final topic under the category of theoretical medicine, occur as products of the interaction between the naturals and non-naturals. The contra-naturals are divided into three categories: diseases, the causes of diseases, and the sequels of diseases. The Isagoge further subdivides each of these.

The Isagoge continues with an explanation of the causes, nature, and signs of disease in various organs. The nature of disease depends on its origin, whether it arises from a combination of cold, hot, moist or dry elements. It may result from constriction or relaxation of the pores, from an excess or lack of humors, from

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[6]L. J. Rather traces the "Six Things Non-Natural" in treatises from ancient times to the late nineteenth century in "The Six Things Non-Natural." He summarizes the doctrine of the six things non-natural in these terms:

> There are six categories of factors that operatively determine health or disease, depending on the circumstances of their use or abuse, to which human beings are unavoidably exposed in the course of daily life (337).

informative virtue (i.e., from internal changes), or from trauma. The treatise concludes with sections on the practical divisions of medicine: the regimen of health, treatment, removal of superfluities, changes in members of the body, divisions of treatment, surgery, and an explanation of various kinds: quality, quantity, time, order, and the separation of good and bad.

Medical treatises like the Isagoge attempted to codify the causes of and remedies for disease within an orderly cosmology. In a sense, all diseases were really variations of one disease resulting from lack or excess of humors in varying degrees. Thus, the close relationship of the internal workings of the body and the external world could serve as a model for all forms and degrees of disease and health. Newly appearing diseases were considered as variations of diseases already known. Accordingly, medieval physicians first labeled plague as a form of fever, placing it in a larger framework of fevers and pestilential diseases.[7] The Isagoge and plague treatises modelled on this ancient work described various agents responsible for disease and health and their relationship to the human

[7] This development has been fully elaborated on by Melissa P. Chase in a dissertation and subsequent article. For a summary of the development of plague as a disease entity separate from fevers or other forms of pestilential diseases, see Chase's "Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes: Authority and Experience in Montpellier Plague Treatises."

body, which was often described in terms suggesting that it was a microcosm of God's orderly universe. Medical treatises thus follow an order assumed to mirror Divine order.

Although the standard medical treatise divided the art of medicine into practical and theoretical medicine, it also stressed the connections between these two major divisions. In plague treatises, phlebotomy, a procedure used for both prevention and treatment and based on theory, was often provided as a supplement for herbal remedies and other practical measures for treating disease. A treatise often began by summarizing the causes of plague, a theoretical concern, and continued by listing remedies, a practical concern. Lay people were more concerned with treatment of plague than with its causes, and especially with less technical treatments such as herbal remedies, instead of with more technical measures like phlebotomy or uroscopy.

By the end of the fourteenth century, treatises on topics such as childbirth, gynecology, surgery, and miscellaneous diseases appeared in English, suggesting that advice on these subjects was more accessible to lay people. But vernacular plague treatises continue to occupy a proportion of this vernacular medical literature well into the fifteenth century (R. H.

Robbins, "Medical Manuscripts" 406-07). By the early fifteenth century, manuals on academic subjects like uroscopy and phlebotomy had also been translated, so that advice on these more theoretical matters was also available in English sources. But as examples from plague treatises reveal, procedures like phlebotomy were often simplified in lay medical guides to the degree that they were not practical for the untrained without further instruction.

Chapter 3: Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century English Plague Treatises

1. John of Burgundy's Treatise

The need for medical advice during plague outbreaks led to a number of treatises written in Latin and later translated into every European language, including Hebrew (Dorothea Waley Singer and Reuben Levy, "Plague Treatises" 394). Dorothea Waley Singer describes this broad variety of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century plague treatises in a study centering on the plague treatise attributed to John of Burgundy.[1] According to

[1] Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine, History Section, 9 (1916): 159-212.

Singer's work on the classification of English plague treatises is the most complete, although Karl Sudhoff and others have also studied plague treatises in England, and their contribution ought to be considered briefly here.

In a study of treatises written between 1348 and 1500, Sudhoff found that only 9 of the 281 texts he investigated were actually from England. Unfortunately, Sudhoff's opinion concerning the provenance of English texts is somewhat limited; he had much greater access to German collections than to British manuscripts. George Sarton finds that "the fact that half are of German origin is accidental, Sudhoff having naturally been able to explore the German collections of MSS more thoroughly than the collections of other countries" (Intro. to the History of Science, 2: 1660). Much of Sudhoff's work was done before and during World War I, when access to British libraries was difficult for German scholars.

Concerning fourteenth century plague tracts particularly, of those composed when plague was most

Singer, there are four Latin and two English copies of the earlier Burgundy treatise in the British Museum alone, and several more in Oxford and Cambridge, attesting to its popularity ("Some Plague Treatises" 177). In a later study, Singer and Annie Anderson describe other plague treatises surviving in Great Britain, many of them incorporating portions of the Burgundy treatise.[2]

The plague treatise variously attributed to John of Burgundy (ca. 1338-1390) has given rise to a complex web

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imminent, only 77 of the 281 texts mentioned by Sudhoff were written during initial outbreaks of the disease, and of these, only three are in English. Twenty of these fourteenth-century texts were written within five years of the first outbreak.

Consult Winslow and Duran-Reynals, "Jacme d'Agramont and the First of the Plague Treatises" 747-65, esp. 747; and K. Sudhoff's extensive collection of plague texts in Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des Schwarzen Todes.

[2] Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Plague Tractates in Great Britain and Eire in MSS Written Before the Sixteenth Century. The catalogue provides extensive examples of anonymous plague treatises and pestilence passages in medical works and is especially useful because it contains incipits, chapter headings, and explicits from unpublished manuscripts (see esp. Appendices A and B). The many unpublished treatises mentioned offer much ground for future editors. As Rossell Hope Robbins states concerning Middle English manuscripts generally, "...the field of medical and other scientific vernacular manuscripts is still a Yukon territory crying out for exploitation. So little is known, so much has to be discovered" ("Medical Manuscripts 413).

of texts by various translators.[3] Some of the treatises in this family have been attributed to other medical authorities contemporary with John of Burgundy: John of Bordeaux and Bearded John of Liège. To add to the uncertainty over authorship, John of Burgundy was once thought to be John Mandeville, author of the Travels.[4]

The many redactions of the Burgundy plague treatise and its distinction as the first published medical manuscript in England (Singer "Some Plague Treatises" 177) further attest to its wide influence.[5] No other

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[3] For translations of Hebrew versions of the Burgundy treatise from manuscripts located in the Bibliothèque Nationale, see Dorothea Waley Singer and Reuben Levy, "Plague Treatises."

[4] There is not enough space here to recount the entire controversy concerning the original authorship of the Burgundy plague treatise which gave rise to so many others, although the history of scholarship on the author of this treatise does present an interesting piece of detective work. For an earlier view on the identity of the author, see Singer and Anderson 26-27, David Murray, John de Burdeus or John de Burgundia and the Pestilence, and especially Singer and Levy, 395-99.

More recent scholarship suggests that John Mandeville and Bearded John of Burgundy, physician of Liège, were not the same person. The editor of the Oxford edition of Mandeville's Travels, M. C. Seymour, supports that notion.

Concerning the anonymous author of Mandeville's Travels, Seymour remarks, "None of the various attempts to pierce the author's anonymity, which began in the fourteenth century at Liège and which have successively associated the book with Jean de Bourgogne, a Liège physician (d. 1372), and Jean d'Outremeuse, a Liège notary (d. 1399), as well as with the author's adopted name, will bear critical examination" (xiii).

[5] The plague treatise by Bengt Knutsson, discussed later in this chapter (88-94), is a distant heir of the Burgundy treatise and bears the distinction of being

plague treatises survive in England in as many versions.[6] The original Latin treatise by John of Burgundy (Tractatus Johannis de Burgundia de morbo epidemiae) appeared around 1365, and a Latin recension of the work attributed to John of Bordeaux appeared around 1390.

The Latin versions of this treatise were longer, with an astrological prologue explaining miasmas and the causes of plague, useful for graduate physicians in plotting the course of a patient's illness. Astrological knowledge was necessary for understanding the course of disease, but would be of little use to laymen who more often concerned themselves with remedies.[7] These long astrological prologues also serve

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the first English book with a separate title page as well as the first medical book published in England (1485) (Keyes, "The Plague" 50).

[6] Rossell Hope Robbins and Dorothea Waley Singer have placed the total number of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century medical manuscripts in Great Britain as follows:

	Latin	English
14th C.	1948	140
15th C.	3729	872

(Robbins, "Medical Manuscripts" 393)

These figures demonstrate the dramatic increase in Latin, and especially in English medical manuscripts from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

[7] Singer and Anderson do not mention any abbreviated Latin editions of the treatise without the prologue. Academic medical writing stressed the importance of astrological forecasting as an important component in academic medicine, but English readers were most concerned with remedy and prevention, which these treatises address extensively.

as evidence for physicians' concerns with locating plague in a larger cosmology. Though plague brought widespread suffering and death, it could be understood along with other diseases as part of a larger scheme.

English translations of the Burgundy treatise offered English readers consolation as well as medical advice by explaining plague in an accessible language. But the most popular forms of the treatise in England were shorter versions that summarized remedies and directions for phlebotomy, omitting lengthy discussions of the astrological causes of plague. Even though the advice given in the Burgundy treatise was widely available in English, it remained within the domain of academic medicine, seldom working its way into general medical treatises or later popular texts such as those described in Chapter Four. The Burgundy treatise defers to ancient medical writers, while general medical works with advice on plague defer to an ancient pharmaceutical tradition. Neither the academic nor the popular tradition in English medical writing turns much to contemporary sources in explaining plague.

Like the Isagoge, a medical treatise on the theory and practice of medicine used by medieval physicians, the Latin version of the Burgundy plague treatise divides its subject into three major categories: causes,

prevention, and remedy.[8] The Latin version of the treatise and its heirs follow an outline of theoretical and practical medicine explained in the Isagoge, locating the causes of plague among "natural things" (the effects of the elements on the humors) as they are changed by "non-natural things:" distantly, as changes in the planets, and nearer, as changes in the surrounding air. Like other diseases, plague was a "contra-natural thing," having its cause in the interaction of certain non-natural elements within the human body.[9] Like other epidemic diseases discussed in ancient treatises, plague's causes were also thought to be both particular and universal: involving internal organs and their similar parts in the body, while at the same time affecting great numbers of people.

The original Latin treatise by John of Burgundy (ca. 1365), surviving in several British manuscripts, reflects the concerns of ancient treatises, especially in locating plague within the context of other

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[8] The Isagoge is discussed in Chapter Two (57-61) of this study as an example of a typical learned medical treatise.

[9] As one translation of the Burgundy treatise puts it, "ayer enters into a mans body and infectes his flesche and his blude and sa engenders the pestilence" (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 1443.376-93; in Singer and Anderson 44).

epidemics.[10] In a personal introduction, its author states that he writes about plague so that each man might be his own physician: "sibi ipsi sit praeservator, curator et rector" (62). It begins with advice on preventing plague, explaining the importance of a moderate diet and moderation in sexual activity (63). English prose translations summarize this advice but omit other, more complicated preventives like the pomum ambrae, explained in this treatise: an aromatic ball containing a variety spices held together by resin and worn around the neck to prevent plague; one of many kinds of aromatics used to purify plague-infested air.[11] The treatise gives recipes for other plague preventives, stating that more common ingredients could be substituted for uncommon or unavailable ingredients. These remedies have analogues in ancient sources.

In the next section (64), the author outlines the causes of plague, citing authorities like Rhazes (ca. AD 860-923) and Avicenna (AD 980-1037) in a technical description that parallels the content of writings on

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[10] Sloane 134. f. 31^{r}-38^{v}; Sloane 3566, f. 63^{v}-87^{v}; British Museum K. G. IV, v. 158^{r}-159^{v}.
Tractatus Johannis de Burgundia de morbo epidemiae, edited by Karl Sudhoff in Pestschriften aus dem 150 Jahre nach der Epidemie 5 (1911-12): 62-69. Parenthetical page references following quotations from this treatise are from Sudhoff's edition.

[11] The pomum ambrae was recommended as a prophylactic measure for pestilence earlier in the fourteenth century by physicians like Bernard of Gordon.

plague by earlier medical authorities, especially Hippocrates (ca. 460-375 BC) and Galen (AD 129-99), who survived an outbreak of pestilence himself in the second century.[12] The section on the causes of plague locates them in general and remote sources, and then in ones particular and near. Medical authorities on plague, beginning with the faculty of medicine at the University of Paris, had argued that the remote source of this disease was a planetary conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in 1345.[13] The Burgundy Latin treatise states that this planetary conjunction had corrupted the air, making it putrid, and in the next section describes

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[12] Galen does not mention astrological causes as the source of epidemics; Avicenna mentions them briefly (A. M. Campbell, The Black Death 37n5). See also the discussion of epidemics in the writings of Hippocrates and Galen, Chapter Two (51-53, esp. 52n1).

[13] Planetary conjunctions were thought to signal great events, not all of them harmful (e.g., the coming of a great prophet) as Guy de Chauliac's Cyrurgia explains. But certain conjunctions could produce serious illness.

A grand conjunction of the three superior planets, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars, in the sign of Aquarius, took place on March 24, 1345, according to Guy de Chauliac. This, he argued, was the cause of the plague that swept Europe from 1348 onwards. Guy comments extensively on the cause of the plague in his Cyrurgia Magna, which was later translated into vernacular languages. It became a popular surgical textbook in England, and its description of the causes of plague parallels the one found in the Burgundy treatise, though with more detail. Consult Chapter Four (95-103).

additional remedies for countering the effects of this corrupt air in the body.[14]

The treatise continues by explaining how pestilential air corrupts the three principal members, or organs, within the body: the heart, head (brain), and liver (65), causing each, in turn, to produce excess humors.[15] The treatise recommends phlebotomy for reducing these excess humors, and explains this technique in summary form in the next section (65-66). The treatise then gives advice on treating plague with a diet of several kinds of herbs, similar to those prescribed by earlier authorities for fevers. Plague was often accompanied with fever, and medieval physicians placed it in the larger category of pestilential fever, since ancient physicians like Hippocrates had classified epidemics as forms of pestilential fever.[16]

According to the author, the best remedy for this disease is tyriaca (theriac), an ancient remedy

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[14]Et qui isto utatur regimine a pestiferi aeris corrupcione mediante dei auxilio poterit praeservari (64.68-70).

[15]For an extended discussion of this concept, see Chapter Two (54-56). The treatise explains the location of the emunctories where these excess humors are expelled: "Epatis vero emuctoria sunt inguinaria, et emuctoria cerebri sunt ub auribus aut sub lingua... (65.79-80).

[16]Dieta in hiis morbis sit tenuis ut in febricitantibus, quia huic morbo semper commiscitur febris (66.136-37).

containing 70 ingredients in an opium base, first suggested and described by Galen as a panacea for a variety of illnesses (66), and commonly used by physicians afterwards. Other, more simply compounded herbal remedies appear in the next section (67), which offers a series of recipes later translated word-for-word in English prose versions but with substitutions for rarer or more expensive herbs. Above all, the treatise warns, one must not delay in applying these remedies, as the disease not only progresses rapidly, but is often fatal (67).[17]

In the closing sections of the treatise, the author gives further advice on diet, recapitulates on the importance of phlebotomy, and lists several other recipes. He concludes with a testimonial to the authority of past physicians from Hippocrates onwards, but in an unusual turn from the conventions of standard medical treatises, gives contemporary physicians the majority of the credit.[18] Despite this testimonial to

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[17] Etiam dico quod isti morbi pestilenciales breve et subitaneum habent principium et cito determinacionem unde illa, quae spectant ad curam, in his morbis non deberent procrastinari, quare minucio, quae est principium curae, non debet retardari nec expectetur dies prima nec secunda (67.183-87).

[18] Nichilominus tamen super hiis, quae dictus Ypocras vidit, librum edidit de epidemia. Sed Galienus, Diastorius, Rasis, Damascenus, Geber, Mesue, Copho, Constantinus, Serapion, Avicenna, Algagel et sequaces eorum nunquam viderunt ita generalem nec longam epidemiam, nec curas eorum longa experientia

contemporary colleagues, the sources of medical information in the treatise derive from a well-established tradition, not from contemporary observation.

Like other academic treatises, the Latin version of the Burgundy plague treatise stresses the importance of diet both in the prevention and treatment of disease. In later academic treatises on plague, and in later English versions of the Burgundy treatise, fewer plague remedies appear, because the plague proved so often fatal, and also, perhaps because complicated recipes like theriac had to be compounded by trained apothecaries. Hence, prophylactic measures like phlebotomy and diet became crucial and were stressed in later treatises as means for preventing a disease which could not be effectively cured. However, plague remedies remain an important part of general medical works containing advice on plague, and appear in recipe collections as late as the nineteenth century when the bacillus was discovered.

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probaverunt, sed quidquid plurimi dicant et tractent de epidemiis a dictis Ypocratis exhauserunt. Unde magistri huius temporis in illis morbis maiori experientia usi sunt, quam omnes qui nos praecesserunt, unde dicitur et verum est, quod experientia facit artem, et ideo ego autem pietate motus et cladi hominum condolens et compatiens hoc compendium edidi...
(68-69.239-50)

Several later versions of the Latin Burgundy treatise have an English title and glosses.[19] The English glosses in these treatises summarize learned advice and, therefore, could be read by laymen, or may have served as a crib or quick guide for those who read Latin, but not fluently, serving as a crutch for readers unfamiliar with the language of formal medical treatises. The practice of summarizing medical information was more useful for academically trained physicians, who often carried a vade mecum containing a chart of favorable days for letting blood and diagrams of rotula, urine flasks indicating the various colors of urine. These charts and summaries aided physicians in making accurate diagnoses and prognoses, in addition to giving tables of days for letting blood, essential information for treating patients.[20]

A mixture of Latin and English in prose recensions of the Burgundy treatise occurs in texts mostly after the late fourteenth century. While Latin may have been accessible to clerks and physicians, in English versions it lends a degree of credibility to various

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[19]For example, "Here begynneth the tretis of John of Burdeux the nobyll fecision ageyn the pestilence ewyll as it is proved be doctores" (in Singer and Anderson, nos. 17, 33).

[20]Consult Charles H. Talbot, "A Mediaeval Physician's Vade Mecum." Chapter One of this dissertation (44) contains an example of a physician's uroscopy chart.

remedies and procedures explained in the treatise, reminding the audience of the earlier authority on which it is based.

The custom of using Latin also appears in other vernacular works as the mark of authority and as a reminder of the ancient sources from which the text is derived. In the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's Pardoner explains how Latin tags lend credibility to greedy intentions when speaking to an audience of "gentils." The Pardoner tells his pilgrim audience:

> And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
> To saffron with my predicacioun,
> And for to stire hem to devocioun.
> (6.343-346)[21]

An English plague treatise with Latin glosses was not necessarily the work of a charlatan, who, like Chaucer's Pardoner, had interest only in financial gain.

The English versions of the Burgundy treatise appear in both prose and rhyme and were generally shorter, often lacking the long astrological prologue.[22] Like the Latin treatises on which they were

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[21] The Summoner is said to do the same "like a jay" (General Prologue 637-46)). And Langland uses Latin in many ways to suggest a dialogue between lay and learned perspectives.

[22] Ed. David Murray, John de Burdeus or John de Burgundia and the Pestilence (Register Coenobii Kalchoensis MS. Adv. Bibl.).
Ed. Karl Sudhoff, Pestschriften aus dem 150 Jahre nach der Epidemie (Cambridge, Trinity College MS. R.14.32).

based, they also divide their subject into four chapters, but avoid lengthy or complicated recipes such as Galen's theriac. The English prose treatises on plague, unlike later academic advice on plague, continue to stress remedies, often substituting common garden herbs for more expensive or complex ingredients given in earlier versions.

One Latin version with an English title and glosses (ca. 1390) refers to its author as a "gude fisycyane." Like later English versions, this treatise divides into four sections: 1) how to care for oneself in times of pestilence, 2) causes, 3) remedies, and 4) prevention.[23] An English version of the same treatise begins by advocating a moderate diet. One should avoid certain foods: "garlik, vuyons [onions], lakes [leeks] en other suche metes [foods] that bringeth a man into on vnkyndely hete" (qtd. in Sudhoff 73).[24] One should also avoid bathing or other physical activity that might cause excessive body heat and open the pores, allowing "venonys ayre to enter and distroyeth the lyfly spirites

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[23]The order of these sections changes, however, in some of the other Englished Burgundy treatises as examples in this chapter show.

[24]Parenthetical references to page and line numbers in the following quotations are from Karl Sudhoff's transcription of an English version of the Burgundy treatise in Pestschriften nach der Epidemie des "Schwarzen Todes" 1348. Archiv fur Geschichte der Medizin 5.73-75.

in man and [thus] enfebleth the body" (73.14-16). "Lecherye" should also be shunned because it weakens "kynde" and, like bathing or perspiring, "enfebleth the kynde and openeth the pores" (73.16-17).[25]

The prologue to many versions of the Burgundy treatise, including earlier Latin versions, explained that the treatise, though taken from professional medical writing, was written for everyone's use, so that each might ably restore and preserve his own health.[26] Writing shortly after the first outbreak of plague in Lerida, Catalonia, the Continental physician Jacme d'Agramont explained why he had recorded advice on this disease:

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[25] "Kynde" in the passage above might refer to semen as it does in Chaucer's Parson's Tale:

> For if the chirche be halwed, and man or womman spille his kynde inwith that place by wey of synne or by wikked temptacioun, the chirche is entredited til it be reconsiled by the bysshop.
>
> (965)

"Kynde," on first reading, appears to refer only to semen, particularly because sexual activity ("lecherye") is involved. But "kynde" also may refer to spirit, or simply to "physical nature," which, when weakened by plague vapors entering the body, causes humoral imbalance which, in turn, results in the characteristic buboes (cf. also, MED, s.v. kynde).

[26] Sudhoff find the following prologue to a Latin version of Burgundy's treatise typical:

> Ego Johannes de Burgundia divino auxilio invocato praeservationem et curam epidemiae enucleare intendo, ut vix aliquis phisico indigeat, sed unusquis que phisicus sibi ipsi sit praeservator, curator et rector.

Pestschriften aus dem 150 Jahre nach der Epidemie 5:61. (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS.O.I.77).

> Because in this [the task of producing a plague tract] I am not incited by envy or iniquity but by true love and charity having made this present treatise principally for the benefit of the people and not for the instruction of the physician...[27]

But unlike the preface to the Burgundy treatise, which set no restrictions on the users of the text, Jacme goes on to explain that the treatment of plague itself ought to be left for trained physicians:

> Everybody can make use of the regimen of prevention presented in the present treatise without a physician and without danger. But the regimen of treatment properly belongs to the physician, since in this anybody without the art of medicine could easily err, and in order to avoid this, no mention of treatment is made here.
> (in Duran-Reynals and Winslow 58)

The translator of the original Burgundy treatise apparently believed his audience could understand and make use of more complicated procedures, including phlebotomy, as he added information on this technical treatment, ostensibly allowing each man to become not only a preserver of health, but a healer himself.

Phlebotomy was rooted in Galenic and Hippocratic medicine, and was well-established as a treatment and preventive for various diseases by the fourteenth century. But the directions for phlebotomy in this treatise and others in the Burgundy corpus are so

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[27] Trans. M. L. Duran-Reynals and C.-E. A. Winslow, in "Texts and Documents: Regiment de Preservacio a Epidimia o Pestilencia e Mortaldats" 58.

greatly simplified that one would have to refer to a more complete technical phlebotomy in order to carry them out, suggesting that, with respect to phlebotomy at least, one could hardly become his own "praeservator, curator et rector" on the basis of this text alone.[28] Latin treatises in the Burgundy corpus contain an even less detailed description of phlebotomy than later English versions, possibly because other Latin phlebotomies were more available to those who read Latin treatises and would be superfluous in Latin plague treatises, but considered useful for English readers.

The translator of one English phlebotomy (ca. 1400), explains that he is translating a Latin text for "myn dere gossip thomas plawdon, citiseyn & barbour of london" (Voigts and McVaugh 15). He further states that he will "write sum del of theorike & sum del of pratike a þorue þe which 3e schulle þe betir entre into þe worchynge of fisyk in tyme of lakkyng of wise fysicians..." (Voigts and McVaugh 15).[29] The longer

[28] Probably the oldest technical phlebotomy available was the anonymous Epistula de phlebotomia which dates from the ninth century.

For a discussion of the history of this procedure, see Karl Josef Bauer, Geschichte der Aderlasse, and for a more thorough explanation of this tradition in Middle English texts, see Linda E. Voigts and Michael R. McVaugh, A Latin Technical Phlebotomy and Its Middle English Translation.

[29] Voigts and McVaugh note that it is difficult to determine the extent of training for barber-surgeons, who generally used technical phlebotomies, especially

English plague treatise thus demonstrates a blending of learned and lay perspectives which explain for a popular audience useful measures for controlling plague from both traditions, though the recipes seem the most usable part.

The treatise emphasizes herbal remedies which could be mixed with vinegar or white, but not red, wine (75.107-08), but like its Latin source, concludes that prevention is best:

> Therfore whoo that dredeth hym of his sekenes, kepe hym fro thynke envennemyd as in the frist chaptre, and whoo so is [þ]erinne doo by tyme and rule hym as the other capiters of this tretis techen hym, and through the grace of god he shalle fro this

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before 1451 when they were awarded a grant of arms, and, later, in 1462, a royal charter, which contributed to uniform codes for training physicians (A Latin Technical Phlebotomy 17, esp. note 55).

However, they argue that we can probably assume that many barbers read Latin, and that they may have attended academic lectures in addition to their apprenticeship and other practical training (A Latin Technical Phlebotomy 16). This appears to be the case with John Arderne, surgeon-author of Treatises of Fistula in Ano, who apparently had some academic training in addition to his apprenticeship as a surgeon.

Translating a Latin treatise on phlebotomy for barber-surgeons, then, would not have been the same as translating information on phlebotomy for a less educated audience. While empirics had no university training, unlike barbers-surgeons, they might have used phlebotomy learned in an apprenticeship and not by reading texts on phlebotomy. Sharing such information with them, especially when it comes from a learned physician like John of Burgundy, seems to be an unusual situation. Many academic physicians did not advocate sharing such learned procedures with empirics, as we have seen in Jacme d'Agramont's treatise on plague quoted above.

> seknes kept and delivered, for [þ]er is no sikenes in kynde, that hat holpe it in kynde.
> (75.115-20)

In English versions, recipes are simplified from Latin originals, and advice on phlebotomy, though probably difficult to use, is generally a summary of more complicated techniques. Before the fifteenth century, more technical procedures like phlebotomy, humoral theory (i.e., a discussion of "cleansing places"), and uroscopy rarely appear in lay manuals.[30]

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[30] English translations of uroscopies do not appear until sometime during the fifteenth century, indicating that prognosis or forecasting might be considered a more technical strategy than phlebotomy, and of little use to laymen in "great mortalities." By the fifteenth century, even technical information on uroscopy, usually carried out by physicians, was translated into the vernacular.

The English text of the Liber Uricrisiarum (Welcome 225), edited by Joanne Jasin, is one example of the growing availability of technical information for a popular audience. The plainness of the English manuscript in which it appears, when compared to more ornate Latin versions, also reveals a gap between wealthier physicians and the poorer leeches. The scribe of the Uricrisiarum, as Jasin has noted, "apologizes for his lack of access to certain authoritative texts for 'faut of pecunie' (33r)" (5).

The rise of the medical guilds increased further differences between "wise physicians" and poorer practitioners and later, these guilds encouraged medical licensure for physicians which was granted by act of Parliament in 1423. Voigts and McVaugh (A Latin Technical Phlebotomy) comment on medieval medical practice with respect to the guilds: "In England in the early fifteenth century surgeons and physicians seemed to have been aligned with one another perhaps because both groups were weak in relation to the politically powerful guild of barber-surgeons" (16-17). According to Voigts and McVaugh, guild records for the barbers survive from 1308; they were awarded a grant of arms in 1451 and a royal charter in 1462; Guild records for surgeons survive from 1368; surgeons were granted arms in 1492 (17n55).

Several rhymed versions of the Burgundy treatise dating from the fifteenth century also survive, including one edited by R. H. Bowers with the Latin title De pestilencia.[31] Bowers places this tract in the category of "mnemonic or functional verse" (119). Its form is like that of other versified medical treatises.[32] But unlike other rhymed medical works, this

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For a discussion of medieval medical practice, see Vern L. Bullough, The Development of Medicine as a Profession; John A. Alford, "Medicine in the Middle Ages: The Theory of a Profession"; and Elaine Miller, "In Hoote Somere" xxxiii-xxxix.

[31]Versified medical writings are popular in the Middle Ages. See examples in George Henslow, Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century or in Warren R. Dawson's A Leechbook or Collection of Medical Recipes of the Fifteenth Century.

Many rhymed treatises give remedies for ailments in head-to-toe order. The first 700 lines of one such treatise describes the virtues of herbs, explaining, in order, how each may be used for specific ailments catalogued. See Robert Max Garrett, "Middle English Rimed Medical Treatise" 163-93.

Compared to the rhymed version of the Burgundy treatise, this herbarium and remedy book offers little in the way of prevention. One typical remedy in this treatise ("For to knowe the festers") describes several types of festers, cold and hot, and then gives "Diuerse medecynes for þem." The hot fester is more dangerous, but "The colde fester schal be heled wt hete." (Garrett, 191).

[32]Robert S. Gottfried has printed portions of a rhymed treatise, which he explains "is a much-copied Oxford manuscript from about 1480, later printed, which included a segment entitled 'An Ancient Treatise of Leechcraft on Medicine and Surgery'" (Doctors and Medicine 70). Its rhymed couplets and meter are similar to Bower's rhymed plague treatise:

The man that well of leechcraft lere
Read one this book and you will hear
Many a medicine both good and true
To heal sores, both old and new

one avoids reference to charms, sometimes considered useful for warding off disease and often mentioned in popular works (Bowers 118).[33]

The translator of this rhymed version of the Burgundy treatise explains several reasons for learning this information:

> Her begynys a tretis fyne,
> Made in Ynglis owt of Latyne.
> Hyt techis the helpe & the defens
> Agaynys the seknes of the pestilens.
> (Bowers, "A Middle English Mnemonic Plague Tract" 120)

The rhyme is like doggerel, but its simple rhyme scheme and meter would serve as a memory aid, though not a complete explanation, as the following example illustrates:

> Blode lettyng I teche the:
> Qwen thou prykkyng felis in thi bode
> Thou lett the blade in that same tyde
> In the next vayne on the same syde
> With in the sext houre aftur the prykkyng.
> (121)

> Here are medicines without flew
> To heal all sores that been durable
> Of sword and knife and arrow
> Be the wound wide or be it narrow
> Of spear or quarrel or dagger or dart
> To make him heal in likely part...
> (Gottfried transcription 70)

[33]For examples of folk remedies containing charms and other incantations, many of them handed down from Anglo-Saxon sources, J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine.

The treatise promises both remedy and prevention "agaynys the seknes of the pestilens." It is brief, like English prose versions, omitting sections on the causes of pestilence, but, like English versions of the Burgundy treatise, stresses remedy as much as prevention. Many lines are devoted to a description of phlebotomy, but in a form that describes the location of veins while omitting instruction on the procedure for opening them or on the importance of seasonal and astrological considerations when doing so. The academic medical advice derived "owt of Latyne" in this treatise is greatly simplified. In the course of this short, 117-line poem, readers could learn an outline of major parts of the longer treatises: causes, diet, and prevention.

Like the prose versions discussed earlier in this chapter, this rhymed treatise mentions neither ancient nor contemporary physicians, except in one place, halfway through the text, where the translator describes remedies taught by "Feissians of Oxinforth." The closing couplet of this tract playfully attests to the translator's perception of his work:

> Her ar medycyns many--ches 3ou of the best;
> For I wyll trett no more bot now go to my rest.
> (116-117)

Advice similar to the kind given in the Burgundy tract appears in other English plague treatises in the

early fifteenth century--in John Stipse's plague tract and advice from "Some Men in Oxford," and in the late fifteenth-century English version of Bengt Knutsson's plague tract, which parallels much of the information given in the Burgundy treatise.

2. Advice from "Some Men in Oxford"

Dorothea W. Singer and Annie Anderson (Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Plague Texts) have printed portions of one fifteenth-century manuscript that begins with the phrase, "Sum Men in Oxynford." Advice on plague in this work, while related to the advice found in the Burgundy tract, is derived from a treatise with Latin and Italian versions belonging to the Monastery of St. Zeno at Verona, offering additional evidence for English sources outside the Burgundy tradition. According to the editors, this treatise "is mostly in one hand, but there are exceptions (especially in ff. 5; 102^{r}-02^{v}; 115-23; 177^{r}-77^{v}) and is written by a certain Leo" (Singer and Anderson 81-82).

The advice on plague taken from a more extensive treatise by Leo is attributed to "sum men in Oxynford that beth greet physicions" (Singer and Anderson 82) and appears in English translation in a separate manuscript. Like the Burgundy treatise, the advice in this treatise

includes remedies for plague, mostly herbal, but without an explanation of phlebotomy or other technical procedures. Many of the remedies require costly ingredients including "almowndis," which are not native to Britain but available to readers in Verona where the work originated. Each recipe begins with the statement "some take" or a variation of it.[34] One recipe tells the reader to "seyyn therover y pater noster and ane maria," religious advice found more commonly in recipes from an earlier, pharmaceutical tradition, but rarely in academic medical texts. One remedy states that "sum seyen ywis and Saresynys in fer contreys beyonde the see they usyn for pestylens this water...," adding to its credibility by deferring to authorities in exotic lands.[35]

This translated plague treatise differs from the Burgundy treatise by providing a greater variety of remedies, themselves taken from a variety of sources (i.e., from Oxford physicians, folk remedies, and charms, and remedies prescribed by "Saresynys in fer

[34] E.g., "some ley tansey opon and apirion ther as a man woll have hym to feyee hymselfe; sum ley the poudyr of muske upone the colis, and some take iv levvys of sauge wtoute eny holys..." (Singer and Anderson 82).

[35] Anna M. Campbell quotes from a Paduan poet who, instead of citing Saracens as authorities on plague, curses them with pestilence. The poet prays that God will preserve the Paduans, but "Let them [i.e., pestilences] come upon the Venetians, let Saracens too be smitten" (The Black Death 112).

contreys"). The audience of this work is apparently expected to know of these recipes, in much the same way as the audience of the Burgundy treatise is expected to know phlebotomy with only minimal instruction, as the recipes appear in catalog form and directions for making and using them are not provided.

"Advice from Som Men," taken from a Continental treatise, also serves as a reminder that Continental writers deferred to ancient authorities for remedies. But the English translation of this treatise, like translations of the Burgundy treatise, gives credit to contemporary physicians for remedies, in this case, physicians from Oxford. As we will see in the next chapter, recipes for plague medicines continued to be popular in vernacular medical works, but plague recipes were often deleted from or condensed in academic treatises.

3. John Stipse's Treatise

Singer and Anderson provide examples of later plague treatises, including portions of a manuscript by John Stipse of Oxford entitled "A redgement for a pestilence oftene proved in Oxford and other places moste." According to the editors, the treatise contains long passages based on the longer Burgundy treatise with

an astrological introduction (50-51). The incipit and explicit reveal the authority on which it was based.[36] In one version of the Stipse treatise, the author states that he is a surgeon at Oxford living in the Parish of East St. Aldate [Aldgate] in 1472, further stating that he has tried these remedies himself.[37] Stipse's references to personal experience in treating plague are unique, as most English treatises lack references to contemporary plague outbreaks. The style of Stipse's treatise is less didactic than most treatises, and less a cataloging of recipes, as in the advice given by "Some Men." The treatise is more informal than other academic plague treatises,

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[36] According to the editors, the excerpts reproduced in their edition, quoted below, may be found in a regimen belonging to St. Peter's Monastery, Erfurt, and were presented to Brompton Oratory by David Lewis.
Title: A redgement for a pestilence oftene proved in Oxford and other places moste.
Incipit: A speciall water for the pestilence taken out of an anciente writen booke of Mr. Smales of Gadesdene. Also yf there be made a water by distillation of diptanye, pimpernelle....
Explicit: ...This poulder I the forsayd John proved upon a man of Sunningwell in Barkeshere which was called Richard Bradstocke and many more and now helped by the might and grace of God thus endeth this tretes of the pestelence.

[37] British Museum, Sloane 3866 ff.90-92; f. 91^{v}: ...and I, John Stipse, usinge surgerye within the Universytie of Oxforde, dwellinge in the paryshe of Est St. Aldate in Fyshe strete at St. Olldys church style in the yere of our Lord 1472. In the which the bouke was gathered and made... (Singer and Anderson 51).

particularly in its references to personal experience and to contemporary physicians.

The remedies in this treatise are simple, calling for less expensive ingredients and common herbs, unlike those given in the treatise from "Some Men." English readers would be able to reproduce Stipse's recipes using common garden herbs without the help of an apothecary. A reference to Mr. Smales' "anciente writen booke" in the treatise, containing a recipe for "speciall water for the pestilence," might at first suggest that the author had consulted contemporary authorities on plague in his search for remedies. But the remedies in this treatise, apparently used and endorsed by Stipse's contemporaries, are, in fact, taken from much earlier sources, not from contemporary plague treatises. Stipse's treatise and the advice "from Som Men in Oxford" are more traditional than the Burgundy treatise in that they provide remedies rather than preventive measures for plague and are based on ancient pharmaceutical advice.

4. Bengt Knutsson's Treatise

A late fifteenth-century plague treatise written by Bengt Knutsson, Bishop of Västeras, provides one final example of the influence of the Burgundy treatise on

later medical works written by physicians. The treatise provides evidence for physicians' growing emphasis on plague prevention, as opposed to more popular treatises like Stipse's which continue to emphasize remedy.[38]

According to Guthrie Vine, editor of the John Rylands Library copy of Knutsson's treatise, two other versions exist: one in the British Museum and the other in the Cambridge University Library (xxiii-xxiv). This treatise has the distinction of being the first plague treatise published in book form. It was printed about 1510 by Wynkyn de Worde, and again in 1536 in a new edition by Thomas Gybson of London. Thomas Phaer included Knutsson's advice on the plague in a postscript to his translation of the Regimen sanitatis Salerni (The Regyment of Lyfe) in 1546. The section on plague in

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[38]Bengt Knutsson is described in the treatise variously as "Kaminti (or Kamiti), episcopi Arusiensis civitatis, regni Dacie, medicine expertissimi professoris" (Vine xxxii).

Västeras is near Stockholm, Sweden. Guthrie Vine, editor of the treatise, notes that Västeras has been wrongly identified by some as Aarhuus, Denmark, because the treatise mentions "regni Dacie" (in the Kingdom of Denmark). But no bishop of that name can be traced to Aarhuus. Since the countries of Sweden and Denmark were under the same rule in the fifteenth century, and since there are records of Bishop Knutsson in Arosia, Västeras is most likely Arosia rather than Aarhuus. According to Vine, little is known of Knutsson's life, except for what he says of himself in the treatise.

An edited version of Knutsson's Latin treatise appears with a parallel version of a treatise by Johannes Jacobi in Karl Sudhoff, "Die Identität des Regimen contra pestilentiam." Pestschriften aus dem 150 Jahre nach der Epidemie 5:56-58.

Phaer's treatise was published separately in London a number of times after 1546, and until as late as 1722 (Vine xxxvi).

Though Knutsson composed his Latin treatise around 1461 (ca. 1461-63), it appeared in English translation only after an outbreak of English sweating sickness in 1485-86, serving as a guide for the treatment of this disease. Medical researchers have not been able to determine with certainty the nature of this disease, known medically as Sudor Anglicus, which appeared in epidemic form in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with a high mortality and then disappeared. Folke Henschen remarks that "its nature as a virus disease cannot be regarded as certain," and that its symptoms appear much like those of encephalitis with an acute rash (62). These symptoms, coupled with a high mortality, led doctors to assume that it was a form of pestilential fever and thus amenable to the same treatment as plague.

According to the medical historian Roderick E. McGrew (Encyclopedia of Medical History), Polydore Virgil, an Italian émigré who came to London in 1501, described sweating sickness, appearing in 1485 and 1508, as "a pestilence horrible indeed, and before which no age could endure" (107). Apparently, the disease struck its victims suddenly, and even the

healthy, once infected, died within 24 hours (McGrew 107). John Caius, the eminent physician from Cambridge and master of Gonville and Caius College, wrote a comprehensive summary of the disease in 1552, in which he set out to "declare the beginning, name, nature, and signs of the sweating sickness" (McGrew 107). Like Galen and Hippocrates, Caius determined that the disease was caused by impure air and by "impure spirits by repletion," a reference, McGrew explains, "to the excessive consumption of beer among the English" (107). English sweating sickness thus shares with plague high mortality and a rapid onset, which comes as a "blow or stroke." Its causes, like plague's, are associated with impure air and physical excess.

The English translation of Knutsson's plague treatise begins with a reference to the author:

> Here begynneth a litil boke the whiche traytied and reherced many gode thinges necessaries for the infirmite & grete sekenesse called Pestilence and which often times enfecteth us made by the most expert Doctour in phisike Bisshop of arusiens in the realme of Denmark, etc.[39]

The treatise continues with the author's personal preface:

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[39]References to the English translation of the Knutsson treatise ("A litil boke") are from Vine's edition, which has been compared with a transcription by Ralph H. Major, Classic Descriptions of Disease 82-84. An edition of this treatise by Joseph Pickett is forthcoming.

> I the Bisshop of Arusiens in the wyalme [scil. ryalme] of Denmark doctour of Phisique Wille Write by the moost experte and famous doctours auctorised in Phisike somme thynges of the infirmitie of pestilence Whiche dayly enfecteth, & sone suffreth be to departe oute of this lyfe.
> (Vine, ed. 1[r])

The style and structure of the English version of this treatise resemble English translations of the Burgundy plague treatise. Knutsson's treatise is divided into chapters, one each on the signs of pestilence, causes of pestilence, remedies, comfort for the heart and principal members (as prevention), and phlebotomy.

In part one, the author is more specific concerning the signs of pestilence (e.g, changes in the air) than are English versions of the Burgundy treatise:

> Whan in a sommers daye the Weder often times chaungeth, as in the morning the Wedyr appereth to rayne, after Ward it apperith cloudy & atte last Wyndy in the south...

Unlike other translations of the Burgundy treatise, Knutsson's specifies the signs of pestilence, such as "Whan grete multitude of flyes ben Upon the eerthe." The author mentions falling stars, lightning and thunder from the South as signs of plague and prays that "god of His mercy Wille remeve it." Knutsson also warns that many physicians are deceived concerning the causes of pestilence:

> Sometime it cometh of dede careyn or corrupcion of standing Waters in diches or sloughs & other corrupt places & these things somtyme be Universall & somtime particular...

Although the treatise derives from the Burgundy treatise, its advice on remedies is recast from the writings of Avicenna, as Knutsson explains.

The detailed explanation of causes points toward Knutsson's dual role as physician and bishop. As a physician, Knutsson shows himself a keen observer of the physical circumstances in which plague occurs, noting especially rotting food and other substances, the presence of flies, and wind direction during outbreaks of plague. He places these observations in the context of ancient terminology: "somtyme Universall & somtime particular." Knutsson connects these causes with a religious explanation by stating that God sends plague through various physical agents, thus drawing on biblical sources in a way that the Burgundy treatises do not. One might expect that, as a bishop, Knutsson would likely blame sin as the ultimate cause of plague, but his explanation in terms of medical theory demonstrates that interpretations taken from medical and moral perspectives need not be mutually exclusive.[40]

[40] The author of The Book of Quinte Essence (ca. 1460), also combines religious and moral interpretations of plague, noting that there are two kinds: one sent directly from God as punishment for sin, and the other sent indirectly through the planets. It is foolish to attempt to cure the first kind, he believes, but the second kind may be cured by natural remedies because it has natural causes: "Forsoþe, holy scripture seiþ þat summe tymes oure lord god sendiþ pestilence to sle summe maner of peple, as it is seid deutronomium 28....Therefore a gret fool were he þat wolde presume to

The value of advice given in plague treatises was established by the fifteenth century and general enough to be applied to other epidemic illnesses similar to plague.[41] English treatises, whether written by physician or layman, tended toward practical advice, with a strong emphasis on practical rather than technical measures for controlling disease, an emphasis that Hippocrates and Galen had also endorsed for controlling epidemic disease.

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cure þese plagis of pestilence þat ben vncurable, þat ben sent of god to ponysche synne" (23-24).

[41] Thomas Forestier wrote a treatise on plague in 1491 in Latin and dedicated it to Henry VII. Forestier, a physician from Normandy and resident of London during outbreaks of sweating-sickness in 1485, described English Sweating Sickness as a form of pestilential fever. The treatise contains a catalogue of medical remedies for plague borrowed from earlier medical writing on plague, and especially from the Knutsson plague treatise. In the sixteenth century, Andrew Boorde uses plague terminology in writing about sweating-sickness in his Dyetary (1542): "When the plages of the pestylence or the swetynge syckenes is in a towne, the people doth fle" (OED, s.v. sweating-sickness).

Singer and Anderson comment on the influence of the Burgundy tract on yet another plague treatise written much later, in the sixteenth century: "We might mention here that Thomas Moulton (f. 1540), English Dominican, author of the "Myrour of Helthe" appears in an early sixteenth century manuscript as the author of an English treatise which again is lifted almost entirely from [the longer Burgundy treatise] (London, British Museum, Sloane 3489 ff. 44-51).

5. Conclusion

Luke Demaitre has observed that, in the Middle Ages, "Medicine was to be taught from a philosophical basis, with reasons governing theory and theory guiding practice" (Rev. of Arnaldus de Villanova 118). The Burgundy treatise and its heirs give evidence for the relationship between the theoretical and practical interests of medicine. With respect to plague, writers drew on earlier theories as a way of explaining this apparently new disease within the framework of an established cosmology. They added practical advice on plague remedies drawn from ancient sources.

The treatises themselves offer, as C.-E. A. Winslow and M. L. Duran-Reynals have suggested, "Little in the way of new theoretical knowledge to the writings of Galen, Rhazes, Avicenna and other earlier writers" (Jacme d'Agramont 747). On the other hand, as Winslow and Reynals also suggest, vernacular plague treatises "give a clear picture of the knowledge then available with regard to the causation and control of epidemic disease...and represent the first large-scale effort at popular health instruction" (Jacme d'Agramont 747).

However, the usefulness of this "large-scale effort" is questionable. Technical procedures like phlebotomy, not found in vernacular medical treatises

before the late fourteenth century, were introduced in translations of the Burgundy treatise. A practitioner would have to know the basic technique before applying the information given in these treatises. A summary of phlebotomy would not be adequate. Other theoretical matters such as astrology were also described in plague treatises, but the shortened astrological prologues in these treatises do not explain the causes of plague in any detail, except to serve as a reminder that it had come from distant causes (a planetary conjunction) and nearer causes (foul air). A shortened description of causes, like a summary of phlebotomy, assumes a familiarity with astrological forecasting, technical matters more familiar and more important to clerks and physicians than laymen. However, directions for plague preventives in these treatises, like the directions for herbal remedies, were already familiar, and could be carried out without formal instruction.

The influence of fourteenth-century plague treatises remained strong among clerks well into the fifteenth century. Knutsson's plague treatise served as useful advice for Thomas Forestier, who borrowed it almost word-for-word in writing on English sweating sickness. John Stipse turned to the Burgundy treatise when writing on plague in the fifteenth century. As the next chapter explains, lay medical writers like John

Lydgate turned to academic treatises for advice on plague in the fifteenth century, using that advice as council to kings in the Secrees of Old Philosoffres and in a short, rhymed treatise he wrote on pestilence.[42]

Finally, plague treatises rarely suggest that plague resulted from divine punishment or that the consequences of sin directly influenced the course of this disease. Instead, writers of plague treatises turned exclusively to earlier medical sources which also interpreted epidemics in medical rather than moral terms. By doing so, medieval physicians incorporated this seemingly new and unfamiliar disease into the framework of an established cosmology.

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[42] Practical literature was read far more widely than belles lettres in the late Middle Ages, William Crossgrove believes, adding the following passage from the historian Gerhard Eis as support for his argument: "The artes-literature was far more widely read than was fiction, had a continuous tradition in all parts of Germany, introduced many new forms and genres, is important for the proper interpretation of medieval fiction, and often is a significant part of the literary production of an author also known for his fiction" ("The Forms" 14).

Chapter 4: References to Plague in General Medical Works

During later outbreaks of plague, advice of the kind recorded in academic plague treatises was incorporated into general medical works, often as a separate chapter on the treatment of pestilential disease. Before English plague treatises were available, lay people relied on traditional recipes for plague, which they continued to do for centuries after the fourteenth-century plague pandemic.[1] When plague came to Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, physicians and empirics relied mostly on the writings of ancient physicians and on traditional remedies for pestilential diseases. When recorded, remedies were nearly always traceable to ancient medical authorities like Galen and Hippocrates.

One major difference between plague treatises written by physicians in the late fourteenth century and the English translations arising from them concerns

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[1] See, for example, the Estate Book of Henry de Bray and the Paston family letters, both of which are discussed in Chapter Six (171-77).

For a discussion of the importance of literary and oral transmission of medical remedies in the learned and lay medical practice, see John M. Riddle, "Theory and Practice in Medieval Medicine."

explanations for the cause of plague. Physician-writers stressed astrological causes, which they often explained in lengthy prologues to the treatises. Translators and redactors generally omitted or condensed these prologues, favoring simpler versions of the astrological theories of plague.

This chapter examines interpretations of plague in English translations of general medical treatises from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first part considers the English translation of Guy de Chauliac's surgical treatise written during the first outbreak of plague in the fourteenth century. The chapter continues with an examination of plague references found in two general medical works from the fifteenth century: "In Hoote Somere," an anonymous fifteenth-century medical treatise (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R.14.51), and a Middle English translation of the Liber Uricrisiarum, a treatise on uroscopy with advice on theoretical and practical medicine, including astrology, child-bearing, and the treatment of fevers. The chapter concludes with several examples of plague recipes in general medical works from later centuries as evidence for a continuing tradition of plague advice in later sources.

The texts discussed in this chapter share several common features. With the exception of portions of "In Hoote Somere," they are prose translations from Latin

sources, not original works. Like the plague treatises discussed in the last chapter, they provide examples of the knowledgeability and interests of English medical translators, who draw on past authority as a source of solace and as a means for creating order. In addition, these texts remind us that English writers were more concerned with plague remedies from ancient sources than with contemporary experience, unlike Continental physicians like Guy de Chauliac and Jeuan Gethin, who describe contemporary encounters with plague and its victims.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the number of medical tracts in English had increased dramatically (Rossell Hope Robbins, "Medical Manuscripts" 393). While we cannot assume that the crisis of fourteenth-century plague directly or solely encouraged more of these vernacular texts, the appearance of English versions of various medical writings provides an opportunity to observe certain changes in the emphasis of medical works translated for a popular audience.[2] Fifteenth-century vernacular works

[2] It is worth reminding ourselves of the dangers of the post hoc fallacy easily committed in the study of the history of epidemics and their influence. Philip Ziegler provides this important caveat:

> Once again, as so often in the history of the Black Death, one must remember that post hoc is not necessarily propter hoc. The second half of the fourteenth century was a time of spiritual unrest, of pertinent questioning of the values and of the

display a continued interest in plague prevention and remedies, and less concern with the uses of phlebotomy, uroscopy, and astrological forecasting with respect to plague, even though English uroscopies and phlebotomies were more common in the fifteenth century than in the fourteenth. These technical measures for treating plague remained part of the academic tradition in the fifteenth century but are rarely mentioned in vernacular texts after that time. But fifteenth-century writers continued to draw on accounts in early treatises for advice, as sources of consolation and order, even when the advice from those sources proved ineffective.

1. The Surgical Treatises of Guy de Chauliac and John Arderne

Several English versions of surgical treatises from the fourteenth century contain advice on plague. These became popular in England in the later Middle Ages and serve as examples of translated medical works available to lay readers. Because plague was classified

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> conduct of the Church, of disrespect for established idols and a seeking for strange gods. Though the tempo of events would have been different, changes would have taken longer to bring about, resistance would have been more intense and reaction more immediate; in the longrun things would have followed the same course, even though there had never been a plague.
> (The Black Death 269)

as a form of pestilential fever before the fifteenth century, discussions of plague in these treatises usually occur in a chapter on fevers or apostemes, swellings of the lymph nodes thought to be caused by plague.

One popular surgical treatise is the English version of the Cyrurgia Magna written by Guy de Chauliac (1300-67) and known in English translation as the Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac. It was translated because of its importance as a textbook on surgery. The work remained a principal text on the subject for centuries after Guy de Chauliac's death (Deaux 55).[3]

One of the first contemporary explanations of plague's causes occurs in the Cyrurgie, and for that reason scholars often cite this treatise as evidence of contemporary interest in plague. Chauliac's advice on plague combines standard medical advice found in the

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[3]Sixteen of its surviving editions are in Latin, forty-three in French, five in Italian, four in Dutch, several in German, five in Spanish, and one in English (Major, Classic Descriptions of Disease 77). Quotations from Chauliac's treatise cited in this chapter are from an edition by Margaret S. Ogden.

R. Theodore Beck (The Cutting Edge) comments further on the popularity and esteem later surgeons had for Chauliac's work: "His great text book on surgery, written in Latin, appeared about 1363, and edition after edition was issued in manuscript form until it was printed in French in 1478. It was translated into English, Provençal, Dutch, and Hebrew. Chauliac's book on anatomy and surgery was to become the students [sic] text book and to hold its place until the seventeenth century" (26).

Burgundy treatises with the author's personal observations on the plague in Avignon where he served as physician to several popes: Clement VI, Innocent VI, and Urban V. Besides serving as papal physician, he was also a Canon of the Church of St. Justus in Avignon, where he spent most of his life (Beck, The Cutting Edge 25). During the plague, Pope Clement VI gave sanctuary to Jews living near Avignon when popular accusations held that they had poisoned the wells (John 271).[4]

Chauliac, considered one of the most erudite surgeons of his day, completed the Cyrurgia Magna in 1363. The treatise, based largely on the teachings of the Salernitan School of Medicine founded in the eighth century, advocated such practices as leaving contaminated wounds open to clean air to prevent further contamination, a practice considered ahead of its time (McGrew 321). Chauliac's formal descriptions of various case histories in the treatise represent his attempt at cataloging the major areas of contemporary medical and surgical knowledge. The author describes the divisions of his treatise in its preface:

> The firste [chapter] schal be anothomye [anatomie], þe secound of apostomes [apostemes], þe þridde of

[4] In addition, the Pope also engaged doctors to tend those stricken with plague and built extensions to the papal hospitals and almshouses to care for them. He also built a cemetery and engaged grave diggers and carters to carry away and bury the huge numbers of dead (John 271).

> woundes, þe fourþe of bocches [blotches, various skin lesions], þe fifte of brekynges and bones out of ioynte, þe sixte of alle oþere sekenessis þe whiche beþ noght propurly apostomes noþer bocches ne passiouns of bones for þe whiche recourse is ihad to a cirurgien. þe seuenþe schal be an antitodarie. (14)

Chauliac further explains that each book in the treatise is precisely organized according to two doctrines, or "lores": universal and simple members, and particular and compound members. The author promises to consider the three principal divisions of therapeutics in each book: a description of the disease and its causes, signs or "tokens" useful in prognosis, and treatment or "curynges" for specific diseases. Dividing therapeutics into these categories has precedent in ancient medical writing such as the Isagoge of Johannitius.[5]

Each category forms a separate "book" within the treatise, and each book further divides into chapters, according to a classification scheme found in other academic medical treatises. The author explains the division of chapters in these terms:

> To þe esy fyndynge of þe matires of þe whiche it is itreted in þis book, it is profitable to sette tofore þe rubriches of þe tretys and chapitres of all þis book þat by þe rasynge of name of a lettre þe book be noght iseie to byleue dowme [i.e., are not said to downplay experience], þat happely is

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[5] For a description of the Isagoge and its principal features, see Chapter Two (57-61).

> noght nedefull in speculatyf science, as Aueroys, þe Sotil Doctoure, schewede.
> (14)

Accordingly, Chauliac promises to temper the authority or "lore" on which his treatise is based with his own experience, which he finds compatible with the teachings of Averroës, "the skillful doctor."

The description of plague and its treatment in the Cyrurgie, appearing in the second book (On apostemes and pustules), combines a description of the author's experience with a medical description of the causes and treatment of plague. He mentions that he did not flee like other physicians, but remained to treat those who suffered. The treatise continues with advice on preventing plague:

> And displese it noght þat I schal telle it for þe mervayle þerof and for to be ware þerof if it schulde come a3en.
> (148)

Chauliac continues the account as though it were a lament:

> The fader visited nou3t þe sone, ne þe sone þe fader. Charite was dede, and hope was þrowen downe.
> (148)

The inversion of repeated words in this passage, known in rhetorical terms as antimetabole, stresses the hopelessness Chauliac felt during this incurable epidemic. The author recounts his experiences and some of the popular misconceptions on the causes of plague

(e.g., wells poisoned by Jews).[6] Then, Chauliac proceeds with a more objective interpretation of plague concerning universal and particular causes:

> Neuerþelatter what so euere þe peple saide, þe truþe was þat þe cause of þis pestilence was twofolde: one þat was vnyuersal doynge, and anoþer þat was particuler suffrynge.
> (148)

Throughout his account, he makes an ethical appeal to his readers, ostensibly surgeons, although the English version of the treatise could be read by others not formally trained in medicine as well as by surgeons.

The importance of Chauliac's description of plague lies in its mixture of narrative with a standard medical description of the disease which employs <u>divisio</u>, the division of therapeutics and preventives into subcategories, a more formal structure. The transition between Chauliac's narrative and his more objective description occurs in the passage above: "...þe truþe was þat þe cause of þis pestilence was two folde." This said, the text turns to a more objective explanation of

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[6] Of þe cause Many men couteden of þe cause of þis grete pestilence. And in some parties þai troweden þat þe Iewes had venymed þe world, and so pore men slow3 hem in some places and girde of her hedes and made hem to flee away, and þerfore þai dowteden to goo by þe worlde. And fynally it come to so mooche þat the kepers ofte in citees and in townes helde þe folke, and þai lete no man entre but [f.47$^{v b}$] hym þat was wel knowen. And if þei fonde vppon eny man powdres or oynementes, dredynge leste þei were made for drinkes of infeccioun, þay made hem for to swelowe þayme (154-58).

causes, which are explained in greater detail than in other Englished plague treatises.[7]

The personal account of plague in this treatise would have appealed to an audience of English readers who would find that its personal style leads naturally

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[7] Chauliac's description of causes, reproduced here at length, parallels closely the description of causes in the longer Burgundy treatises:

> The vnyuersal cause doynge was þe disposicioun of a manere of grete coniuncciouns of þre planetes, of Saturnus, of Iupiter and of Mars, þe whiche coniuncciouns come in þe 3ere of oure Lorde 1345, on þe 24 day of Marche, in þe 19 degree of Aquarie. The grete coniunccions forsoþe bytokeneþ mervaylouse þinges, strong þinges and terrible and chaungynge of kyngdomes, comynge of prophecies and grete deþes, and I haue saide in þe litel book the whiche I made of astrologies. And þoo coniuncciouns ben disposed after þe kynde of þe signes and of þe aspectes of ham in þe whiche þai be made. It was no wonder þerfore þogh þat grete coniuncciouns bytokened a wonderful and ferful deth, for it was nou3t onliche of þe grete gut as it were of þe moste. And for it was in masculyne signe, it dressed harme vppon mankynde. And for þat þe signe was fix, it bytokened long lastynge. It bygan forsoþe in þe Este a litel after þe coniuncciouns, and it lasted 3it vnto þe fiftuþe 3ere in þe West. It impressed forsoþe suche a schap in þe ayere and in oþer elementes þat, ri3te as þe adamaunde moueþ yren, so þat fourme or schappe mouede grete humours and brente and venymouse, and it gadre hem togedre wiþinforth, and it made apostemes. Of þe whiche þinges þer folowed contynuel feueres and spittynge of glode in þe bygynngynge while þat þe fourme was strong and it confounded kynde. And afterward when kynde was lower, it was nou3t so mykel confounded, and it keste out as it my3te to þe vttre mem[f. 48r a]bres, and most ot þe arm holes and to þe schares. And it causeded bubones an oþer effectes of þe ynner apostemes.
>
> The particuler cause and suffrynge was þe disposicioun of þe bodyes in euel humour and feblenesse and opilacioun (i.stoppynge). And for þat, þe comune peple deyde, trauayllynge and euel-lyuynge (154-58).

into a more formal explanation of causes. But English readers would not necessarily be familiar with the experiences Chauliac describes: "the [gate]kepers" of cities who refused entrance to anyone but residents; the popular belief that Jews had poisoned the wells, also mentioned in Chauliac's account, while current in France, did not occur in England.

The section on plague in the Cyrurgie continues with medicinal remedies and preventive measures (balls of aloes, triacle, and the "bole armonyak." Bernard of Gordon (ca. 1258-1318) had recommended these in his own writing on pestilential disease some 25 years before 1348, and they were commonly recommended in other plague writing.

The author then interrupts his explanation of medical treatment with additional autobiographical information:

> And for to eschewe euel lose, I durste nou3t goo forth. Wiþ contynue dredes I kepte me wiþ þe forsaide þinges als mykel as I my3te. Neuerþelatter toward þe ende of þe pestilence, I renne into a contynue feuer wiþ an aposteme in þe schare, as it were sixe wokes. And I was in so grete perile þat alle my felowes trowede þat I schulde be ded. And I scapede by the comaundement of God when þe aposteme was matured and heled, as I haue saide. (157)

Chauliac's comments on the futility of treatment and on the tragedy of this disease lend credibility to his medical explanation of pestilence, particularly for lay

readers, by providing a narrative style not found elsewhere in the Cyrurgie. However, Chauliac's combination of a personal account of plague with a standard medical description is rare in other surgical treatises, and even less common in medical treatises which maintain a more rigid structure based on ancient treatises like the Isagoge.[8] Like Guy de Chauliac, the English surgeon John Arderne (1307-92) also included several personal references in his surgical treatise, but none on plague. According to D'Arcy Power, Arderne worked as a surgeon in France during the early fourteenth century; he was not in orders (Chronologia Medica 64).

The ability to combine personal views with a more objective account, as Chauliac does, is especially evident in Arderne's portrait of the good surgeon in the introduction to his treatise and in his own case studies, where he explains both success and failure in treating patients.[9] Arderne's treatise offers no advice

[8] Another Continental writer, Jeuan Gethin wrote a plague treatise before the plague arrived in Lerida, Spain, where he practiced medicine. He described his fear of the disease in a personal prologue: "We see death coming into our midst like black smoke, a plague which cuts off the young, a rootless phantom which has no mercy for fair countenance" (ca. 1348) qtd. in Marks 1).

[9] Among other things, Arderne states that the good surgeon must be sober:

> And aboue al þis it profiteth to hym that he be founden euermore sobre; ffor dronkenne3 destroyeth

on plague, and though Arderne lived through major outbreaks of the disease during the fourteenth century as Chauliac had, he refers to plague only in the preface:

> I, John Arderne fro the first pestilence that was in the 3ere of our lord 1349 duellid in Newerk in Notyngham-shire vnto the 3ere of oure lord 1370, and ther I helid many men of fistula in ano.
> (Power, ed. 1)

He continues with an account of his first patient, "Sire Adam Euerynghamm," whom he cured of anal fistula.

In terms of the audience of both Arderne's and Guy de Chauliac's surgical treatises, the large number of surviving manuscripts of both attests to their popularity, presumably not only because of the technical information they contain, but also because they outline and explain current surgical knowledge in English translation. Robert S. Gottfried has suggested that surgical texts were more direct and straightforward than the more obscure theoretical treatises, "indeed, generally explicable, the kind of text a mercer or draper could appreciate and understand" (Doctors and Medicine 69).

Arderne's scarce mention of plague may suggest that it left less of an impression on him than it did on Guy

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> al vertu and bringith it to not, so seith a wise man, "Ebrietas frangit quicquid sapiencia tangit," [which Arderne translates]: "Dronkenes breketh what-so wisdom toucheth."
> (Power, ed. 4)

de Chauliac, who served a pope committed to those suffering from the disease in Avignon. Despite the contemporaneity with which Arderne describes and explains surgical techniques--anal fistula were a common problem for soldiers--like other English medical writers, Arderne avoids contemporary references to plague.

2. General Medical Treatises with Advice on Plague

The Liber de Diversis Medicinis, a fifteenth-century leechbook in the Thornton Manuscript, is a popular medical text with a discussion on "medcynes for þe pestilence" (Ogden ed., 51-54).[10] The Thornton manuscript itself contains romances, sermons, mystical writings, and religious lyrics, besides the leechbook.[11] In this case, a plague treatise is incorporated with general medical advice and with other forms of literature: didactic, religious, and literary pieces. Advice on plague in the Liber de Diversis combines academic advice on its causes and treatment with several

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[10]MS. Lincoln Cathedral A.5.2, Margaret Ogden, ed., EETS, os no. 207. Quotations from the Liber de Diversis Medicinis are from Ogden's edition.

[11]For a more detailed description of the contents of the Thornton MS., see The Thornton Romances, ed. J. O. Halliwell, xxv-xxxvi.

remedies for pestilential diseases borrowed from ancient herbals.

The manuscript, probably dating from the first part of the fifteenth century (after 1422 and before 1454), is, Margaret Ogden believes, "more like the product of a gentleman amateur than of a cleric" (xvii). By the fifteenth century, English translations of religious, literary, and medical works achieved some degree of popularity among English readers, as these survive in a large number of manuscripts. This "gentleman amateur" was also apparently literate in Latin. According to Ogden, the translation of John of Burgundy's shorter treatise appearing in this medical manuscript is likely Thornton's own, as it does not appear to be an exact transcription of one of the other English translations of Burgundy's plague treatise (Ogden xxiv). Rather, it is a shorter version of the Burgundy treatise, and the only section in the Liber de Diversis translated directly from a Latin source, as far as the editor can tell. The material on plague in this work "is an abridged translation of the shorter version of the tract on the pestilence attributed in several manuscripts to John of Burgundy" (104), suggesting that Thornton sought

advice on plague from academic sources rather than from popular leechbooks.[12]

The Liber de Diversis begins with advice on diseases of the head, providing advice on other diseases in a head-to-toe arrangement. Unlike Guy de Chauliac's Cyrurgie, the patchwork sources in this treatise suggest that much of its advice derives from popular medical lore, usually more loosely organized than formal medical treatises. The entire work is not a direct translation of any known medical text (Ogden xxiv). Most plague treatises mention ancient medical authorities, but the translated advice on plague in the Liber de Diversis contains neither Latin tags nor mention of authority:

> Here bygynnes medcynes for þe pestilence: Here bygynnes medcynes for þe pestilence noble & fyne & are departede in foure chapiters. The firste chapiter tells how a man sal kepe hym in tyme þer-of. The secounde how þis sekenes commes. The thirde what medcyne is a-gayne it. The ferthe how he sall be kepid in it. (51)

Testimonials to ancient or contemporary authorities, common in the Burgundy treatise and its descendants, were deleted by Thornton, who may have intended this work for his own use or for his family, and not for a wider audience who would have wanted some assurance of the text's credibility.

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[12]The chapter on plague occurs in f.300^{v}-f.302^{v} of the manuscript (Ogden 51-53).

The first chapter on plague, like the first chapter in the Burgundy treatise, provides instruction on diet as a means of plague prevention. The second chapter describes "how this sekenes comes & what is þe cause of it is." Here, Thornton's translation also parallels versions of the Burgundy treatise in describing both universal and particular causes of plague and their effects on the humoral system.

The third chapter also describes herbal concoctions useful for reducing heat in the internal members: "Than the hert schulde be comforthede be calde letuaryse to temper þe grete hetis þerof" (53). The herbal concoctions described in this chapter on plague, unlike the longer Burgundy treatises, contain more native English herbs, providing evidence that Thornton added these plague remedies to his translation of the Burgundy treatise:

> þen is gude to hafe water stilled of thiese foure herbis: betony, pympernole, tormentill and scabyous, for thies are gud medcyns bothe in sekenes and to kepe the ther-fra.
> (53)

Chapter three concludes with advice on diet.

The fourth and final chapter, a listing of various treatments for plague, appears short for a work which is based largely on popular medical advice. Leechbooks often included long lists of herbal remedies, perhaps suggesting that "the actual fact of the plague may not

have yet infiltrated the folk medical literature of the period" (Elaine Miller, "In Hoote Somere" xxxi).[13]

The section on plague in the Liber de Diversis ends with several recipes for plasters and drinks not found in the Burgundy treatise. Then the author abruptly shifts to a discussion of "a gude oynement for kiles, wondes, broken bones, bolnynges, and to felon & to gowte" (54). Thornton has removed academic language in his translation. The only Latin portion of the Liber de Diversis appears in the chapter on plague:

> ...þat febles þe body, et super omnia alia nocet coitus & accelerat ad hunc morbum...& destruit spiritus vitales, also vse little froyte or none. (51)[14]

Here, Latin serves not as a testimony to learned authority as it does in some vernacular treatises, but as a means of avoiding sexual language. The author, concerned with decorum, quotes directly from his Latin

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[13]Miller explains further that "by the time the fifteenth century arrived, the plague, too, had become part of the common folk heritage, and thus, it [the plague] could appear easily integrated in the literature. In the earlier period, however, more confusion on the suspected origins and treatments of the plague abounded,and finding a specific treatment for it in a common folk document is more difficult" (xxxii).

[14]Translation: "...that enfeebles the body, and above all other things, coitus increases this disease...and destroys the vital spirit; also eat little fruit or [else] none."

source.[15] Rather than serving as testimony to learned authority or even as support for the English text, Thornton uses Latin to protect his audience, likely the rest of his family, from what he considers offensive, or, at least, from material requiring discretion.

Thornton employs academic medical terms concerning the causes of plague, but defines them "...and ilkane of thies hase his place whare he may put owt his superflueties and are called in phiseke emundatoria eorum" (51). His explanation of the uses of phlebotomy in treating plague (the third part of the translated plague treatise) follows the Burgundy treatises. The third chapter explains "helpe agayne þis seknes & within what tyme helpe may be." "Helpe" includes advice on blood letting in even more condensed form than the description of phlebotomy in longer versions of Burgundy's plague treatise, suggesting that the author or those using the treatise knew this technique already and might have used this summary as a crib. Thornton thus has cast an academic plague treatise into familiar terms as part of a larger leechbook. But despite the idiosyncratic nature of Thornton's translation, the

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[15] Thomas O. Cockayne follows the same course with passages on sexual intercourse in his nineteenth-century translation of Old English Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England.

advice on plague itself derives from traditional rather than from contemporary sources.

3. "In Hoote Somere" (A Popular Fifteenth-Century Treatise)

A rather complicated remedy for plague is described in an anonymous popular medical treatise from the fifteenth century, referred to by its editor, Elaine Miller, and in the following discussion as "In Hoote Somere." Miller compares this complicated remedy to others in the treatise: "Although no complete description of the symptoms is made, the extremely elaborate cure suggests that the disease is a rather serious one, and not merely one's every day 'fester' or 'canker'" (xxix). Miller further believes that it must be intended as a remedy for plague. Most of the other recipes in this popular treatise call for common ingredients like garden herbs, as the following remedy for fester demonstrates:

> ffor þe brennynge fester.
> Of honye and rye floure bake a kake,
> As harde as men may it make.
> Lay it on þe holyd festred sore,
> Whan it ys nessche [moist] lay anoþere þore.
> So schalle it hele, þus doctours seyne,
> Nothynge elles þerto þu leyne.
> (Miller 11.17-23)

But the probable remedy for plague in the treatise under the category of "fester" or "canker," in a

chapter on "bolnyngs" [tumorous swellings], requires a complex set of ingredients not found in common herb gardens (MED. s.v., bolnyng; OED. s.v., bolning). Several required ingredients are, in fact, nonce words, as the editor's transcription of this remedy for plague, known as "Sank Dragons," shows:

> Doo wassche þe canker sone anone,
> And caste þe pouder þer upon,
> 3it take alempatike [garlic], myrre, francensence, masake [mace], Cole freyne [cold fragne, i.e., ash], cole coyne grece, orpement, Royle aromonyak, And a grece þat ys callyd Aristologe [the herb astrolochia], Rounde Luppines,
> Venathans [unknown plant], tartaran of drye gallys þat men callen Oke apples, synynilles [unknown plant], and brenne alle with blak pepir.
> And loke that þey be alle of oon weighte in balaunce. And whan it ys alle wele bronte, caste þe pouder þeron. Also take an cranes heed and þe feete and bray hem in a mortar; and take talongh and virgyne wax, and temper alle togeder. And þis salve ys clepyd sank dragons.
> (Miller 12.8-20)[16]

According to Miller, part of this recipe has an analogue in a fourteenth-century Middle English medical manuscript found in the National Library of Sweden (117n5^{v}.5-9).[17] The analogous recipe for canker in the

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[16]Miller notes that "Sank Dragons," is a variation of sangdragon or sandragon, "dragon's blood," also mentioned in Lanfranc's Cirgurie 35 (118n5^{v}, 20). Bracketed notes in the quotation above are the editor's.

[17]For to hole y^{e} cankyr good medicine--
Take aporcion of bacwn lene
And brene it al i powder clene,
And do wasche y^{e} cankyr sone ano
And caste y^{e} powdyr yeri ano.
Take y^{e} fayrest of y^{e} qwete
And do it smal to gedyr bete,

Stockholm manuscript calls for more common ingredients than the recipe in "In Hoote Somere," suggesting that more exotic ones were added later. This highly complex remedy, more complex than others in this popular medical treatise, demonstrates the practice of recording elaborate treatments for serious diseases like plague in popular medical works.[18]

> And menge it w[t] mylk of woma mylde
> y[t] hat boryn aknawe chylde.
> (Miller 117n5[v], 5-9)

[18]A further analogue to the use of impossibly complex or exotic remedies for treatment of plague occurs in a spurious medical work from the fifteenth century entitled Contra pestem. The tract was written by Johannes Mercurius of Corregio, a charlatan who had the work printed sometime between 1493 and 1512 in Rome (Fugitive Leaves 2-). The work combines popular remedies with exotic ingredients, probably unknown to laymen even though the author claims to have written the tract for their benefit. The following recipe for a plague preventive in Contra pestem exemplifies the content and style of recipes in the rest of the tract:

> Likewise, certain experiments should be carefully noted: which I forsooth bring forward openly, in this unusual proclamation of mine, for princes, prelates, and rich men, and yet for citizens, at the same time, and the common people: vz. that whoever carries around in his mouth and sucks on a green crystal Jasper, stained with certain bloody or ruby drops: for him it will not be possible to be corrupted and infected by any corruption, either of water or air or by contagion from corpses and men: nor by the bite of serpents and snakes.
> (Fugitive Leaves 2 (May, 1935): 5)

The use of various precious stones as plague preventives were not uncommon among wealthier people. George Deaux notes that Pope Clement VI "wore a magical emerald ring on his finger which when turned to the east reduced the possibility of infection, and when turned to the south nullified the effect of any poison that might just possibly be present" (The Black Death 104).

4. The Liber Uricrisiarum (in Wellcome 225)

Pestilence is mentioned in several places in a theoretical medical treatise appearing in Wellcome MS 225, the Liber Uricrisiarum, a translation of the Latin treatise De Urinis written by Isaac Judaeus, a physician practicing during the late ninth and early tenth centuries.[19] Uroscopy was of chief importance in the diagnosis and prognosis of various diseases, and usually reserved for graduate physicians.[20] An English translation of this treatise made uroscopy and other theoretical matters more available for laymen.[21] The

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[19] Background information and citations from the Liber Uricrisiarum are taken from Joanne Jasin's edition. Her introduction to the text is especially useful.

[20] Since ancient times, uroscopy had been associated with academic physicians, and, in fact, became an emblem of the medical profession (Jasin 2-3). The physician shown in the Ellesmere Manuscript holds a urine flask, which, along with his fur hood, distinguishes him from the other Canterbury pilgrims.

Uroscopy or "water casting" was an important tool for determining the course of a disease. Joanne Jasin describes the importance of uroscopy in medieval medicine in the following passage from her edition of the Middle English Liber Uricrisiarum in Wellcome MS 225: "Middle Eastern and Western civilizations made the practice of uroscopy synonymous with and emblematic of the medical profession. Numerous paintings, woodcuts, and illuminated manuscripts depict the physician standing by the patient, solemnly examining the urine in the urinal while holding it up to the light" (2).

[21] The traditional subdivisions of the study of the urine include the engendering of urine, its colors and contents (Jasin 7 ff.).

treatise contains information on astrology, humoral doctrine, circulation, anatomy, and human reproduction, topics of more concern to medical theoreticians than laymen. But the treatise contains more than medical theory, including practical advice on fevers, digestion, gynecology, and even a charm against bleeding (483).

Whether or not laymen actually practiced uroscopy is questionable, but the style the translator has chosen makes it possible for those not formally trained in medicine to understand this complicated diagnostic procedure.[22] "The style of the treatise," Jasin remarks, "is simple and straightforward, as befits a work whose purpose is to communicate technical knowledge as clearly as possible" (14). In a number of instances, the scribe provides English translations of technical terms, often preceded by "id est." He frequently provides native English terms for the diseases and ailments or anatomical features described in the text with cross references. The opening of Book One demonstrates his approach:

> Uryn is als mykyll for to say in Ynglysch as on (in) þe reynys (reynes) is Frensch. Reynes Latyn, lendys in Ynglysch; & it is said "on þe reynes" because þat it is kyndly & formly caused & gendyrd in þe reynes; & if you wyll wewt wyttyrly what are

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[22] There were, for instance, as many as fifty different colors of urine which could combine with many variations. See illus. of uroscopic charts, Chapter One (50).

> þe reynes, se in þe 2[nd] buk, þe 5[th] chapater of whyt colour. (51.1-6)

The Latin tags in the Liber de Diversis Medicinis and in other works mentioned earlier in this chapter euphemize sexual terminology or, in some cases, add a mark of authority to the text. The translator of the Liber Uricrisiarum, however, explains Latin terminology, rather than using it as the mark of authority or for obscuring topics he deems unfit for an audience of English readers.

The Liber Uricrisiarum contains no specific remedies for plague, but does mention pestilence in a section on planetary influences, explaining in general terms that, when the planet Saturn is in Capricorn or Aquarius, "he caues mykyll water & mony flodys, of whylk comes derthes & hungyr and pestilence of folk & best" (253.3068-70). In an explanation of "Inopos & Kyanos," two colors of urine, the first a reddish and the second a darker red or purplish, the author mentions various apostemes of the liver and kidneys, external or internal swellings caused by a superfluity of humors frequently associated with plague. Information like this could be useful in understanding the causes of plague, but the absence of plague remedies in this treatise indicates

that much of the treatise was taken from ancient sources, which seldom mentioned plague specifically.[23] Most of the information found in the Liber Uricrisiarum was not often recorded in English before the fourteenth century. The Leech Book of Bald (ed. Oswald Cockayne) is an exception. This English Leechbook, written during the ninth or tenth century, contains various remedies not unlike those found in later vernacular works such as the liber Uricrisiarum and "In Hoote Somere."

5. Conclusion: Plague Treatises and Their Readers

Especially in times of crisis, other people besides university-trained physicians were called on to heal the large number of sick. Lay practitioners included barber-surgeons, who may or may not have been trained in the

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[23] Part Nine of John Mirfield's Breviarium Bartholomei (ca. 1380) also contains information on the pestilence, but the treatise cannot be described in detail here as the English version of this work has yet to be edited. According to Norman Moore, Mirfield borrows his discussion of pestilence nearly word for word from the writings of an earlier fourteenth-century physician of some note, Bernard of Gordon (ca. 1258-1318), who wrote on pestilential diseases (A History of the Study of Medicine 38). Bernard died before the outbreaks of plague in fourteenth-century England, but his writing on pestilential fever became a source of authority for some contemporary physicians, according to Moore. Mirfield's numerous remarks on protection from plague "as well as the way in which he leaves the reader to infer that treatment is of very little use, points to actual experience 'tempore pestilenciae'" (38).

universities; leeches, who practiced medicine with practical training only; and clerics, parish priests and others who may have practiced medicine partly on the basis of reading medical works, but mostly through apprenticeships.

Remedies, when mentioned in the treatises discussed in this chapter, often called for common garden herbs. These were useful for leeches who practiced medicine without academic training, and traditionally, were less concerned with theory than with practical doctoring. Empirics applied remedies learned aurally, but later these were recorded in leech books, often in verse. These recipes usually prescribe herbal remedies in addition to certain charms. Occasional references to Hippocrates, Galen, and other ancient authorities mentioned as a source for some recipes might suggest that empirics were also familiar with some degree of medical theory. But while many may have known the names of the major theorists of antiquity and the early Christian era, few knew the theories these men endorsed.

Barber-surgeons, for instance, learned their trade during an apprenticeship with a master-surgeon, a course of study endorsed and later recorded in the charters of the Guild of Barber Surgeons. As Lester King explains, the empiric generally "expects that what has helped in

the past will help in the future. If he has good training, his experience will probably make him a reliable practitioner; poor training will make him unreliable. But in either case he is contented with what works and doesn't worry about the theory" (191-2).[24]

The notebook of John Crophill, a fifteenth-century empiric practicing in the English countryside, contains information from academic sources, including astrological prognostics, but, according to Ernest William Talbert, "Although Crophill apparently knew that astrology was the science which elucidated primary causes, an analysis of his notebook shows that his astrological knowledge was, at best, superficial...Crophill's cosmological system is a medieval commonplace" ("The Notebook" 13). Like other empirics, Crophill is more concerned with remedy than

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[24]By the end of the fifteenth century, the barber-surgeons had established a more "learned" tradition for themselves through various acts of Parliament which prohibited the practice of surgery to those without training and endorsement by the Guild of Surgeons, established earlier in the fifteenth century.

The sixteenth-century surgeon Thomas Vicary writes in the "Epistle Dedicatorie" to the Anatomie of the Bodie of Man (Eds. Frederick J. Furnivall and Percy Furnivall):

> And although we do lack the profound knowledge and sugred eloquence of the Latin and Greeke tongues, to decke and beautifie this vvorke, yet we hope the studious Reader shal thereby reape singuler commoditie and fruite, by reading this little treatise of the Anatomie of mans body, the vvhich is onely grounded vpon reason and experience, which are two principal rootes of Phisicke and Surgerie (7).

cause, and though his notebook contains no advice on plague, expect for a recipe written in a sixteenth-century hand (Talbert 7n7), its many recipes and summary of prognostics suggest a strong concern with practical rather than with theoretical advice.[25]

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[25]According to Talbert, the manuscript containing Crophill's notebook includes two types of prognostics and seventy cooking recipes, in addition to the notebook. The notebook contains sections on evil days, a brief discussion of bloodletting, leading to a discussion of zodiac man, followed by an outline of the cosmos, with information on the size of the earth and the relation of earth to astral bodies and planets" (7-8). In addition, the notebook discusses the four complexions, the four elements, and uroscopy. While it might, at first, seem that Crophill's notebook includes a fair amount of theoretical advice (on astrology or uroscopy, for instance), this advice is actually summarized or even distorted. Talbert explains that

> Nowhere in his discussion of cosmology does Crophill show that he was acquainted with texts which represented the contemporary opinion of the learned. There is, for example, no mention in Crophill's work of the doctrine that the four elements are not found in a pure state in any bodies perceptible to the senses. Nor does Crophill show any knowledge of the aRistotelian doctrine of the fifth essence [Quint Essence], even though that doctrine is clearly enunciated in , for example, the Introductorium in Astronomiam by Albumasar--one of the standard textbooks, written by the astrologer most frequently cited in Western Europe during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance.
>
> ("The Notebook" 16)

Further, the notebook demonstrates a superficial knowledge of astrological calculations (Talbert 16). In sum, rather than follow the advice of standard theoretical authorities, Crophill prefers the authority of standard, gnomic advice, especially regarding practical measures such as diet. He mentions the "wise physicians Hippocrates, Galen, Socrates, Isaac, Herodicos, Theophilus, Gilbert and Constantine," calling them "outstanding physicians and astronomers," but, according to Talbert, "wisely refrains from attributing to them any specific portions of the notebook" (21n46).

Despite different emphases, popular and academic medicine traditionally relied on the authority of ancient practitioners, although often in condensed form; physicians relied on written sources for the theory of disease and empirics on traditional pharmaceutical advice for remedies. Many remedies described in leechbooks were the same as those found in the works of Galen and Hippocrates. Physicians were familiar with remedies for plague, but would have likely depended on apothecaries for compounding and administering them to patients.[26] While the authority of ancient practitioners was important in both academic and practical medicine, academic medicine held to the authority recorded in medical documents, and empirics traditionally referred to the authority of the spoken word.

In England, the universities regulated the practice of physicians through a course of medical instruction. The number of academic physicians seems small, however, when compared to the numbers of other practitioners. Rossell Hope Robbins estimates the number of physicians

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[26]Chaucer's narrator describes the collusion between his Physician and the apothecaries in this passage in the General Prologue:

> Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries
> To sende hym drogges and his letuaries,
> For ech of hem made oother for to wynne--
> Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigynne.
> (425-28)

practicing in England in the fifteenth century to be about 60 ("Medical Manuscripts" 408). Elaine Miller observes that this number is "hardly enough to service the entire island," adding that since many doctors of physic had died in plague times, and since their educational term was so long (in some cases up to eighteen years), "there was definitely a shortage [of academic physicians] which was not quickly replenished in the fifteenth century" ("In Hoote Somere" xxxiv).

Physicians were available in the smaller towns of Oxford and Cambridge, but Linda Voigts and Michael McVaugh explain that "an English faculty of medicine was not in a position to regulate and license the medical practice of a large metropolitan area as were the faculties of Continental cities" (13). Voigts and McVaugh describe the situation in London: a population of nearly 30,000 could not be treated by university graduates, nor could its practitioners be controlled by the medical faculties in rural university towns like Cambridge and Oxford (13).[27]

Academic medical texts, which borrowed from older treatises like the Isagoge, served as sources for contemporary treatises like the Liber de Diversis

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[27]A useful overview of academic medicine may be found in Vern L. Bullough's "Population and the Study of Medieval Medicine," "Medical Study at Mediaeval Oxford," and "The Mediaeval Medical School at Cambridge."

Medicinis, often with few changes for accommodating the ancient counsel of "wise physicians" to contemporary outbreaks of plague. John Thornton, unable to find satisfactory advice on the treatment of plague in remedy books, turned to an academic medical treatise for guidance, and for advice on plague specifically, to the Latin version of John of Burgundy's treatise.

English vernacular medical works therefore remained largely derivative, even through the sixteenth century, as Paul Slack argues ("Mirrors of Health and Treasures of Poor Men" 237-73). Through English translations, the learned tradition was no longer reserved for those who read Latin. Those who read vernacular languages were now able to learn this advice, though, as examples in this chapter have shown, they would have to know something of academic medicine in order to use the procedures outlined in the treatises. Robert S. Gottfried believes that English medical works might therefore have helped to "'demystify' physicians' texts for an audience of lay readers" (Doctors and Medicine 69).

In the fifteenth century, popular remedies for plague were recorded along with academic medical advice, as the examples in the previous chapters have shown. But academic medical writing was often greatly simplified or condensed, and translated into the vernacular for an audience of English barbers and leeches, and, by the

end of the fifteenth century, for "a reading public that consisted to a large degree of practical, hard-headed merchants" (Robert S. Gottfried, Doctors and Medicine 69). Advice became more popular in the fifteenth century when dietaries and regimens of health were written for the nobility and incorporated with other practical advice in didactic works such as The Secrees of the Philosoffres, considered in Chapter Six.

Fifteenth-century vernacular medical writing was often a collection of remedies, catalogued for convenient use, but without the careful organization of academic treatises. Despite a common source in the Burgundy plague treatise, later treatises often emphasized different means for making sense of plague. Some recorded fairly detailed descriptions of phlebotomy; others gave extensive lists of remedies with complex ingredients. Plague references in academic medical works like Guy de Chauliac's Cyrurgie and the Liber Uricrisiarum are found in longer treatises, more formal and based more exclusively on the teachings of ancient physicians. Texts by Continental physicians like Guy de Chauliac, however, contain more autobiographical and contemporary references than plague treatises written by Englishmen.

Some of the information from English plague treatises undoubtedly found its way into the homes of

English readers, and it is not surprising that literary writers like Lydgate, Chaucer, and Langland employed some of this advice in their own writings, but in support of a moral rather than medical interpretation of plague.

Academic treatises on plague, the basis of most vernacular plague writing, have served as useful evidence for scholars in explaining the rise of professionalism and other developments, including "the rise of surgery, new public health and sanitation, and the development of hospitals designed not just to isolate society's sick but to try to cure them" (Gottfried, The Black Death 110). As the opening to one version of the Burgundy treatise states:

> I, John of Burgoyn or John with the berd, burges of Ledye and master of medecyns in this skrow with Godd is helpe the preservyng and cure of pestilens evelis pleynly y purpose to chewe that onnes eny man schal a physion but eny man may be a phisician a preserver a governer and a curater of hymself.
> (qtd. in Singer and Anderson, no. 19.45)

As the examples in this chapter have shown, plague treatises came increasingly to stress prevention, while laymen themselves preferred remedies and recorded them in leechbooks and other popular medical guides even through the nineteenth century. Like plague remedies in Middle English texts, those in later sources are often long and complex, more than recipes for other diseases appearing with them in leechbooks.

Plague remedies find their way into a variety of later texts, including this recipe from a fifteenth-century gynecological treatise:

> Fro the pestilence: Take 12 drachms each of myrrh, pimpernel, and fumitory, 6 drachms of Armenian bole, 15 drachms of re, 6 drachms each of dittany, and tourmaline, 10 drachms each of wood aloes, sandalwood, madder, fleawort, origanum, round birthwort, and laurel berries, and 6 drachms of gentian, and let them be made into a powder. (Trans. Rowland, Medieval Woman's Guide 163)

Warren R. Dawson finds analogues in ancient sources for medicinal recipes in his edition of a mid-fifteenth century leechbook with analogous recipes appearing in the Cairo Coptic Medical Papyrus and in the works of the tenth century Jewish physician, Shabbethai Donnolo, who, according to Dawson, "settled in Italy and wrote a pharmaceutical work" (6).[28]

[28] Though related to Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts, this leechbook and surviving Anglo-Saxon leechbooks (Ed. Cockayne) "had to a large extent a common origin, but they developed along different lines" (8). Warren R. Dawson lists the following sources for specific remedies given in the leechbook: Anselm, Galen, Bernard of Gordon, Henri de Mondeville, Hippocrates, Peter Bonant [unidentified by Dawson], and Peter of Spain. While these are the only authors noted specifically in the text, Dawson has found elements of the leechbook in the writings of Dioscorides, Pliny the Elder, Cassius felix, Galen, Oribasius, Alexander Trallianus, Pseudo-apuleius, or Apuleius Barbarus, Sextus Placitus, Paulus aegineta, and Marcellus Empiricus, a fifth-century empiric, whom the compiler of the leechbook drew upon to a greater extent than to any of the others above (A Leechbook 10-11).
The following remedy for pestilence appears in Dawson's leechbook:

> A medicine for the pestilence. Take dittany, philipendula (dropwort) and tormentil, of each

Concerning lay people's use of theoretical medicine in the later Middle Ages, John M. Riddle concludes, "As seen in a practical medical guide, the lapidary literature, and the Pestschriften, the general practitioner of the later Middle Ages reacted to the new learned infatuation with theoretical medicine by largely

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> equally much, and bray them together, and temper them with ale or with wine, and drink them. (319).

Plague preservatives were endorsed by the King's Privy Council in a London newspaper on July 6, 1665: "To the end therefore it may be publickly known, where the said Remedies and Medicaments, with directions for the use of them may be had, all persons desiring the same, may hereby take notice, that he places appointed for the sale thereof, are, At Mr. Drinkwaters an Apothecary at the Fountain in Fleet Street..." (H. R. Plomer, "Preservatives from the Plague" 493).

The following plague preventive and remedy appearing in John Wesley's Primitive Physick, or An Early and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases, provides a final example of the influence and consistency of plague remedies long after the Middle Ages:

> The Plague (to prevent): Eat marigold flowers, daily, as a salad, with oil and vinegar. Or, infuse rue, sage, mint, rosemary, wormwood, of each a handful, into two quarts of the sharpest vinegar, over warm embers for eight days: then strain it through a funnel, and add half an ounce of camphire dissolved in three ounces of rectified spirits of wine. With this wash the lins [scil. lips], face, and mouth, and snuff a little up the nose when you go abroad. Smell to a sponge dipped therein when you approach infected persons or places (96).
>
> The Plague (to cure): Cold water alone, drank largely, has cured it. Or, an ounce or two of the juice of marigolds. Or, after bleeding fifteen or sixteen ounces, drink very largely of water sharpened with spirit of vitriol.--Dr. Dover. Or, a draught of brine as soon as seized: sweat in bed; take no other drink for some hours. Or, use lemon juice largely in every thing (96-97).

ignoring it" ("Theory and Practice" 159). Yet both "general practitioners" and academic physicians turned to earlier sources as a way of incorporating an unfamiliar disease into familiar boundaries.

Part II: The Moral Interpretation of Plague

Chapter 5: The Church's Interpretation of Disease

An emphasis on the moral implications of plague rarely appears in English medical works, although some imply that a connection between plague and sin exists. Lechery, for instance, was explained as both a deadly sin and a physical means by which plague miasmas could enter the body, as sexual activity was thought to open the pores, allowing plague vapors to enter. Several English versions of John of Burgundy's treatise, discussed in Chapter Three of this study, warn that lechery might weaken "kinde," thereby causing pestilence (Murray, ed. 30). The section on plague in the Liber de Diversis Medicinis, discussed in Chapter Four (111-17), also warned that lechery and gluttony endanger body and soul.[1]

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[1] John of Burgundy's explains that sexual causes plague because coitus opened the pores, allowing the plague miasmas to enter the body, in turn disrupting humoral balance.
Parallel passages from the Liber de Diversis and the

Continental plague treatises more frequently mention moral causes of plague than English versions, perhaps because more Continental writers of plague treatises served the dual roles of physician and clergyman, as is the case with Bishop Knutsson. Even before plague arrived on the Continent, the French physician Jacme d'Agramont questioned its coming, which he learned about from other writers, in religious and medical terms:

> If air is pestilential because of putrefaction and corruption of its substance, one must consider whether its corruption or putrefaction was sent for our good, or for our sins, or whether it came from the infection of the earth, or of the water, or of allied things, or whether it came from higher or superior causes such as by the influence of conjunctions or opposition of planets.
> (qtd. in Winslow 111)

Jacme furnished remedies appropriate for each cause of plague, but warned that if plague had come from God's anger, there could be no physical remedy:

> The pestilence of the air which involves contra-natural change, or putrefaction in its substance,

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Burgundy plague tract (English prose version) are shown below:

> Liber de Diversis: ...et super omnia alia nocet coitus & accelerat ad hunc morbum quod maxime aperit poros & destruit spiritus vitales..."
> (Ogden ed., 51).
> Trans.: Above all other things, coitus harms and greatly accelerates this disease which enters the pores and destroys the vital spirit.
> Burgundy Treatise: ...quia tanc operti sunt pori corporos, per quor aer intrat venenosus, qui debilitat et destruit vitales spiritus corporales.
> (Murray ed., 26.22-24).

> can also come from various causes. Sometimes it is sent by God because of sins. Thus it is said in the Holy Scripture in the old testament, Deuteronomy, Chap. 28 that God omnipotent promised to his people very great and very marvelous benedictions if they observed and kept his commandments. And likewise He threatened and menaced them with powerful maledictions in case they did not observe His ceremonies and commandments, ubi sic dicitur.
> (Duran-Reynals and Winslow 64-65)

Remedies in fourteenth-century Continental medical works often combined physical remedies with a coda explaining the need for spiritual healing.[2] Klebs and Droz, editors of a number of French plague treatises, explain that a religious interpretation of plague was often included with a medical one in French plague treatises. According to the advice in many Continental treatises, care of the body should be combined with care of the soul, as the following excerpt from a French treatise demonstrates:

> Following are some preventive measures:
> The sick will accomplish their religious duties,for during times of pestilence, confession and penance are to be preferred above all medicine; they will follow a diet carefully, avoiding all emotion and excitement, and they will look after their hygiene and the conditions of their homes.[3]

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[2] For examples of plague remedies in France particularly, see A. C. Klebs and E. Droz, Remèdes Contre la Peste.

[3] Suivent quelques conseils préventifs: les malades accompliront leurs devoirs religieux, 'car en temps pestilencieux, confession et penitence sont a estre preferees davant toute medecine,' ils suivront un régime, évitant soigneusement toute émotion et toute excitation et veilleront à leur hygiène et aux conditions de leur habitation (Klebs and Droz 52).

Pestilential diseases were among those illnesses thought to be caused by sin, and their remedy depended on the restoration of spiritual wholeness. A moral interpretation of pestilence encouraged those threatened with plague to look beyond the physical world for the causes of this scourge. Doing so also led them to look beyond the physical world for remedies. Physicians described physical remedies for plague in treatises, but presumably, devout believers would assume that since God controlled all things, His wrath over human sin was responsible for a scourge of this magnitude, and when disease was caused by sin, it was best to seek help from spiritual rather than physical healers. The connection between sin and disease was explicitly mentioned in English didactic works in the fifteenth century as part of general advice on plague. References to plague in didactic works were therefore seen as warnings of the dangers of sin, along with other troubles of fallen mankind.

The belief that pestilence was sent by God to punish a fallen mankind appears commonly in medieval religious works, and is, ultimately, derived from the Old Testament.[4] When the Children of Israel committed

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[4] See Philip Ziegler, The Black Death, 35-39, where the author discusses Old Testament connections of sin and pestilential diseases like plague.
The Augustinian explanation of the secret punishment of evil provide an important background for

harlotry with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25), they were stricken with plague (Hebrew magefah), probably a sexually transmitted disease (Rosner 30). Plague, in the sense of "blow" or divine scourge, is a common term for epidemic diseases described in the Old Testament.[5] Widespread afflictions were thought to have come from God as punishment, usually for idolatry or unbelief.

According to Fred Rosner, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether or not the biblical and talmudical diseases referred to [in Hebrew] as magefa, deber, nega, negef represent particular diseases, including plague (30). Since biblical times, a "rat-fall," the sudden appearance of dead or dying rats, has been associated with the presence of human epidemics (McGrew 37), leading Rosner to the conclusion that an account of plague mentioned in I Kings must have been bubonic plague and that the term emerods probably refers to buboes (6).

Medieval English religious writers drew parallels between biblical plagues, and particularly the plague of

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Chaucer and Langland's moralistic interpretations of the plague and other diseases brought on by sin. For a fuller discussion of Augustine's description of the secret punishment of evil in the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, see Alfred L. Kellogg, "An Augustinian Interpretation of Chaucer's Pardoner."

[5] In the New Testament, the word mastix (literally, a lash), is a term used to denote various epidemics (cf. Mark 3.10, 5.29, 34).

the Philistines, and the fourteenth-century plague, ancient plagues serving as precedents for contemporary events. The Philistines, who took the Ark of the Lord and placed it in the temple of Dagon, were smitten with "emerods" or buboes. In order to be healed, they had to offer a sacrifice of five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. These golden replicas of plague swellings and mice were placed in the ark, which was then returned to the Israelites. The plague of the Philistines serves as a warning for those who would violate the Ark of the Covenant: The men of Ashdod associated the ark with this plague of mysterious swellings and shipped it off to Gath, another Philistine city; but there too, God smote them (Deaux, The Black Death 11).[6]

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[6]The story of the plague of the Philistines appears in I Kings 5.6-9:

> And the men of Azotus seeing this kind of plague, said: The ark of the God of Israel shall not stay with us: for his hand is heavy upon us, and upon Dagon our god. And sending, they gathered together all the lords of the Philistines to them, and said: What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And the Gethrites answered: Let the ark of the God is Israel be carried about. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about. And while they were carrying it about, the hand of the Lord came upon every city with an exceeding great slaughter: and he smote the men of every city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts. And the Gethrites consulted together, and made themselves seats of skins.
>
> (I Kings 5:6-9, Douay-Rheims)

George Deaux further explains some of the parallels between the plague of the Philistines and the Black Death:

Concerning the causes of illnesses, the Church taught that the physical risks from sin were serious, but that spiritual consequences from sin were even more serious. Failure to repent would lead to eternal damnation. Humans were punished for their disobedience through Nature, who at God's bidding, sent the plague to chastise and force repentance. In the Etymologies, Isidore of Seville had explained that even though epidemic disease "often springs up from air-borne potencies [per aërias potestates], nevertheless it can never come about without the will of God" (Sharpe trans. 57.17).[7]

> The method of transporting the ark [containing "images of your emerods and images of your mice that mar the land"] is of some interest. It was to be sent in a cart drawn by two cows. If the cows chose to take the coast road to Beth-shemesh, it would be understood that the pestilence had come from God, but "if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: but was a chance thing that happened to us." The cows chose the coast road and the arrival of the ark in Beth-shemesh was the occasion for great rejoicing" (The Black Death 11).

In this account, we may see that, according to biblical precedent, plagues could take two forms as either naturally occurring or divinely sent, a dichotomy also observed by medieval writers like Bishop Knutsson (see Chapter Four (88-94)) and in the Book of Quinte Essence.

> [7] Isidore interpreted plague in etymological terms: It is termed "pestilence" as though a "little pasture," pastulentia, or because it feeds like a fire, as Vergil [Aeneid 5.638]: Toto descendit corpora pestis, "The plague fell upon the whole body." Likewise, it is called "contagion," contagium, from "touch," contingere, for whomsoever it touches, it infects. It is also called inguina because it attacks the groins, inguen.

A reciprocal relationship was assumed to exist between man's spiritual and physical nature. Sin weakened the spirit, which, in turn, weakened the body. As John A. Alford explains, "If all order is primarily a participation in divine justice, then physiological order is simply the working out of justice through the medium of the body" ("Medicine in the Middle Ages" 386). In literature, the metaphor of plague represented disorder in a world filled with the disease of sin, just as in medical writing, it represented humoral imbalance in the world of the body. In religious terms, disease could be interpreted in several ways. Penelope B. R. Doob distinguishes among three kinds: the first as a punishment for sin and a reminder of damnation awaiting the unfaithful; the second, "monitory and purgative, at once a visible token of sin, a punishment for sin, and a means of expiation;" the third, "a test to prove the elect and increase their merit" (6).

The tradition of separating bodily from spiritual health was related to the tradition of separating

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> The same disease is also called lues, from "destruction" and "grief," luctus, since its course is so acute and rapid that one does not have enough time in which even to hope for life or for death, but a feeling of faintness comes on suddenly, bringing death at the same time" (Sharpe trans. 57.18-19).

Ida B. Jones provides additional examples of the Church's interpretation of disease in "Popular Medical Knowledge."

physical from spiritual healers. Cicero had distinguished between morbus corporis and morbus animi. According to him, "the illnesses of the body...are the domain of medicine, while diseases of the mind can only be cured by philosophy" (qtd. in Ell, "Concepts of Disease" 154). According to the Church Fathers, the concern of medicine was the health of the body, and the concern of the Church, the health of the soul. The commentaries of the Church Fathers often pointed out this connection based on the example of Christ, who was "The Great Physician" of body and soul.[8] Peter B. Paisley explains that the Church Fathers interpreted literally Christ's healing mission, believing that Christ's mission included the healing of body as well as soul: "Visiting and caring for the sick was one of the central activities of the Christian life from the start; we tend nowadays to think of the physician metaphors of the New Testament as being just that--metaphors--but it is clear that the Church Fathers interpreted them a great deal more literally than this" ("The Idea of Plague" 208).

Gregory I, commenting on the relationship of physical and spiritual health, warned that illness (aegritudo) was castigation of God (qtd. in Ell, "Concepts of Disease" 157). When one became ill, one

[8] Cf. Mark 2.17, Luke 4.23; 5.31.

needed to consider whether or not the disease had been caused by sin. St. Bede, who survived contemporary epidemics himself (Blair, The World of Bede 178, 237), described one "whole season of summer overturned in violent winds and wintry storms" which resulted in an outbreak of pestilence.[9] Such excesses of nature, Bede believed, were the breeding ground for pestilential diseases (pestilentia or cwealm), but were ultimately brought on through the wrath of God.

The idea that God chastised mankind with disease sometimes was taken to extremes, especially in the eremitical life. Sickness was even considered desirable, in some cases, as a means for spiritual growth. The author of the Ancren Riwle distinguishes between two kinds of disease: first were those that man brings on himself through foolishness, and second, those sent by God, not as punishment, but as a means of strengthening faith. The latter kind was to be seen as a blessing, since it gave man an opportunity to reestablish spiritual health before death so that damnation, the ultimate castigation of God, would not occur:

> Secnesse is þi goldsmiþ þe iþe blisse of heouene ouergulde þ þi crune...þe mei þenne edstearten [escape] þat ilke grisliche [dreadful] wa. þe eateliche [deadly] þinen þruh secnesse þat agead

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[9] De natura rerum, PL 90, cols. 187-278. Trans. is Blair's (The World of Bede) 117.

> [passes away] þurh ei euel þat her is seliliche [blessed] mei ha seggen [call herself].
> (Tolkien, ed., 95.14-28)

In the eremitical life, the absence of illness could warn of God's displeasure:

> 3et he wepeþ to me wiuene sarest, ond seiþ godd for3et him for þi þat he ne sent him na muchel secnesse.
> (Tolkien, ed., 195.15-16)

Sickness could also serve as a reminder of the agonies of the Passion. Christ had suffered physically for the sins of mankind. So one who was sincerely dedicated to knowing the ways of God would also willingly accept the burden of physical illness as a reminder of Christ's blessed mission on earth. Therefore, when sickness came, it was not always desirable to lessen physical discomfort and illness with medicines; rather it was best to seek divine intervention. Since there were two kinds of disease, one originating from natural sources and the other from God's chastising hand, it was natural to think that there must also be two kinds of healers. As the author of the Ancren Riwle explained:

> Godd ond his desciples speken of sawle lechecreft. Ypocras ond Galien of licomes heale...þe wes best ilearet of iesu cristes lechecreft seiþ flesches wisdom is deaþ to þe sawle.
> (Tolkien, ed., 189.29-32)

Some of the penances prescribed for the religious life encouraged illness and may have even directly caused it. Fasting, dietary restriction, and deliberate exposure to extremes of weather are examples. But such extreme measures were seldom part of most Christians' lives. When sickness came, however, one must recognize that God had a hand in that illness as a warning of some imminent danger to the soul, or as means for spiritual growth. Individual cases of sickness sometimes came as a warning or punishment for individual sins, but widespread diseases like plague were thought to occur as the result of collective sins, and thus often drew a collective response from the Church and public officials. The fourteenth-century Church, faced with many deaths caused by plague, like medical writers, turned naturally to the earlier teachings of the Church and its Fathers and concluded that plague was a spiritual problem and to be solved by spiritual means, namely through contrition, repentance, penance, and prayer.

Fourteenth-century Church records during plague outbreaks stated explicitly that plague had come from God through Nature. As the Bishop of Winchester reminded the clergy in his diocese during the first outbreak of plague in 1349-50, the healing of souls needed to come before bodily health could be restored. His

interpretation of plague, based on the teachings of the Church Fathers concerning epidemic diseases, emphasized spiritual health over the health of the body.

The bishop explained the presence of plague in moral terms: "Man's sensuality which, propagated by the tendency of the old sin of Adam, from youth inclines to all evil, has now fallen into deeper malice and justly provoked the divine wrath by a multitude of sins to this chastisement." It was only through the "healing of souls," the bishop explained a few weeks later, that "this kind of sickness [which comes from sin] is known to cease."[10] When the disease continued to rage in successive outbreaks after 1349, some thought that those suffering from this illness had not been sincerely contrite during earlier outbreaks. The Hereford Register gives other examples of the Church's response to this collective disease. The parishes of Great and Little Collington were combined by the Bishop of Hereford after a severe outbreak of plague because, the register explains, the disease had so greatly reduced the number of parishioners. The register further explained that

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[10] Victoria County History of Hampshire 2:32-33; see also D. Knowles and R. N. Haddock, Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales.

plague had impoverished the land, creating "terrarum sterilitas."[11]

The warning expressed in Trillek's message and by other representatives of the Church was that plague had come as God's scourge sent to force repentance and that forgiveness had to be sought before the corporate body could be whole again.[12] Saints, especially Roch and Sebastian, were invoked during plague times, and various prayers to the Virgin such as the "De Sancta Maria contra pestilenciam" were considered by some as more powerful remedies for plague than any physical measures.[13]

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[11] The Register of John de Trillek, Bishop of Hereford (A.D. 1344-1361), Ed. F. C. Hingeston-Rondolph:

> ...pestilencie hominum jam transacte tempestas gravis que universum orbem terrarum undique invadebat adeo ecclesiarum predictarum populum reddibit diminutum...terrarum sterilitas, et paupertas notoria contigit et persistit.

The bishop himself died from plague in 1361.

[12] Such was the familiar message of Christ to those whom he healed of bodily ailments. Healing of the soul must occur before physical health could be restored. Before Christ healed the body, he called on the sinner to repent, as He did in the case of the man crippled with palsy:

> And when Jesus had seen their faith, he saith to the sick of the palsy: Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.
>
> (Mark 2.5)

[13] Analecta hymnica 31:207. See R. Woolf, English Religious Lyric, 282-83.

A later version of the poem is Robert Henryson's "Ane Prayer for the Pest," in Denton Fox, ed., The Poems of Robert Henryson, 167-69. Rosemary Woolf, Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century, 206-08. Carleton Brown (A Register) describes the refrain in one prayer:

The connection between sin and plague, emphasized by the Church, was also found in contemporary writers like John of Rupesicca, author of the Liber secretorum eventuum, which gained wide popularity in England in the later Middle Ages. John narrowly survived the Black Death himself in 1349. Robert E. Lerner comments on references to plague in the Liber secretorum eventuum:

> [John] built the plague into his understanding of present and future between 1348 and 1349. God was punishing humanity in numerous ways that would culminate in Antichrist's triumph, but proper understanding of the future offered a beacon of hope and a guide for enduring through tribulation.[14]

"A peste succure nobis" (Sloane 1584, f.14b). And see also Robert Henryson's "Prayer for the Pestilence). According to Singer and Anderson: "Many prayers against the pestilence addressed to Saint Sebastian and other saints connected especially with this scourge are found on odd pages of manuscript volumes containing secular works as well as in books of Hours and other Prayer Books. An extensive search would doubtless reveal many [more] examples..." (158).

Among the examples reported by Singer and Anderson are the "Collect, Secret and Post-Communion for the Mass of St. Sebastian in the Time of Pestilence," the prayer or hymn "Stella Celi," and a "Vision" by Edmund Leversedge in the fifteenth century (18).

Sources above from Singer and Anderson, Appendix D, in seriatim order: London, British Museum Additional 40,146; f. 82; Oratio contra pestem, printed Clemens Blume and Guido M. Dreves, Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi 31:201; translated by John Lydgate as "Thu hevenly queen, of grace our loodsterre [EETS, e.s., no. 107, H. N. MacCracken, ed., Lydgate's Minor Poems, 1:294-295]; printed E. M. Thompson in Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries 9.

[14] "Western European Eschatological Mentalities," in Daniel Williman, ed., The Black Death 86.

Nature was the direct intermediary between God's divine plan and the working out of that plan in the sphere of human life.

As Chaucer explained in The Parliament of Fowls, Nature worked through the elements in carrying out God's intentions on earth:

> Nature, the vicaire of the almyghty Lord,
> That hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst, and dreye
> Hath knyt by evene noumbres of acord...
> (379-381)[15]

Religious poetry also mentions plague as one of the three signs of God's judgment which occurred during the fourteenth century: the Peasants' Revolt, the Black Death, and earthquakes. The poem "A Warning to Beware" describes these signs in the context of a sinful world:

> Thy Rysing of the comuynes in londe
> The pestilens, and the eorthe-quake,
> Theose threo thinges, I understande,
> Beo-tokens the grete vengaunce & wrake
> That schulde falle for synnes sake.
> (57-61)

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[15] Charles Muscatine discusses Chaucer's sources for this passage:

> The personification of Nature was commonplace in the Middle Ages. In his conception of Nature, Chaucer was particularly indebted to Alanus de Insulis and to Jean de Meun. Nature is characterized as a queen and goddess, vicar of God (PF 379), representing the forces of both generation and order in the universe.
> (Muscatine 999n303)

Nature is called the vicaire of God in Alanus, De planctu 13.224, 16.187, 18.44, and in The Romance of the Rose 16782, 19507, and in Chaucer's Physician's Tale, VI.20 (cited in Muscatine 1000n379).

Another fourteenth-century poem, "Love and Dread God," also explained that human sin was the cause of pestilence. The poem states that the scourge of plague was sent to earth by the arrows of God, a familiar metaphor for the mechanism through which God chastened sinners.[16]

Descriptions of the horror of plague in the fourteenth century also added vivid detail to the dramatic debate between the dead and the living in the fifteenth-century Disputacione betwyn the Body and Wormes, which also reminds its audience that plague resulted from sin.[17]

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[16] Twenty-six Political and Other Poems, EETS o.s. no. 124, esp. l. 81. The scourge of God's arrows was a familiar metaphor not only during plague times, but also in conjunction with other scourges sent to correct wayward sinners. Perhaps the most familiar of these was The Flood, which was sometimes described as sent by God's sword.

In the Wakefield Noah, God explains his reasons for sending The Flood:

> ...of veniance [out of vengeance] draw my swerd
> And make end
> Of all that beris [bears] life,
> Sayf [except] Noe and his wife,
> For thay wold never strife
> With me, then [nor] me offend.
> (David Bevington, ed. 294.103-08).

From biblical times, pestilential disease had been described as God's bow, as we have seen, and variously as God's angel (Donne, Poems, Grierson, ed. 1:346), God's arrow (Psalm 38.2), and as God's hand stretched out to destroy the wicked (Exodus 9.15). Chaucer's Pardoner refers to it as the spear of death (Canterbury Tales VI.677).

[17] An early example of the debate form used to warn of the consequences of a sinful life is the Old English "Soul and Body;" see G. P. Krapp, and E. V. K. Dobbie,

Plague references in English didactic and literary works, discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, reveal close connections between religious and medical interpretations of plague. English didactic works combined advice on care of the body (i.e., the medical concern with plague) with the Church's moral advice on spiritual care of the soul.[18] Literary writers

The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, The Exeter Book, 3:174-78.

In the fifteenth century Disputacione betwyn the Body and Wormes, the poet enters a church during a "ceson of huge mortalite, /...with the pestilence / Hevely reynand," where he sees "a towmbe or sepulture / Ful freschly forgyd, depycte, and depynte." He reads the following epitaph on the wall:

> Take hede unto my fygure here abowve
> And se how symtyme I was fresche and gay
> Now turned to wormes mete and corrupcone
> Bot fowle erth and stynkyng slyme and clay
> Attend therfore to this diputacione written here,
> ...
> To see what thou art and here aftyr sal be.

Quotations from the Disputacione are from Philippa Tristram, Figures of Life and Death 160, from a transcription of the poem by John Conlee (BM Addit. 37049).

[18] A moral interpretation of plague was more commonly included in medical interpretations by the end of the fifteenth century. This mixture of moral and medical views appears even as late as the nineteenth century, as the following example from J. F. C. Hecker's Der Schwarze Tod illustrates:

> We must bear in mind also, that human science and art appear particularly weak in great pestilences, because they have to contend with the powers of nature, of which they have no knowledge; and which, if they had been, or could be comprehended in their collective effects, would remain uncontrollable by them, principally on account of the disordered condition of human society [emphasis mine].
>
> (The Epidemics of the Middle Ages, trans. Babington 50).

interpreted plague as God's punishment for collective sin and, along with other warnings, as an emblem for social disorder in the context of an orderly cosmology.

Chapter 6: From Medical to Moral Interpretations of Plague: John Lydgate and Other Didactic Writers

An increase in the number of vernacular medical works in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries corresponds to an increase in more general vernacular didactic works with advice on disease prevention in the fifteenth century. By the fifteenth century, dietaries and regimens of health became popular, especially with the nobility. Like English plague treatises from the late fourteenth century, fifteenth-century didactic works with advice on plague emphasize prevention. These writings also explain the presence of plague in moral terms besides offering medical information. The medical view of plague explained that certain physical measures could be carried out in order to avoid this disease. Advice for preventing plague in fifteenth-century didactic works stressed governance of the spirit through moral living, in addition to governance of the body through preventive physical measures such as proper diet and phlebotomy. By the late fifteenth century, advice on pestilence from an older, pharmaceutical tradition of recording and reworking recipes supplanted academic medical information given in plague treatises.

This chapter considers didactic works such as Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence and Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philosoffres, as well as other writing found in estate books and family letters, and in Edmund Leversedge's Vision.[1] Readers of these works would have wanted advice for themselves and their families, not for patients. They needed practical advice on plague, which they could understand without formal training.

The texts considered in this chapter are usually shorter and contain less medical information on plague than those translated directly from professional medical treatises. These shorter works might best be described as "summaries of the knowledge in their fields...broad in scope but limited in depth for those who were reading for their own interest and self-improvement" (Mooney 3).

Authors of didactic writings with advice on health were often literate laymen, not physicians. While these authors agreed with learned medical authorities on

[1]The choice of Lydgate is based on the popularity of his works, which were widely read in the fifteenth century. For instance, R. H. Robbins finds that Lydgate's Dietary, a popular "informational work," survives in 46 manuscript copies, a number exceeded only by manuscripts of poetic works: The Canterbury Tales and Piers Plowman ("Medical Manuscripts" 404), and the Prick of Conscience.

Many of the writers discussed in this chapter had experienced outbreaks of the plague themselves. At Lydgate's own monastery, the Abbey of St. Bury, the number of monks dropped from 80 to 47 after an attack of the Black Death in 1381 (Pearsall, John Lydgate 24).

matters of plague prevention, they looked to religious sources for an explanation of the causes of plague and often preferred herbal remedies and physical preventives to the longer, more complicated procedures and explanations found in academic plague treatises. They argued that poor governance of the spirit, in addition to poor governance of the body, had caused plagues in the past, and that poor spiritual governance could result in further outbreaks. Their writings suggest the importance of recognizing that pestilential disease had behind it the chastising hand of God, an interpretation rarely mentioned by physician-authors in plague treatises.

An explanation of the dual nature of plague as a moral and medical problem occurs in the Book of Quintessence, written by the Franciscan Johannes de Rupescissa, who was also an alchemist (fl. late fourteenth century).[2] As the English translator explains, he translated the text from a Latin source, "þat þe wisdom and þe science of þis book schulde not

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[2]The English version is based on Johannes de Rupescissa's (Jean de Roquetalillade's) Liber de famulatu philosophiae or liber de consideratione quintae essentiae (libri II)--The Book of Quintessence (ctd. in Singer and Anderson 142-44). Edited by F. J. Furnivall from the London, British Museum, Sloane MS., 73 ff. 11-25^{v}, EETS, os no. 16.

perische" (1).[3] The treatise describes Quinte Essence, the fifth element found above the other four, which, according to the author, had the power to make the corruptible incorruptible (2-3). The treatise explains how to make Quinte Essence, which, like brandy, can be distilled from wine (4-5), and when combined with gold, served as a treatment for various illnesses, including plague.

But the author warns that medicine for the pestilence, compounded from Quinte Essence, would be effective only in certain cases:

> ...forsoþe holy scripture seiþ þat summe tymes oure lord god sendiþ pestilence to sle summe maner of peple, as it is seid deutronomium 28 in þis maner....Therefore a gret fool were he þat wolde presume to cure þese plagis of pestilence þat ben vncurable, þat ben sent of god to ponysche synne. (23-34)

In this passage, the author reminds his readers that plague may arise directly from the wrath of God, as punishment for sin, or that it may arise from natural causes. The former is never curable; the latter, the author claims, could be healed with Quinte Essence.

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[3] According to Richard Firth Green, "The line between pure medicine and such pursuits as astrology, alchemy, and even necromancy was a thin one in the middle ages" (Poets and Princepleasers 89). Green explains the case of John Fauceby, royal physician to Henry VI, who was granted a royal license to practice alchemy, and, in addition, exempted from prosecution for practicing it.

The ultimate source for this distinction, the author explains, is Deuteronomy 28, which enumerates the blessings given those who obey God's commands and warns of the curses awaiting those who are disobedient. Johannes quotes relevant passages from Deuteronomy 28 in his text as support for the notion that pestilence and other physical ailments could occur as punishment for sin:

> May the Lord set the pestilence upon thee, until he consume thee out of the land, which thou shalt go in to possess. May the Lord afflict thee with miserable want, with the fever and with cold, with burning and with heat, and with corrupted air and with blasting, and pursue thee till thou perish. (Deut. 28.21-22)

The Book of Quinte Essence continues by explaining other causes of plague besides sin. Natural causes include the perilous influence of evil planets (24), and may be curable, "by þe grace of god...partialy wiþ oure 5. essence [i.e., Quinte Essence]" (24).

The treatise concludes with a summary of Quinte Essence's ability to restore health in the case of other diseases:

> And þus 3e may wiþ þis 5 essencijs cure alle þese siknesses aforeseid, and many oþere, as it were by myracle, if 3e worche discreetly as I haue tolld 3e tofore. (25)

The examples from the Book of Quinte Essence show how the medical interpretation of plague appears in conjunction with a moral interpretation based on

biblical sources, as is the case with the other examples from didactic works discussed in this chapter.

1. Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence[4]

In most modern editions, Lydgate's A Doctrine for the Pestilence is appended to his Dietary, as the two often appear together in many manuscripts (MacCracken). MacCracken believes that the Doctrine and Dietary is a translation of a French ballade which appears in art.21, Trinity College, Cambridge, R.3.20. R. H. Robbins has noted that these two poems often appear in collections of instructional poems for children, perhaps suggesting an oral tradition of medicinal remedies handed down in verse form from parents to children.[5] The Dietary is

[4] "A Dietary, and a Doctrine for Pestilence." In Henry Noble MacCracken, ed., The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, EETS os, no. 192.

[5] Derek Pearsall places Lydgate's Dietary under the category of "didactic and practical verse" (John Lydgate 76). Other examples of Lydgate's works which fit this category are his Churl and Bird, Fabula duorum mercantorum, and other animal poems: Goose and Sheep, Horse, and Jak Hare (Pearsall 76). Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine for Pestilence comes under the category of "Religious and Didactic Works" in the revised Manual of the Writings in Middle English because its concern is morally admonitory rather than solely medically informative.

For a brief explanation of the manuscripts in which both the Dietary and Doctrine appear, see The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, part 1 ("The Lydgate Canon and Religious Poems"), EETS, es no. 107, xv. Both poems appear in The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, part 2

composed of 11 stanzas of 8 lines each, and the Doctrine, which follows, has 4 stanzas of 8 lines each. The Doctrine has the refrain: "Walk in cleene heir, eschew[e] mystis blake." Advice on plague was usually a translation from an earlier medical work, as with the Burgundy treatises.[6] However, Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence, like many collections of plague remedies, derives from a tradition of gnomic wisdom.

Lydgate's emphasis on spiritual and physical governance has analogues in other, "general moral advice, of the usual gnomic kind" (Pearsall 220), and demonstrates Lydgate's affinity for moralizing, as he does in the following line: "Suffir in tyme, in thi riht be bold" (MacCracken 149-52). Like other contemporary didactic writers, Lydgate correlated astrology and health, envisioning man as a microcosm of the larger world. Charles F. Mullett has noted that Lydgate, like many of his contemporaries, "reflected the constant burden of the pestilence by his concern with sudden death as well as with the disease itself. He composed

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("Secular Poems"), EETS, os no. 192, 702-07. And for an analysis of the two poems in the larger context of the Lydgate canon, see Derek Pearsall, John Lydgate, esp. 76.219-20, 285; Charles F. Mullett, "John Lydgate: A Mirror of Medieval Medicine."

[6] Philippa Tristram remarks that "it is as if the past could provide consolation adequate to present ills" (Figures 13).

prayers against it and one versified doctrine" ("John Lydgate" 404).

While the Doctrine contains few remedies for plague, it stresses the importance of spiritual comfort in preventing the disease, especially in its conclusion:

> Thuys in too thyngis stondith al the welthe
> Of sowle & bodi...
> Moderat foode yeueth to man his helthe
> And charite to the sowle is dewe.
> (MacCracken 707)

In this poem, medical advice serves as a metaphor for spiritual advice: "Ther be thre lechees consarue a mannys myht: "glad hert, temperat diet," and "for no thyng take no thought." Lydgate believed that avoiding worry was the best means for preventing plague (704). He also explained that one should be moderate in all things, believing that "temperat diet, temperat travaile, nat melencolius, encourages good attitude" (705).[7]

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[7] This echoes the plague description given in the Boccaccio's introduction to the Decameron:

> ...very few [of those dead from plague] were granted the piteous laments and bitter tears of their relatives; on the contrary, most relatives were somewhere else, laughing, joking, and amusing themselves; even the women learned this practice too well, having put aside, for the most part, their womanly compassion for their own safety.
> (The Decameron, trans. Musa and Bondanella 7)

Storytelling in the Decameron becomes a means for avoiding the plague. As the Queen tells the young men and women before they leave:

> But if you take my advice in this matter, I suggest we spend this hot part of the day not in playing

Other ways of preventing plague's return include the avoidance of spiritual weakness by refusing to hear false rumors. Lydgate also warns of the dangers of arguing:

> With thre folk ben nat at debate,
> thi bettir, ageyn thi felaw, with thi soget.
> (MacCracken 705)

One should also avoid "dees pleiers & hasardours" (706).[8]

Lydgate's emphasis on plague prevention through moral living as more important than physical remedy is typical of the other fifteenth-century didactic works discussed in this chapter. Most state that plague could be avoided through proper diet in addition to righteous living by governing the spirit. Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine combines the Church's moral interpretation of plague with plague advice taken from popular medical lore, and therefore follows biblical precedent in

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> games, but rather in telling stories, for this way one person, by telling a story, can provide amusement for the entire company.
> (trans. Musa and Bondanella 17)

In Literature as Recreation, Glending Olson argues that recreational activities such as story telling were thought to be useful in preventing plague.

[8]The immorality of these sins is also part of Chaucer's Pardoner's warnings concerning gluttony and the other tavern sins:

> In Flaundres whilom was a compaignye
> Of yonge folk that haunteden folye
> As riot, hasard, stywes, and tavernes,
> Where as with harpes, lutes, and gyternes,
> They daunce and pleyen at dees bothe day and nyght.
> (Canterbury Tales VI.463-67)

serving the needs of both body and spirit. As the Great Physician, Christ had done the same in His miraculous healing of the blind and palsied, whose sins He forgave before healing.

As Chapter Five points out, traditionally, the Church believed that spiritual health was not only more desirable than physical health, but often its key. Thus, governance of the spirit could prevent physical disease, especially when that disease occurred as punishment for sin.

In the sixteenth century, medical writers like Thomas Vicary emphasized spiritual guidance even more strongly, applying the advice on plague prevention as a metaphor for the care of the soul.[9]

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[9]Vicary combines spiritual and physical concepts using medical terms in the following allegory written in 1613:

> First, fast and pray, and then take a quart of Repentance of nineve, and put in two hand-fuls of Faith in the blood of Christ, with as much Hope and Charity as you can get, and put it into the vessell of a clean Conscience: then boyle it on the fire of Love, so long till you see by the eye of Faith, the black foame of the love of this world stinke in your stomacke, then scumme it off cleane with the sponne of faithfull Prayers. When that is done, put in the powder of Patience, and take the cloth of Christs Innocency, and straine all together in his Cup: then drinke it burning hot next thy heart, and cover thee warme with as many clothes of amendment of life, as God shall strengthen thee to beare, that thou mayst sewate out all the poyson of covetousnesse, pride, whoredome, idolatrie, usury, swearing, lying, and the like. And when thou feelest thy selfe altered from the forenamed vices, take the powder of Say-well, and put it upon thy tongue: but drinke thrice as much doe-well

2. Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philosoffres

Lydgate and Burgh's translation of the Secreta Secretorum has as its principal source the treatise de Regimine Principum, attributed to Aristotle, and translated into many languages: from Arabic into Latin by Philip of Paris in the thirteenth century, and later into French. After the thirteenth century, the work grew in popularity and was expanded on by various translators and redactors (Steele xi). As Robert Steele has noted, "A work of this nature, so suitable to the habits of thought of the writers of medieval times, naturally gave rise to a host of imitations and emendations" (xii). Its popularity increased in the fifteenth century when dietaries and manuals of good governance (e.g., courtesy books) became especially popular with the English court (Green, Poets and Princepleasers 73). But as Jonathan Nicholls describes them, courtesy books in the Middle Ages "are only a small part of a vast amount of improving and didactic literature which is to be found in all languages during that period," later adding that in many of these courtesy books (e.g., on table etiquette, speech, conduct in church, greetings, travelling), "moral instruction is not necessarily

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daily. (qtd. in F. P. Wilson, The Plague in Shakespeare's London, 4n1).

absent, but usually takes a subordinate role" (The Matter of Courtesy 14). The advice on good governance in the Secreta Secretorum could be adapted for various purposes. The work served as a source for later manuals on good governance such as Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees, which, unlike most courtesy books, contains moral advice.

English versions of the Secreta Secretorum include Hoccleve's Regement of Princes, with the earliest version translated by James Young and addressed to James Butler, Earl of Ormond, Lord Deputy of Ireland (ca. 1420) (Steele xiii). Like Hoccleve's Regement, Lydgate and Burgh's version was translated for royal patronage. Written late in Lydgate's life, possibly at the bidding of Henry VI, the Secrees remained unfinished at his death in AD 1449 or 1450.[10] It is considered the last of Lydgate's works. The text was completed by Benedict Burgh, another monk and one of his students (d. 1483).

As literature, the poem itself is not of great interest, and, as Richard Steel bitingly remarks: "His work [the Secrees] is scrappy, ill-ordered, and tedious to a remarkable degree even for him" (Steele xviii). More disparaging is Derek Pearsall's deposition: "[the Secrees is] a work as nearly worthless as any that

[10]For a brief summary of Lydgate's life, see Lois A. Ebin, John Lydgate 1-3. Quotations from the Secrees in this chapter are from Robert Steele's edition.

Lydgate penned" (Lydgate 296). Pearsall adds that the poem is actually a series of "fragments of a translation, perhaps done at different times, and brought together after Lydgate's death" (297). Structurally, there are gaps and a lack of transitions in places, showing an apparent lack of artistry. The section on remedies for the stone ("How Aristotil declarith to knyg Alisaundre of the stoonys"), for instance, has little to do either with what goes before (a section on the dispositions of kings) or after (a continuation of the governance of kings) (Pearsall 298-99).

Lydgate and Burgh's version of the Secrees serves as an example of popular interest in political and moral instruction, besides containing medical advice on plague. In addition, it transforms an earlier prose work into poetry. Lydgate and Burgh were faced with the task of rendering a prose work from Latin into English rhyme which required a number of changes expressed in the prologues. The translators' prologues and the sections on pestilence, additions to the original treatise, also show something of the translators' interest in audience concerns with later outbreaks of plague in the mid-fifteenth century.

N. F. Blake remarks that in Lydgate's other works, the prologues are "diffuse and he inserts interpolations

and other remarks at various stages" ("John Lydgate" 76). Lydgate's prologues often comment on the genesis of the works he is writing and on his royal patronage. Such features are, according to Blake, new in English literature (276-77).

In the prologue to the Secrees, Lydgate explains that one should "Tak[en] at gre [will] / the Rudnesse of my style," a style produced by his rendering of the Latin work into English (1.21). The poem, he also tells his royal audience, is "of al good thewys [customs]" (2.31); it conveys "a mene / atwen werre and pees" (2.39). He states the purpose of the poem in its introduction:

> ffirst I that am / humble Servitour
> of the kyng / with hool Affecyoun,
> Voyde of Elloquence / I haue do my labour
> To sette in Ordre / and execucyoun
> ffirst my symplesse / vndir Correccioun,
> With ryght hool herte / in al my best entent
> ffor tacomplysshe / your comaundement.
> (2.22-29)

The Secrees of Old Philosoffres makes public what is ostensibly "secree," because the audience of the original work was limited to clerks, those literate in Latin. With this translation, Lydgate and Burgh permitted their royal patronage to share in the "secrets" of learned clerks:

> but the knowyng / is hyd fro many oon,
> And not declaryd / to every Creature.
> (17.514-515)

The "knowyng" should be kept from certain people, as common people should not be told matters reserved for clerks and nobles for the following reasons:

> Ther is of ryght / a greet difference
> Twen a prynces / Royal dignite
> And atwen Comouns / Rude intelligence,
> To whoom nat longith / to medle in no degre
> Of konnynges / that shulde be kept secre;
> ffor to a kynges / famous magnificence,
> And to Clerkys / which haue experience...
> (17.519-525)

Burgh expresses his views on the uses of the English language in the prologue to the last section of the work, which he completed after Lydgate's death:

> In modir tounge / this matere to Combyne
> Which sauff Support / knowe not the musys nyne.
> (51.1588-89)

Like the other fifteenth-century didactic works discussed in this chapter, the advice on plague in the Secrees combines information from the medical tradition with a strong moral warning. Lydgate defends this approach by stating that one must temper medical advice with experience:

> Suych as been prevyd / by experience,
> And prevyd Auctours / as the phesyk techys,
> Truste On the dede / And nat in gay spechys;
> Woord is but wynd / leff woord and tak the dede...
> (39.1221-1224)

In the section on plague, the Secrees recommends that one should eat only "holsom" foods and avoid "mystes blake," as other treatises had done based on earlier

medical sources.[11] Besides medical care, the author stresses certain spiritual defenses useful in warding off plague, especially in cases where "phesyk lakke" (41.1281). One should avoid pensiveness and should maintain his household "After thy Rente" (41.1285). Swearing could also indirectly bring on disease, as could deceit (41.1284-1288). Moderate diet and "charyte" were therefore effective in preserving health during plague times. Thus, while acknowledging the importance of physical governance of the body, the advice on plague in the Secrees, like the advice given in Lydgate's Doctrine for the Pestilence, reminds its readers that the care of the soul is as essential as proper diet in warding off this illness.

Lydgate concluded the Dietary and Doctrine by explaining that its advice was not reserved for clerks. It could serve as useful advice for common readers:

> This receiht bouht is of non appotecarie,
> Off Maister Antony, nor of Maister Hewe;
> To all indifferent richest dietarie!
> (707.166-68)

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[11]The references to black mists in this passage and in the example from Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine (see above), indicate that plague miasmas were often seen in an atmosphere of moral pollution. John A. Alford emends myte to myste in the following passage from Piers Plowman, B-text, which refers to Haukyn's coat, stained with sin:

> And Dobest kepe[th] clene from unkynde werkes.
> Shal nevere my[ste] bymolen it, ne mothe after biten it,
> Ne fend ne fals man defoulen it in thi lyve.
> (XIV.23-25)

He translated the Secrees, however, for an elite audience. Until this translation, its "secrets," the proper governance of a king, both physically and spiritually, were reserved for clerks and nobles. The ability to read its learned language (i.e., Latin) was reserved for clerks, who imparted its secrets to royalty. But a vernacular language could not serve as an obstacle to common readers in the way that a learned language could, and Lydgate, in fact, explained his reasons for translating this work into English:

> Excellent prynce / this processe to Compyle
> Takith at gre / the Rudnesse of my style.
> (1.20-21)

Benedict Burgh, who completed the work, ended it with an apology for this "Rudnesse":

> Yf ony man / thy Rudnesse lyst accuse,
> Make no diffence / but with lowlyhede
> Pray hym refourme / wheer as he seth nede...
> (86.2726-28)

Regardless of either collaborator's wishes, the audience could no longer be restricted to nobles and clerks.[12]

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[12]R. F. Green argues that the court provided a main impetus for literary creation which expressed the "life and attitudes of the court" (Poets and Princepleasers 211).

A. S. G. Edwards would disagree, particularly with regard to Lydgate's works, often written expressly for laymen. Edwards has suggested that the ownership of at least some of the manuscripts in the Lydgate corpus "extends beyond the social range of Lydgate's initial patrons. It suggests that his audience encompassed the nobility, bourgeoisie, religious institutions and individual clerics--in fact a full spectrum of potential fifteenth-century readership" ("Lydgate Manuscripts:

Though the Latin version was intended for a learned audience, in translation it communicated specialized and private instruction to a wider audience. As is the case with vernacular translations of medical treatises on plague, didactic works, even those intended for noble audiences, became increasingly available to those who could read and write "rude" languages, but their advice appears not to have penetrated many leechbooks, which continued to stress recipes for remedies and preventives, but had little to say about governing the spirit with respect to plague.

3. Plague References in Other Late Middle English Didactic Works

A remedy for plague is found at the end of Henry de Bray's estate book, written over a period of several decades from the early to mid-fourteenth century. According to Dorothy Willis, the book appears to have been kept by de Bray himself, the lord of the manor, which is unusual as such records were normally kept by a bailiff or clerk. Willis notes that the estate book was written in Latin "with occasional lapses into currently spelt French" ("The Estate Book of Henry de Bray" 117).

The last folio of the manuscript contains a recipe for the prevention and cure of pestilence. Although the

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Some Directions for Future Research" 21-22).

recipe is in Latin, the author gives English equivalents for Latin, French, and lesser known English botanical terms mentioned in the recipe. Among them are goldwort "which in English is rod [goldenrod]" and pied de lion, "which in English is called crowsfoot" (138-39). Most likely, the recipe itself was added to the estate book sometime during the mid-fourteenth century, probably during a major outbreak of plague. Perhaps Henry de Bray, who survived early outbreaks of the plague himself, wished to preserve the recipe for quick reference. Like plague remedies in other fourteenth-century popular English works, this one bears a resemblance to those in the manuscripts of John of Burgundy in its description of various symptoms of plague such as buboes or fever, which could be treated with herbal remedies.

Unlike the advice on plague in didactic works from the fifteenth century discussed earlier in this chapter, the advice on plague in de Bray's book, like many didactic writings by laymen, concerns remedy rather than prevention. This situation is typical of earlier vernacular plague writings where authors mention remedies for pestilential diseases from earlier folk remedies. As we have seen, most didactic works with advice on plague in the fifteenth century stress

prevention, often directly stating that plague had come about because of sin.

The Paston family letters provide yet another example of popular writing on plague in the fifteenth century. Although these outbreaks were less virulent, fear of plague remained strong, as references to the disease in the letters of this educated middle class family demonstrate.[13]

The earliest reference to plague in the Paston family letters appears in a letter from Agnes Paston to her son John, dated 1453, in which she reports that those who contracted plague died quickly (155).[14] A year later, William Paston reported to his brother John that the plague was still prevalent in London: "here is pestelens, and syd [scil. syth] I farid þe better" (155). He closes the letter by telling John, in even stronger terms, "Here is gret pestelens. I purpose to fle in-to the contre" (156). By August 1465, the plague appeared again in Norwich. Margaret Paston, writing to her son John on August 18 reported, "They dyy ryght sore

[13]Unless otherwise indicated, citations from the Paston Letters are from Norman Davis' edition, Volume 1. Richard Firth Green notes that William Paston sent many of his sons, to whom and by whom many of the letters in this collection were written, to the Inns of Court for their education (Poets and Princepleasers 191).

[14]Page references following citations from letters by the Paston family are from Norman Davis, ed., The Paston Letters and Papers, 2 vols.

in Norwych...for þe pestylens ys so feruent in Norwych that thay there no lengere a-byde there" (315-16).

Besides these brief objective descriptions of plague, some of the Pastons relate their personal experiences during plague outbreaks. Norman Davis informs us that Agnes, Walter, and John Paston all died from plague in 1479, also a plague year (2:411). John Paston II, writing to his wife Margaret and his son John III "in hast" (Sept. 15, 1471), asked for news of friends or "well-wyllerys" who may have died while he was away. John feared that plague might spread: "froe I feer þat there is grete deth in Norwyche and in other borowghe townese in Norffolk; for I ensure yow it is the most vnyuersall dethe þat evyre I wyst in Ingelond" (441). In the same letter, John asked Margaret to warn his younger brothers that immoral behavior could cause the plague. "My yonge brytheryn," John admonished, "[ought not to desport] wyth noon other yonge people whyche resortythe wher any sykenesse is" (441). Like Lydgate, John Paston II may have associated plague with "dees pleiers and hasardours," gluttony, and the other excesses of youth.

Eight years later in a letter to Margaret, John Paston II described his "feere of the syknesse" during another outbreak, sometime before October 29, 1479. He asked Margaret to send him "ij pottys of tryacle of

Jenne" by the next messenger from London as a plague preventive (615).[15] In a letter written to John Paston II, John Peacock, one of his servants, explained more about the seriousness of this outbreak: "And for deth, Caster and Mawteby there deyd non son Michellmas, at Bylby, Ormysby, and Scrowby and othir placys they dey stylle" (412). According to Davis, "John II's 'fear of the sickness' was justified: he died a little over two weeks [after the letter was written]" (515). Writing to his mother less than two months after the death of his father, John Paston III reported that the number of deaths from plague was declining: "And thankyd be God, the sykness is well seasyd here; and also my besyness" (618).

The fear of further outbreaks was not yet over in 1487, when Edmond Paston II, in a letter to his brother, John III, reported that "she [his master's wife] woold this day haue made here cowntenance to haue seyn here nes, [brothers dowtere], wyche is at Pallyngys fore fere of the plage" (643). The best preventive was to flee infected areas, as this and other letters explain. In the letter, Edmond also reported that his

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[15]The term Jenne (var. gene) could mean various wares marketed by Genoese merchants, as it does in this passage: "My mastyr toke his man to kepe a potte of geene to put in grene gyngyr" (1466--Acc. Howard in RC 57 369. Cf. MED, s.v., gene (b).

cousin Clere's mother and his master's wife both had died of plague, which "reygnyth at Ormysby" (641).

Several of the Paston family letters acknowledge the importance of knowing about contagion and of fleeing as perhaps the best way to avoid the disease. These letters also indicate the widespread effects of plague in mid-fifteenth-century towns. John Paston II, who eventually died from plague, reported that it "is the most vnyuersall dethe þat evyre I wyst in Ingelonde" (615). References to plague in these letters also express a sense of urgency and doom, sometimes warning, as John II had done, of the dangers of frivolity during plague times. Dietaries written after the fifteenth century emphasized the importance of plague prevention, in part, because the disease rarely struck with as much force as it had in the mid-fourteenth century. Prevention also gained greater emphasis from those who realized that remedies for plague were ineffective, though, in some cases, those remedies might have seemed effective. The virility of the plague bacillus weakened over time so that recovery was more likely.

The advice on plague in fifteenth-century didactic works combines medical and religious explanations of the causes of plague by stressing governance of body and spirit in addition to physical remedies as a means of plague prevention. This perceived relationship between

the physical and spiritual self derives from biblical sources and from later texts such as the Book of Quinte Essence, which distinguishes between medical and moral causes of plague. Both Lydgate's Doctrine for the Pestilence and the Secrees emphasize prevention based on diet and spiritual governance. Those who could read a "rude" language had access to these "secrets" and thus could save both body and soul, both of which were endangered by plague.

In the fifteenth century, members of the Paston family had shown themselves familiar with advice on plague given in contemporary didactic works: that "to flee was best," and that moral living was important, especially during times of pestilence. They were also aware that remedies were available for preventing plague. As we have seen, John Paston II asked his wife, Margaret, to send him one such remedy ("tryacle of Jenne") by messenger (Davis 615). However, not all fifteenth-century didactic works were concerned with both medical and moral aspects of plague. Other didactic writers only mention the moral aspects of plague, as is the case with Edmund Leversedge's Vision, written in 1465 after he experienced a "plage of pestylence" (Ed. E. Margaret Thompson 23).[16] Leversedge's personal

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[16] Subsequent page references are from Thompson's edition of Leversedge's Vision.

account of plague is unusual compared to other English accounts of plague, as most consider plague along with other corporate disasters as a warning to repent, rather than as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Leversedge's Vision appears to be a contemporary and personal account of an outbreak of pestilence in the mid-fifteenth century. He mentions, for instance, specific dates and describes physical symptoms:

> The 3eere of our lorde god a M.c.c.c.c.lx.v [1465] in the towne of Frome with in the Shyre of Somersett, by the hand and vysytacyon of almyghty God was smyton with the plage of pestylence, and in suche wyse so fervently takyn j was strayght forthe and lay as dede the space of iii hours of the nyght, and my spyrit was raveschyd and departyd fro my body and also my knyll rongon for my saule, before ye wyche streychynge foreth and knyll rongon I was so a vexed and trowbled with the syght of fyer and temptacyons of ij deuellys, that my face of wy3t colour was a blak as any cole, and my tonge that was wont to be red was a blake as any pyche and thrast out at my mouthe the length of halfe a foote and more, that the rote of my seyd tonge and the vaynes of the seyd tonge aperid and lay out of my mouthe (23).

It may be argued that Leversedge did not experience an attack of bubonic plague: he does not describe the characteristic plague buboes or mention that others around him also became ill. But like other fifteenth-century didactic writers, Leversedge calls his disease a "plague [i.e., "stroke, blow"] of pestylence," and associates this disease with sins of excess, which he claims he has committed: he has worn piked shoes and extravagant clothes (25), and has had "liberte of

kissyne" (30-31), for which he should have "byn dampnyd and shuld have byn in hell for ever" (25).[17] Instead, during an attack of plague, an angel leads Leversedge through a vision where the consequences of his own life of excess are vividly shown by the actions of various devils.

Most of Leversedge's account derives from William Staunton's Pilgrimage of the Soul (AD 1409), which appears in the same manuscript as the Vision (Thompson 22). Staunton's Pilgrimage derives from earlier accounts of St. Paul's vision, the ultimate source of which is the apocryphal Visio Pauli itself.[18] Leversedge is led

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[17] Leversedge describes his extravagant manner of dress before his illness, which he sees in the form of devils paraded before him:

> And for the sayd aray the going of the sayd deuyllys, and as hit has pleasid my Lord God that they shuld apere to me in suche wise, was in shorte gownes and dowblettes, closse hosyn, longe heere, vpon here browes, pykes on ther shon of a foot in lengh and more, hygh bonettes I my selfe sume tyme vsid, and this prowid peple that callis them selfe galantes 3it vsid.
> (25)

[18] Margaret Thompson comments further on the Vision and its sources, 21-22. The original source for this vision appears in 2 Corinthians:

> If I must glory (it is not expedient indeed): but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth): That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.
> (1-4).

by "a good angell" (27), an experience which forces him to repent and become a hermit after his recovery. At the end of the vision, the angel commands Leversedge to study divinity at Oxford (32) under the name of William Wrech:

> "I charge the," she seyd, "that thou call the William Wrech as longe as art within the vniuersite of Oxforth, and when thou comyst whome a3en lett call thy name Edmund Lyuersigge, as thou hast byn euer called byfore this tyme."
> (32)

Leversedge is not to marry, "but conteneu thi life as a clarke" (32). In addition, the angel tells Leversedge when "suche of my kynne that shuld die, as my mother, and also that al my enymes shuld de dedd or that I come home in to my contrey" (32).

Like other, earlier versions of the Visio Pauli, Leversedge describes his own experience with plague in terms which echo moral warnings concerning plague:

> ...then my good angell speke vnto me and told me howe they wer spirites that God had gifin power and commaundment to persecute and smyt the people for the synne that dayly renyth a mong them with the infirmyte and plage of pestilence, the whych synne and people gretly displesith God.
> (33)[19]

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[19] As Leversedge turned to a biblical account for advice on this "plage of pestylence," which "dayly renyth," so Bengt Knutsson, concerned with healing a plague which "dayly enfecteth," turned to authorities for advice:

> I the Bisshop of Arusiens in the wyalme [scil. ryalme] of Denmark doctour of Phisique Wille Write by the moost experte and famous doctours auctorised in Phisike somme thynges of the infirmitie of

The Vision concludes with a warning to others who might commit the same sins as Leversedge had done in his earlier life:

> Wherfore j a synfull wrekche haue grestes [sic] cause to gife laud and praising to God and euer to dred hym, and people princypally of this realme haue the more cause to dred almyghty God by this ensample shewid in me wrecch, and not only for me this example was sheuyd but for al synners, to take exsample at me to be pinytant of ther synne and to exchewe the occasion of the same, wher that holy scripture sayth.
> (34)

By the late fifteenth century, more English translations of medical and religious works were available for laymen able to read this "rude" language, but, like Edmund Leversedge, they continued to turn to older sources for both medical and moral interpretations of plague, rather than to more contemporary sources such as translations of plague treatises. It appears that advice on plague in practical works for laymen from the early fifteenth century onwards consistently moves away from cataloging remedies, as in the fifteenth-century Liber de Diversis Medicinis or earlier, in de Bray's estate book, toward an emphasis on plague prevention through spiritual and mental governance combined with physical remedies. , However, Laymen themselves continued to record remedies

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> pestilence Whiche dayly enfecteth, & sone suffreth be to departe oute of this lyfe (Vine, ed. 1[r]).

for pestilence which had come down through a tradition of herbal lore in the fourteenth century, much as Henry de Bray had done by recording a plague recipe in his estate book in the mid-fourteenth century, or as Robert Thornton had done by combining a plague recipe with an outline of the learned causes and prevention of plague.

A later example, written in the sixteenth century, Andrew Boorde's Dietary of Helthe, a descendant of earlier didactic works like Lydgate's Doctrine and Dietary, stresses prevention almost entirely, eliminating plague remedies and treatment.[20] Concerning advice on plague in the Dietary, Boorde explained that such things as "myrth" were the best protection against plague:

> I do wryte wordes of myrth/ truely it is for no other Intencyon but to make your grace mery, --for myrth is one of the chefest thynges of Physycke, the which doth aduertyse, euery man to be mery, and to beware of pencyfulnes...
> (228)

He believed that a cheerful mental state could

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[20] F. J. Furnivall, ed. Andrew Boorde's Dyetary of Helthe. EETS es no. 10. Thomas Linacre was formerly thought to be the author of this manuscript. In an article on the authorship of the Dyetary ("Andrew Boorde, Thomas Linacre and the 'Dyetary of Helthe'"), John L. Thornton argues that the manuscript was attributed to Linacre for some time, as Boorde had been imprisoned on several occasions, the second time, "for keeping three women of loose morals" (209). This alleged impropriety, Thornton argues, was a principal reason for discrediting Boorde with the authorship of this popular treatise.

contribute greatly to health.[21] By stressing prevention, he downplayed the ineffectiveness of traditional plague remedies as English translators of advice on plague had begun to do in the fifteenth century.

Boorde admitted that one could not always prevent this sickness, "for it is so vehement and so parlouse" (290). Reminding us of the Bishop of Hereford's comment on the sterility of the land in plague times, Boorde further remarked that the infection even lies in clothes and in buildings. In one case, he reported that hogs lying in straw cast out from a pestiferous home "dyed of the pestylence" themselves. After these bleak descriptions of this epidemic, he discussed the importance of prevention, noting that it was the only way to control this disease. He mentioned that fires may help, and that other fumigations may prove effective at times (291), but he promised no remedy. The emphasis of plague advice in his work is on preventing the disease by achieving "comfort for the brain" (291).

Also writing more than two centuries after the Black Death, William Bullein outlined various responses to pestilence in A Dialogue Against the Fever Pestilence (1564). In a preface "To the Reader,"

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[21] Glending Olson's Literature as Recreation (esp. Chap. 5: "From Plague to Pleasure") contains an excellent discussion of the uses of "literary delight" as a means for preventing plague.

Bullein, like Andrew Boorde, emphasized the importance of a moral life combined with physical preventives for plague.[22] By the sixteenth century, writers like Thomas Elyot, author of the Castel of Helthe (first published in 1539), felt qualified to write a dietary based not on medical training or first-hand experience, but on reading alone.[23]

English versions of Latin texts increased the availability of medical knowledge which encouraged a conflation of religious and medical interpretations in didactic English works during the fifteenth century. The

[22] Good reader, when aduersitie draweth neare to any Citie or Towne, and the vangeaunce of God appereth either by Hunger, Sicknesse, or the Sworde, then mannes nature is most fearefull, but yet worldlie prouidence to helpe themselues: which in the tyme of prosperitie or quietness is carelesse and forgetfull, neither myndefull to feare God, not pitifull to helpe their neighbour in adursitie. And when they are touched by the fearfull stroke of the Pestilence of their nexte neighbour, or els in their owne familie, then thei vse Medicnes, flie the Aire, &c. Which indeede are verie good meanes, and not agains Gods woorde so to doe; then other some falleth into sodaine devuotion, in giuyng almose to the poore and needie, which before haue doen nothing els but oppressed theim and haue dooen them wrong: other doe locke from their hartes Gods liuely worde, and refuse grace offered by Christes spirite, thinkyng there is not God. Some other are preuented by death in their flourishyng yeres, which in the crosse of death haue their onely consolation in Jesus Christe. All this is described here in this plain Dialogue: praying you paciently totake it in good parte.
(Bullein, A Dialogue 3)

[23] John A. Alford has noted this development in "Medicine in the Middle Ages: The Theory of a Profession," 384. Norman Moore also comments on this situation in The History of the Study of Medicine 170.

Book of Quinte Essence, Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence, and Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philosoffres serve as examples of didactic works with advice on preventing plague regardless of whether it came from natural causes or directly from God, as the biblical example of the Plague of the Philistines had taught.

Chapter 7: Allusions to Plague in Examples from Medieval English Poetry

When Bishop Trillek of Winchester warned that plague had come from sin, he did so on biblical authority.[1] As the example of biblical plagues had shown, sin, and especially the sins of excess, resulted from a lack of concern with governance of the spirit. Humans were, like children, rebellious, needing to be curbed when they lost control. This theme, familiar in Middle English sermons, also appears in Middle English literature, as this chapter will show. Middle English ecclesiastics described epidemics in the context of sermons and other moral advice, often with references to biblical plagues, explaining that epidemics resulted from corporate sin. Middle English poets,like sermon writers, presented a moral perspective, adding plague references to well-known fables, as further evidence for the chaos resulting from poor governance of the spirit, and often as examples of individual sin.

In a sermon preached at St. Paul's Cross in London on Quinquagesima Sunday, 1388 (MS. Hatton 57, ed. K. F. Sundén), Robert Wimbledon warned that everyone must be

[1]For a lengthier analysis of Bishop Trillek's message, see Chapter Five.

accountable for the deeds of this life, and that each person, like a steward in the vineyard (Luke 16), must live so as not to deserve God's vengeance on the Day of Judgment. The preacher described God's judgment as taking place in two orderly stages, one occurring immediately after death, the other on the day of Resurrection. Every human being would eventually be brought to judgment by three "summoners" or "seargeants": sickness, old age, and death.[2] The preacher further explained the work of these three "summoners" respectively: "þe furst warneþ, þe secunde þretiþ, and þe þridde takiþ" (19.14-15). Sickness can, according to Wimbleton, appear at any age, and strike individually or "al man kynde, so þat euery man haþ it" (19.20-21). This second form of illness is "dowble" for it strikes the soul within and the body without (19.22-25). Consequently, epidemics were signs of a corporately diseased spirit which could only be healed through good governance, the responsibility of every faithful steward.

Other Middle English sermons, such as those in the Worcester Manuscript, warn that pestilence occurs as a consequence of the sins of excess, such as "Excesse in etyng' & dryngkyng'" (Grisdale 30.261), much as the

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[2] For a summary of Wimbleton's sermon, see K. F. Sundén ix-xii.

dietaries of the fifteenth century would do. The author, citing John of Salisbury's Polychronicon (8.7) as an authority, retells the story of the "wikkid tiraunt Dionysius, þat was kyng' of Sicilie" (30.264-292). Dionysius, filled with "lustis & likyngis of his flesch" (30.272), turned to gluttony and lechery, which led to blindness and sickness. The preacher warns that these consequences await others who fail to govern themselves. In a later sermon, the preacher warns of the collective disasters which come about as the result of sins:

> Her' 3e wel se þat tis a kursed peple, vor' hardeliche al þe disese þat cumis e þis lond, as resyng' oþ þe peple, pestilens, derþe & erþe-quakes' cum for' hir' cursidnes & hir' mysleuyng. (78.917-20)

Citing various biblical and classical sources as evidence for collective disasters brought on through sin (e.g., Martial, and Alanus' Anticlaudianus), the author concludes that the only way to avoid such disasters is through repentance and obedience (78-79).

One Middle English sermon from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, written for Sexigesima Sunday, cites the example of King David, whose people were punished with plague until he repented for having called a census:

> Ensampull, loo, of Kynge Dauid, þat when he had greved God for þe synne þat he had down, God sent

> down to hym an angell fro heven and smote with pestilence many hundreþ þousaundes on a day of is pepull.
> (Ross 178.9-12)

Only through prayer and penance was David able to stop this pestilence. The preacher, using David's story as an example of the consequences of sin (2 Sam. 24.1-17; 1 Chron. 21.1-17), reminds his listeners: "Ryght þus eueryman muste knalage is synne and prey God of mercy and of is grace" (Ross 178.24-25).

Unlike references to plague as a physicality in Middle English medical texts, references to plague in sermons and literary works serve as emblems for a lack of spiritual governance in an immoral world. On a literal level, pestilence may be taken as an analogue of the pain and suffering occurring as a consequence of sin, which results in widespread suffering and death. As the physical disorder of plague expresses itself through fever and buboes arising from humoral imbalance, so the social disorder caused by plague represents spiritual disorder arising from imbalance caused by sin.

In Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages, Glending Olson argues that "the relationship between the Black Death and certain literary and social recreations suggests a potent value to such mundane joys, and the evidence assembled here [Chapter 5 of Literature as Recreation] may help redress the natural

tendency to dwell on only the most pessimistic kind of medieval responses to pestilence" (164). Olson further argues that, "...the Black Death did not promote only increased morbidity in literature. Amidst all the work that reflects the fear of death and that looks to last things, there is some, at least, that reflects the value of secular life and that looks to proximate things. For the living, singing songs and telling pleasant tales are important means of coping with the plague" (204). Olson's study considers largely Continental plague writing. In Middle English poetry, plague takes on a consistently grimmer picture, often in an atmosphere of moral pollution, as this chapter will show. While Chaucer, Langland, and Lydgate added plague references to the stories they retold, the references themselves have analogues in earlier works that appeared long before the mid-fourteenth century plague.

While the plague itself was seldom a theme in Middle English poetry, it serves as a background for several English poems--as it does in some Middle English sermons--including the disorderly world resulting from poor governance in Fragment Six of The Canterbury Tales, the chaos of the apocalyptic world at the end of Piers Plowman, and in The Dance of Death, the terror of a world leveled by the power of death and plague. Plague's appearance along with other scourges warns of the

dangers of disobedience that disrupts the workings of God's cosmology. Since references to plague in literature often appear with other diseases and scourges, they are considered with plague in this chapter. As in Continental plague treatises, plague in Continental poetry often contain more references to contemporary plague outbreaks than do English poems.[3]

Francis Petrarch (AD 1304-74), Chaucer's contemporary, survived several outbreaks of plague in late fourteenth-century Italy, and, in a letter from Parma in the early summer of 1349, wrote of the devastation caused by the first outbreak of the disease. Petrarch expresses a dark view of the state of mankind in the Epistolae familiaris (esp. 8.290) and in Eclogue 9. Plague, war, and other collective disasters during the fourteenth century inclined him to write concerning the general condition of his world: "O miseris perplexum ambagibus orbem" ("Oh, miserable are the perplexities of this confusing world"). In the Epistolae familiaris 8.290, in terms not unlike those of Guy de Chauliac and

[3] Edmund Pellegrino explains differences between the work of literary writers and physicians in these terms:

> Physicians intervene to mitigate or relieve the physical suffering and mental anguish they encounter. They discern, classify, and treat illness. Writers clarify and interpret--thus identifying meaning in events. They may even confront the reader with the meaninglessness of the situation being described.
>
> (qtd. in Joanne Trautmann, Healing Arts ix)

other Continental writers, Petrarch described the contemporary ravages of plague:

> Posterity, will you believe what we who lived through it [i.e. the plague] can hardly accept? We should think we were dreaming, had we not the testimony of our opened eyes, encountering on our city walks only funerals, and on our return finding our home empty of our dear ones. Thus we learn that our troubles are real and true. Oh how happy will be future times, unacquainted with such miseries, perhaps counting our testimony as fabulous!" (Trans. Morris Bishop 74)

Reflecting on future generations and their conception of plague, he suggested that, while the memory of plague's terror might remain after the disease had ended, future readers of these accounts would consider them "fable."[4] In another letter written during later outbreaks, Petrarch lamented the death of a friend and his family, which reminded him of the transience of life: "Oh mortals, strain, strive, and sweat, range the earth and sea for riches you will not attain, for glory that will not last" (Letters 75).

Like Petrarch, Boccaccio describes contemporary outbreaks of plague. In the Decameron, Boccaccio details the ravages of plague and terror of living in plague-ridden Florence as cause enough for fleeing the city and

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[4]Many personal references to plague appear in Petrarch's poetry and prose. No doubt, he was deeply affected by the loss of friends and relatives, among them his companion Franceschino degli Albizzi, Cardinal Colonna, for whom he had worked, and Laura, whom he loved dearly. For a further discussion of his experience with plague, see Thomas G. Bergin, Petrarch 22-25.

telling tales. He describes the effects of plague on Florence and its inhabitants in the Introduction:

> Let me say, then, that thirteen hundred and forty-eight years had already passed after the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God when into the distinguished city of Florence, more noble than any other Italian city, there came the deadly pestilence. It started in the East, either because of the influence of heavenly bodies or because of God's just wrath as punishment to mortals for our wicked deeds, and it killed an infinite number of people.
>
> (trans. Musa and Bondanella 4)

As George Deaux explains, "The genuine anguish of Petrarch's letter is just as apparent as is the horror of Boccaccio's account. In both cases the formal framework of rhetoric may have been the only thing available to contain the emotion" (George Deaux, The Black Death 93). The need to interpret the presence of plague brings out an important distinction between literary writers and physicians. Literary writers interpreted the significance of plague and other disasters like famine and earthquakes as emblems of the disastrous effect sin in the framework of traditional tales. Physicians, on the other hand, observed and wrote about plague as a physicality in need of physical remedy.

Medieval literary writers, following biblical precedent, argued that epidemic diseases like plague served as warnings of God's wrath, as a means of forcing obedience, and even as direct punishment. The high

mortality caused by plague encouraged them to see that what their "auctors" had stressed about the impermanence of life and the imminence of death was even truer during pestilential times. Literary writers commented on the transience of life in a variety of ways, but most often in the context of other apocalyptic warnings such as epidemic disease and famine, common scourges during the late Middle Ages, but also commonplaces in the writings of their ancient "auctors."[5]

1. Fragment Six of the Canterbury Tales

In the Canterbury Tales, the pilgrims entertain each other with stories on the way to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket. The stories are to be told, one after another, in an orderly fashion, with the Host, Harry Bailly, as moderator. The Host reminds the pilgrims of their pledge to tell tales along the way, stating "That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye, / In this viage shal telle tales tweye" (GP 791-92), and warning them that "Whoso be rebel to my juggement / Shal paye for al

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[5]Cf. the horsemen of the apocalypse in Revelations, who bring with them plagues and other scourges which slay "the third part of men" (Revelations 9).

that by the wey is spent" (833-34).[6] This orderly "gaming" is disrupted in Fragment Six, which has as its theme the struggle between order and disorder. In Fragment Six, various sins described in the Physician's and Pardoner's Tales are reflected by the tellers themselves. As a microcosm, the two tales reflect the pilgrims' larger world where sins bring about such scourges as famine and pestilence.

Pestilence in the background of Fragment Six serves as an emblem for the disorder caused by sin in the two tales. In the Physician's Tale, pestilence appears in a gnomic phrase misapplied in a digression on the good governance of children, but in the Pardoner's Tale, plague moves into the foreground as literal event.[7] The Pardoner tells of "a thousand slayn this pestilence," and in the tale itself, the large number of plague fatalities serves as a reason for seeking Death in order to slay him (675-79).[8]

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[6] Quotations from the Canterbury Tales are from The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson, and, unless otherwise indicated, from Fragment Six.

[7] In addition to the use of pestilence in Fragment Six, Chaucer uses pestilence to mean plague in the Knight's Tale (2469), in curses in the Nun's Priest's Tale (3410) and the Wife of Bath's Tale (1264), and in a figurative sense in the Merchant's Tale (1793).

[8] William E. Rogers argues that the major theme in Fragment Six is the predominance of evil, "into [an even more] stifling atmosphere of irremediable evil" (79), and that governance or the abuse of the gifts of Fortune, Nature, and grace, suggested by other critics

Fragment Six begins with the Physician's Tale, a moral story which warns that chaos results when wicked magistrates violate the law, but that such wickedness could be overcome by righteous living, as shown by the example of Virginia.[9] The evil actions of Judge Apius arise from his lecherous desires for Virginia. These desires interfere with a public responsibility which requires him to maintain order among the people he serves. He brings false charges against Virginia's father, Virginius, so that he can have Virginia for himself. This situation causes Virginia, at her father's bidding, to choose death instead of giving in to the lecherous demands of this judge. But this, in turn, leads to more disruption, resulting in the unnatural act of a father killing his daughter.

When the people in the tale learn of Apius' crime, the wicked judge attempts to bring Virginius to trial and hang him for slaying Virginia:

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as predominant themes in this fragment, are but "particular manifestations of the major concern of both tales--namely the problem of evil" (79).

[9]Anne Middleton remarks that Chaucer's version of the story of "Appius and Virginia" uniquely shifts the "narrative emphasis and ethical interest [from other versions of the story in Livy and Jean de Meun] toward the virgin courage of the daughter, away from the other two principal characters and their chief moral attributes: the perversion of justice in Appius and the stern patrician resolve of the wronged father" ("The Physician's Tale" 10).

> And whan the juge it saugh, as seith the storie,
> He bad to take hym and anhange hym faste.
> (258-59)

But his further abuse of legal power results in further breakdown of order, and a crowd of a thousand people takes control (260):

> But right anon a thousand peple in thraste
> To save the knyght, for routhe and for pitee,
> For knowen was the false iniquitee.
> (260-62)

The intrusion of a thousand people "in thraste," is yet another mark of disorder.[10] Ironically, justice is accomplished, at last, not through the legal order, but at the hands of this angry mob:

> For which unto this Apius they gon
> And caste hym in a prisoun right anon,
> Ther as he slow hymself; and Claudius,
> That servant was unto this Apius,

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[10] The movement of this crowd has the sense of "pushing in" (Riverside Chaucer, gloss to 360) or of "thrusting" (Norman Davis, A Chaucer Glossary, s.v., threste(n).

Concerning the effects of this uprising, Jerome Mandel remarks:

> Virginius' charity affirms God's governance of a frail and fallible world. It supersedes the reaffirmation of order on the social and political levels occasioned by the un-Chaucerian rising of the commons. The 'peple' create the physical positions which each character should hold in an ordered universe: Virginius in control, Apius jailed and a suicide, Claudius condemned.
> ("Governance in the Physician's Tale" 324)

Later in Fragment Six, the Pardoner's "thousand slayn this pestilence" (679) provides a faint, but ironic echo of this lively and unruly crowd, "a thousand peple in thraste."

> Was demed for to hange upon a tree.
> ...
> The remenant were anhanged, moore and lesse,
> That were consentant of this cursednesse.
> (267-71, 275-76)

The lesson in this tale builds on the character of Virginia, who is, first of all, physically flawless: "For Nature hath with sovereyn diligence / Yformed hire in so greet excellence" (9-10). According to the Physician, Virginia's disposition reflects the excellence of her body: "In hire ne lakked no condicioun / That is to preyse, as by discrecioun" (41-42). The Physician's understanding of the body as a reflection of Nature's perfection has an analogue in the teachings of Galen, whose works the Physician would have known:

> Nature has not created matter, but she arranges the material in a fashion which we cannot improve even in our thought, and for this we must praise Her and sing hymns to Her.
> (qtd. in Temkin 25)

Galen elaborates on this theme in De usu partium (On the Use of the Parts), where he argues that anatomical knowledge gained from animal dissection (since human dissection was rarely permitted) supports the notion that each part of the body was constructed in the best possible manner to serve the whole body (Temkin 25n).[11]

[11]Temkin cites Galen's De usu partium, 3:10.17, ed. Georg Helmreich, 1.168ff.
Commenting on Hippocrates' advice to physicians, Galen remarks that "the practice of certain physicians is like playing at the dice, when what turns up may occasion the greatest mischief to their patients." Galen, however, informs us that in some of the MSS.

The physician not only tells a pagan tale, but interprets the function of Nature with a commentary that parallels Galenic doctrine, a pagan medical source. While the Physician believes that the body was created by Nature, acting as the "vicaire general" of God, "the formere principal" (19-20; cf. Parliament of Fowls 379), he further suggests that Virginia's virtue reflects her physical perfection:

> No countrefeted termes hadde she
> To seme wys, but after hir degree
> She spak, and alle hire wordes, moore and lesse,
> Sownynge in vertu and in gentilesse.
> (51-53)

After an explanation of Nature's work, the Physician continues his tale with a digression on the governance of children, where he employs the term pestilence:

> Of alle tresons sovereyn pestilence
> Is whan a wight bitrayseth innocence.
> Ye fadres and ye moodres eek also,
> Though ye han children, be it oon or mo,
> Youre is the charge of al hir surveiaunce,
> Whil that they been under youre governaunce.
> (91-96)[12]

"instead of 'art' he found 'nature'; that is to say, that the physician is 'the minister (or servant) of nature'" (trans. Francis Adams, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins 47n).

On the concept of Natura in medieval literature, see C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image, 34-40; on God as Divine Physician, see R. Arbesmann, "The Concept of 'Christus Medicus.'"

[12]C. David Benson summarizes the diversity of opinions about the "unduly obtrusive" nature of this digression on the governance of children. Some critics have suggested that this digression is an allusion to

Pestilence in this passage, glossed as "wickedness" in The Riverside Chaucer (gloss to VI.91), provides a clue to the character of the Physician. The Physician's conclusion to the entire tale, "Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake" (286), warns of the results of sin, which betrays the sinner, no longer bringing the pleasures it has. However, this conclusion is misdirected, for it considers the fate of the wicked Apius and his accomplices, and not Virginia's perfect nature, which enables her to resist lechery and retain her virginity, which she dies in order to preserve. As Stephen Barney observes, it would seem more in keeping with the pathos of the tale if the physician had used the conclusion to remind his listeners of "the conflict between evils with which Virginia and her father wrestle," and not in a digression.[13]

Chaucer's sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford, "governess to the daughters of John of Gaunt and also his mistress before becoming his third wife" (The Riverside Chaucer 903nn72-104). But Benson argues that "there is no necessity to seek an actual event behind sentiments that are quite conventional, however awkwardly introduced" (nn72-104).

[13] "An Evaluation" 85. Barney argues further that the Physician has mistaken the work of Nature for the purpose of rhetoric:

> Nature's speech is the principal "rhetorical" ornament of the Physician's Tale, in medieval terms, being an extended figure of personification, and even including classical allusions. The Physician seems rather proud of it, ending it plumply with "Thus semeth me that Nature wolde seye" (29). It contains the terms "countrefete" (twice), "colour," and "figures." Nature uses these

The struggle between chaos and order, and the victory of righteousness over evil, especially over the sin of lechery, are a critical part of the tale and remind us of the importance of right governance--by judge, parents, and children. Equally important is Chaucer's emphasis on the victory of righteousness over evil. When control breaks down because of sin, monstrous events occur, such as a father beheading his daughter. For a time, evil seems to triumph over goodness until order is restored by God smiting down the sinner (cf. 278). The connection between good governance and the "pestilential" consequences of sin, explained in the Physician's digression, are changes Chaucer has made in his retelling of the traditional legend of Appius and Virginia, which emphasizes Virginia's ability to withstand evil because of her perfect nature. In keeping with the moral theme of the original tale, the Physician might have made the connection between Apius' sin and the pathos of the tale more obvious, but his inability to do so suggests that he understands the nature of bad governance in terms that earlier pagan physicians like

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terms to describe her own work in creating as God's "vicaire general" (19), but the terms are all, as we see, especially rhetorical jargon, a point which I first noticed because of the close proximity of the phrase "countrefeted termes" (51) to describe Virginia's speech....the Physician accidentally connects Nature's skill at shaping with the skill of an orator, in a passage which is rhetorically deficient (87).

Galen would have endorsed. Thus the Physician's mistelling of a tale derived from pagan medical sources reinforces the words of the narrator in the General Prologue: the Physician's study, and therefore his sources were "but litel on the Bible" (438).

The Physician's lack of emphasis on the moral message in the original tale reflects his own moral insufficiency in the world outside the Tales. Chaucer's Physician had treated plague, for, as the narrator of the General Prologue states, "He [the Physician] kepte that he wan in pestilence" (442). The Physician's love of gold especially (444), suggests not only financial gain during plague time, but his use of gold as a remedy for plague, perhaps for his wealthier patients.[14] The Physician, probably acquainted with contemporary plague

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[14] For gold in phisik is a cordial,
Therefore he lovede gold in special.
(GP 443-44)
Lydgate mentions gold as a treatment for plague in "How the Plague was Ceased at Rome," although, like other remedies, it proved ineffective:

Not gold potable, nor pure quintessence,
Not Rue barbarian, nor Alpharic Treacle,
Surmount the power of mighty pestilence
But God [through] his saints doth his miracle
To every person, by grace receptacle
Worshipping this martyr [i.e. St. Sebastian],
he instilleth his grace,
Most sovereign electuary, in all pestilence case.
(McCracken, Minor Poems of John Lydgate 1:159)

Walter C. Curry (Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences), citing Traill's discussion in Social England, suggests that John of Burgundy may have been the model for Chaucer's Doctor of Physik (317n5) though others have suggested John of Gaddesden was Chaucer's model.

treatises and perhaps even with John of Burgundy's, applies the metaphor of pestilence to poor child rearing.[15]

The use of pestilence in a figurative sense in the tale, is similar to the words of St. Augustine in this mid-fifteenth century translation by Capgrave:

> þe grete lederes of þe cristen flok...haue falle be þe pestilens of lecherrye.[16]

The chaos and deaths in this tale occur not because Apius has failed to govern children wisely or because Virginia has been unwisely reared, but because he has failed to govern his own behavior, allowing the uncontrollable "pestilence of lechery" to supplant reason.[17] The ability of the young virgin to withstand the "fals cherl and fals justise," as the Host describes Apius in the link between the tales in this fragment, is possible because of her perfect nature,

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[15] In the General Prologue, we learn that Hippocrates and Galen, who wrote on the treatment of epidemic disease, are among the authorities the physician would have known.

[16] (c1450) Capgrave's St. Augustine 50.24. MED pestilence. 2.(b). According to the MED, pestilence can mean "evil; a sin, mischief, harm," and may be used in the phrase "pestilence of lecherie," to describe the vice of lechery itself.

[17] In "Governance in the Physician's Tale, Jerome Mandel has argued that the tale deals "with the matter of how to respond to wicked government" (317), and that at the end of the tale, order is restored. Virginia, Mandel argues further, "most clearly represents the theme at the level of the individual" (317).

which, like her body, is a divine gift. The emphasis on Virginia's perfect nature, added by Chaucer in his retelling of the story, is muddled by the Physician in the misplaced conclusion. The Physician presumably would have studied rhetoric as part of his training, but Chaucer has him downplay the importance of the pathos of Virginia and Virginius in a tale which is "rhetorically deficient" (Barney 87).[18] The tale reflects the Physician's deficiencies, especially his greed during disastrous plague times. The Physician's Tale provokes a strong reaction first from the Host, and then from the other pilgrims, who are, as Stephen Barney argues, "affronted in various ways by the Physician's literary failures" (86).

The "Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale" prepares the audience for another lesson concerning the disorderly results of sin. When Harry calls on the Pardoner to tell a "merie tale" so as to heal his near-cardinacle, the pilgrims cry for "som moral thyng" instead. Critics have suggested that the pilgrims fear that the Pardoner, because of his unseemly character, will tell a ribald story, consequently offending his

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[18] See my article on the double meaning of in terme in the link between the tales in Fragment Six: "A New Reading of the Host's 'In Terme' (Canterbury Tales VI, line 311).

listeners.[19] It is not likely that the "gentils" would be affronted by ribald tales at this point in the pilgrimage as they have heard others and have, at least ostensibly, enjoyed them.[20] Instead, they cry for "som moral thyng." The Physician's tale is a moral one, though badly told, yet it is not clear that the pilgrims see the moral purpose of the tale as lucidly as Harry thinks he has. The Pardoner agrees to tell a moral tale, though he must first "'thynke / Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke'" (327b-28).

The Pardoner plays on the confusion created in the Physician's Tale by telling an carefully ordered tale (cf. Owst, Preaching 99ff.). The Pardoner's prologue and tale are deceptively orderly, under rhetorical control, when compared to the Physician's Tale. Even the Pardoner's theme is clearly moral: "Greed is the root of (all) evils" ("radix malorum est cupiditas" 334, 426; 1 Tim. 6.10). The moral of the tale is shown through the

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[19] For a description of the Pardoner, see GP 669-714. Peter G. Beidler argues elsewhere that the Pardoner's physiognomy corresponds to his moral insufficiencies ("The Plague" esp. 263-64), which arouse the suspicions of the other pilgrims.

[20] The narrator remarks on the pilgrims' enjoyment of ribald tales in the prologue to the Reeve's Tale:

> Whan folk hadde laughen at this nyce cas
> Of Absolon and hende Nicholas,
> Diverse folk diversely they seyde,
> But for the moore part they loughe and pleyde.
> Ne at this tale I saugh no man hym greve,
> But it were oonly Osewold the Reve.
> (3855-60)

Pardoner's own greed. He rashly admits that he preaches solely for financial gain:

> Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
> is al my prechyng, for to make hem free
> To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me.
> (VI.400-02)

In the tale itself, death and plague form a dark background, serving as emblems for the Pardoner's own material sins, thought to be the immoral causes of plague. Though the Pardoner's words are rhetorically ordered, his actions reveal his disregard for established order. He is a false preacher, which he admits, and a rioter himself, considering his knowledge of wines:

> Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede,
> And namely fro the white wyn of Lepe
> That is to selle in Fysshstrete or in Chepe.
> This wyn of Spaigne crepeth subtilly...
> (562-65)

The Pardoner claims to have a "joly wenche in every toun" (453, 448-53, but cf. GP 691-93). He is guilty of avarice, gluttony, and lechery, which he perpetuates through the artful use of language. It is not surprising that a reference to plague appears in a tale told by one who is so spiritually deficient, as plague itself was traditionally thought to be caused by the very sins the

Pardoner commits. It is surprising that he has survived the plague himself.[21]

In the tale of the rioters, the plague serves as a grim reminder of the penalties of sin:

> Thise riotoures thre of whiche I telle,
> Longe erst er prime rong of any belle,
> Were set hem in a taverne to drynke,
> And as they say, they herde a belle clynke
> Biforn a cors, was caried to his grave.
> (661-65)

The man being carried to his grave, a friend of the rioters, has died during a recent siege of pestilence:

> Ther cam a privee theef men clepeth Deeth,
> That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
> And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
> And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.
> He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence.
> (675-79)

After mentioning the incident of the passing corpse, the Pardoner moves directly into the turning point of the tale, where the rioters leave the tavern, vowing to "sleen this false traytour Deeth," adding that, "He shal be slayn, he that so manye sleeth" (699-701).[22] The

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[21] He would have been familiar with plague as he was employed by the Church of Mary Ronceville at Charing Cross, especially hard hit by plague in the mid-fourteenth century (Galloway, The Hospital 24).

[22] Their decision to slay death eventually leads them to the pile of gold under the tree, and there, as the narrator explains: "No lenger thanne after Deeth they soughte" (722). Charles A. Owen, Jr. reflects on the importance of this line in these terms:

> The gold has both a sobering and deflating effect. It brings them back to the real world from their illusions of brotherhood and of slaying Death. Yet

Pardoner's digressions on the sins of avarice and gluttony in the prologue serve as a gloss on the actions of the rioters later in the tale as much as they serve as a microcosm of his own immoral activities. The rioters' disorderly living makes them careless and unconcerned with Death's warning, and even with the great force of "this pestilence" which carries off "a thousand" in one outbreak alone. Commenting on the death of their friend, "an old felawe of youres" (672), whose corpse has just been carried by, one of the rioters asks: "Is it swich peril with hym for to meete?" (693).

Like the rioters, who lack moral governance, the Pardoner violates the rules his fellow pilgrims have agreed upon when he disrupts the game in a pitch for pardons at the end of his tale. The Pardoner's words to Harry, "Unbokele anon thy purs" (945), result in Harry's angry outburst: "it shal nat be, so theech!" (947). Harry's anger builds further, until he hurls a final invective at the Pardoner:

> I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
> In stide of relikes or of seintuarie
> Let kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
> They shul be shryned in a hogges toord!
> (952-55)

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their drunken intentions were closer to the final outcome than their sober planning and counter-planning to secure the treasure.
(Discussions of the Canterbury Tales 85)

The Knight, as a representative of order, must intervene to re-establish harmony between Harry, host and appointed judge of the game, and the Pardoner.[23]

As Siegfried Wenzel argues, the Pardoner's character is more noticeable than the moral of the tale itself:

> Beyond this story itself, the entire Pardoner's Prologue and Tale deals explicitly with the sin of avarice, and no matter how modern readers may evaluate Chaucer's attitude towards the Pardoner, it is clearly the Pardoner's character, his moral identity, that occupies the center of the poet's attention.
> ("Pestilence and Middle English Literature", 152)

The lesson learned from a tale like the Pardoner's could be useful in edifying the soul.[24] The tale warns against the dangers of cupidity and the tavern vices. As plague threatens the rioters, so their sins result in an atmosphere of moral pollution. But the Pardoner's artful use of language and his evil nature become so intriguing that the warnings of plague and death seem scarcely noticeable. The Pardoner successfully turns the horrors of life into entertainment in order to deceive

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[23] In the Knight's Tale itself, Saturn the cold finds "in his olde experience an art / ...[and] remedie" against strife (2438-46, 2452). Furthermore, he controls the cold maladies, warning that "my lookyng is the fader of pestilence" (2469). Thus, in the Knight's Tale, pestilence is mentioned in the context of strife in much the same way as it is in the Pardoner's Tale.

[24] Like Lydgate's A Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence, the Pardoner's Tale provides moral advice for preventing disease.

the pilgrims for his own advantage. He knows that when they have forgotten the moral purpose of his story telling, their delight with the fabulous will make them vulnerable, and likely to give up their money, yet they and their spokesman aren't actually fooled, though there is a near breakdown of order.

Chaucer's Physician and Pardoner tell their stories to win a prize and, in the case of the Pardoner's Tale, especially to satisfy the pilgrims' request for a moral tale. However, the Physician tells a moral story with the wrong conclusion in a tale that is rhetorically deficient. Conversely, the Pardoner tells an artful tale, using rhetoric elegantly, but misapplies it for personal gain. Both tales aptly demonstrate the chaotic effects of sin, for which the plague, alluded to in the Physician's Tale and explicitly mentioned in the Pardoner's Tale, serves as a warning. The immoral activities of the rioters and the immoral desires of Apius serve as microcosms of the Pardoner and Physician's immoral worlds outside the two tales in this fragment.

2. Piers Plowman, B-text

References to plague in Piers Plowman appear more frequently than in the Canterbury Tales, and on several

levels. First, passages referring to plague may express contemporary medical views, which argued that the same pestilential air that caused plague also caused certain physical abnormalities in the offspring of survivors. Second, plague references warn of the consequences of sin. Third, in the concluding, apocalyptic Passus 20, plague serves as an emblem of the chaos resulting from that sin.

In the Prologue, the Dreamer learns that parish priests have complained to their bishop that since the plague, their parishes cannot support them. So they ask permission to live in London where they might earn more money singing masses:

> Persons and parisshe preestes pleyned hem to the bisshop
> That hire parisshes weren povere sith the pestilence tyme,
> To have a licence and leve at London to dwelle,
> And syngen ther for symonie, for silver is swete.
> (Prol. 83-86)[25]

This passage expresses a familiar complaint of Langland's day, when priests were accused of abandoning their parishes during plague for fear of catching the

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[25] Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Piers Plowman are from the Kane and Donaldson edition of the B-text.

J. F. Goodridge explains the literal meaning of this passage: to sing for simony, "i.e., the money received for singing Masses for the Dead in the chantries or side-chapels of St. Paul's and elsewhere" allows them to chime their voices to the sweet jingling of silver (263n10). Cf. General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales 507-11.

disease, and afterwards, for lack of income. The depopulation of parishes during plague outbreaks has been well documented, and is used by Langland to emphasize the notion that simony threatens to replace true charity--even in the priesthood.[26]

In Passus 5, the Dreamer learns more about the plague when Reason explains its ultimate cause:

> For I seigh the feld ful of folk that I before of seide,
> And how Reson gan arayen hym al the reaume to preche,
> He preved that thise pestilences were for pure synne,
> And the south-westrene wynd on Saterday at even
> Was pertliche for pride and for no point ellis.
> (V.11-15)

Reason's sermon on the Seven Deadly Sins in this passus stresses the connection between sin and disease.[27] Disobedience leads the sinner away from God and closer to the kingdom of Antichrist. In his sermon, Reason also alludes to particular, or near causes of plague: a storm which occurred on January 15, 1362, St. Maur's Day, and lasted for five days, considered by contemporary preachers as a warning from God (Schmidt

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[26]Concerning the regular clergy, Aiden Gasquet's The Black Death argues that plague caused a decline in monastic life, due to the severe depopulation of the monasteries.

[27]A. V. C. Schmidt explains: "Langland agrees with Brunton, Bromyard and other contemporary [sermon] writers in seeing the plague and other disasters as divine punishment for sin" (The Vision of Piers Plowman 315n13).

315n14). Contemporary medical accounts also explain that southerly winds carried plague miasmas, and earlier medical treatises like the Isagoge state that certain weather conditions could result in disease.[28] The plague treatise written by Bengt Knutsson also mentions foul weather and a southerly wind as a particular and near cause of plague:

> First I sayde the tokenes of this infirmite Vii thynges ought to be noted in the same. The first is Whan in a sommers daye the Weder often times chaungeth, as in the morning the Wedyr appereth to rayne, after Ward it apperith cloudy & atte last Wyndy in the south.
> (Vine, ed. 2[v])[29]

As Reason warns later in his sermon, it might be tempting to spoil the few children who survived the plague, so parents must guard against doing this:

> And thanne he chargede chapmen to chastisen hir children:
> Late no wynnyng forwanye hem while thei be yonge,

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[28]For a discussion of the Isagoge and the other medical treatises discussed in conjunction with Langland's interpretation of plague, see Chapter Two of this study (57-61).

[29]See Chapter Three (88-94) for a more extensive discussion of the contents of Knutsson's treatise.

In a digression on planetary influences in the Liber Uricrisiarum (235-65), a general medical treatise in Middle English discussed earlier in this study (120-23), the author explains that Saturn, when in the constellations of Capricorn or Aquarius, "causys mykyll water & mony flodys, of whylk comes derthes & hungyr and pestilence of folk & best, & hate & wrath & wykked levynge, & it febles þe chyld in þe modyrs wamb. And 3if it have mykyll my3t þereon, it scleis þe chyld in þe modyrs wame" (253.3069-72).

> Ne for no poustee of pestilence plese hem noght out of reson.
> (V.34-36)

Reason explains that pride is the principal cause of the pestilence which comes by a southerly wind at Nature's bidding. Survivors may prevent plague through confession and obedience, and by the good governance of children. People begin living morally, and are set to work by Piers (Passus 6), but the situation quickly changes, and they fall into sin again. Hunger and famine are then sent to chastise those who refuse to work.

Later, Wit lectures the dreamer on marriage, noting that since the plague time, marriages of couples of widely differing ages have produced only foul words and their only children, strife and nagging:

> In jelousie joyelees and janglynge on bedde,
> Many a peire sithen the pestilence han plight hem togideres.
> The fruyt that thei brynge forth arn [manye] foule wordes;
> Have thei no children but cheeste and chopp[es] hem bitwene.
> (IX.166-69)

The advice given by Wit parallels the explanation of plague given in the Liber Uricrisiarum and other medical works warning of the physical consequences of plague. Both Reason (Passus 5) and Wit (Passus 9) explain the physical results of plague, stating further that the risks to the soul were even greater, with sin, and especially the sin of pride as the major cause of this

epidemic and other widespread scourges (e.g., storms, hunger and famine).

Reason's sermon and Wit's explanation of the consequences of plague with regard to fruitless marriages also parallel explanations concerning the aftereffects of plague in contemporary sermons which contain, G. R. Owst explains, "the exemplum terribile" (Preaching 207). Summarizing and quoting extensively from a sermon delivered during the plague by Bishop Brunton (scil. Brinton, MS. Harl. 3760, f. 191), Owst notes that the sermon opens with an invective against those who attribute plague to planets and constellations rather than to the collective sins of the nation (206).[30] Brunton compares contemporary outbreaks of plague with those in the days of Noah, in which God "stretched and made ready his bow," (qtd. in Owst 207). He reminds his listeners of the seriousness of immorality.

Like Wit, Brunton, warns that the effects of plague may extend even to children and other innocent people, punished not for their own wrongdoing, but as a token of a parent's or neighbor's sin:

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[30] "...illi qui talia ascribunt certis planetis et constellationibus" (qtd. in Owst, Preaching 206).
Brinton's sermons have been edited by Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin; see "Sermon 70" 322-26, esp. 322-23. Owst's translation of references to plague in Brinton's "Sermon 70" appears below.

> But you say, 'If sin was the occasion of the aforesaid [i.e., plague], by the just judgement of God the notorious sinners should perish, not children, or the just who have not sinned in this way!' I make reply and say that the children are dying not for their own sins, but for those of their parents....The little ones would have wished to follow in their steps, after all; and in truth God does them no wrong, when death may be the way out from the prison-house...Or let us say that God punishes the innocent that he may chastise us who are the worst, and the offenders [nocentes]. For in the manner of the bowman, God who "hath stretched and made ready his bow" sometimes shoots the arrow of death beyond the mark, that is, in striking the sinner, whether father or mother, or some older person, sometimes "on the near side of the mark," by smiting son or daughter or someone younger, sometimes on the left side, by smiting their neighbours, sometimes upon the right side by smiting brother or sister. But at length he hits the mark itself, when he carries off the sinner asleep in sin, from the midst, by awful death.
> (qtd. in Owst Preaching 207)

Brunton concludes that confession is the only remedy for this scourge. His explanation, like Reason's sermon, warns against attributing plague only to atmospheric conditions. While planets and winds may bring this disease to earth, the force of God lies behind them.

As his pilgrimage continues, the Dreamer learns more about salvation, and, incidentally, more about plague through allusions to this disease, a biblical commonplace occurring in the context of widespread and persistent sin. In Passus 10, Dame Study reproaches her husband, Wit, for trying to teach this ignorant Dreamer, whom, she claims, only wants to impress others with his new-found knowledge. She warns of the dangers of pride,

explaining that plague is one result of it. However, Study also argues that not only in the religious orders, but among rich and poor, pride and greed have grown to such proportions that prayers are ineffective remedies against pestilence:

> so is pride woxen
> In religion and in al the reme amonges riche and povere
> That preieres have no power thise pestilences to lette.
> For God is deef nowadayes and deyneth noght his eres to opene,
> That girles for hire giltes he forgrynt hem alle.
> And yet the wrecches of this world is noon ywar by oother,
> Ne for drede of the deeth withdrawe noght hir pride,
> Ne beth plentevouse to the povere as pure charite wolde,
> But in gaynesse and glotonye forglutten hir good hemselve,
> And breketh noght to the beggere as the Book techeth...
> (X.75b-83)

Dame Study mentions other sins responsible for plague: the idleness of "gaynesse and glotonye" become more important than active works of charity such as giving bread to the poor. In this passage, pride and cupidity are associated with plague, and obedience and confession are again thought the best way of appeasing God's wrath. Dame Study's reference to "the Book" reminds us that scourges come as punishment for sin, as they had to the Philistines in the biblical account of plague.

In Passus 13, Haukyn, the Active Man, explains that he is the enemy of idleness, providing waferbread for

all honest workers (XIII.238-40). He claims to give bread to all who are in need, to beggars and Pope alike, though he receives no reward, even from the Pope. Using the imagery of plague salves as an emblem for spiritual healing, Haukyn says that, if he had a clerk, he would ask the Pope for a pestilence salve:

> Hadde ich a clerc that couthe write I wolde caste hym a bille
> That he sente me under his seel a salve for the pestilence,
> And that his blessynge and hise bulles bocches myghte destruye.
> (XIII.247-49)

The Pope's pardon "mighte lechen [heal] a man," Haukyn claims, "for sith he [the Pope] hath the power that Peter hadde, he hath the pot with the salve" (XIII.253-54). But like ineffective remedies for plague, the Pope's remedies for sin are useless among prideful people who, like Haukyn, feign charity and humility, and continue to sin (XIII.255-59). While Haukyn's words and intentions seem generous, as Conscience reminds him, his coat is stained with "moles [spots] and spottes" of sin (XIII.313-14). Haukyn confesses that he has besmirched his coat of baptism with the Seven Deadly sins.[31]

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[31] John A. Alford emends "moste" to "myste" in XIII.314, adding further plague imagery to this passus, as plague was thought to be caused by foul air, which, in the figurative terms of this passus stains the soul with sin. Consequently, the plague mist staining the coat prevents Haukyn from being healed by the Pope's salve (i.e., pardon) until he has washed it (i.e., confessed and done penance for his sin).

The imagery of healing, used in a literal and figurative sense, appears in later passus in Piers as in Passus 16, where Christ learns the practice of medicine from Piers Plowman:

> And [Piers] lered hym lechecraft, his lif for to save,
> That though he were wounded with his enemy, to warisshen hymselve;
> And dide hym assaie his surgenrie on hem that sike were,
> Til he was parfit praktisour, if any peril file;
> And soughte out the sike and synfulle bothe,
> And salvede sike and synfulle, bothe blynde and crokede,
> And commune wommen convertede [to goode]:
> Non est sanis opus medicus, set male habentibus.
> (XVI.104-110a)

Using the biblical story of the Good Samaritan, the poet again employs physical healing as a metaphor for spiritual healing in Passus 17, where the man beaten by thieves is healed by the Samaritan's salve of charity (XVII.65-81):

> May no medicyne under molde the man to heele brynge--
> Neither Feith ne fyn Hope, so festred be hise woundes,
> Withouten the blood of a barn born of a mayde.
> And be he bathed in that blood, baptised as it were,

In the C-Text, Langland moves the description of Haukyn's lechery to Patience's discussion of Lechery in Passus 5. Haukyn is described in the B-text as prideful, his coat stained with the foul mists of sin. The addition of a description of his lecherous behavior corresponds to contemporary emphasis on material sins, especially, as a cause of plague. Cf. Alford, "Haukyn's Coat," for an explanation of biblical and patristic sources for the coat and Haukyn's role in the poem.

> And thanne plastred with penaunce and passion of
> that baby,
> He sholde stonde and steppe...
> (XVII.93-98b)

References to healing in Passus 16 and 17 contrast with the ineffective salves Friar False Flattery brings into Holy Church later in the poem in Passus 20.

Will's last dream in Passus 20 is a partial vision of the coming of Antichrist. In this dream, during the assault on the Barn of Unity, Holy Church summons Nature for help in bringing people to defend Unity. Nature responds by sending Old Age, Death, and pestilence along with other ailments against the enemies of Holy Church.

> Kynde cam after hym, with many kene soores,
> As pokkes and pestilences--and muche peple shente;
> So Kynde thorugh corrupcions kilde ful manye.
> (XX.97-99)

Even the learned physician cannot help against the scourges, falling prey to palsy himself (XX.175-179). Yet unlike the sinister plague that forms a dark setting in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, pestilence in the last Passus of Piers Plowman works as the servant of Nature in forcing repentance. The plague becomes an instrument that God uses to purify sinners. It arrives in response to Antichrist. Here, as elsewhere in Piers, Langland draws on a biblical commonplace: God's use of physical disease as punishment for disobedience:

> But the nation and kingdom that will not serve Nabuchodonosor king of Babylon, and whosoever will not bend his neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon: I will visit upon that nation with the

> sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, saith,
> the Lord: till I consume them by his hand.
> (Jer. 27.8; cf. 14.12, 24.10)

As with the famines of Passus 6, after "pokkes and pestilences," people obey, but like the Children of Israel, they are soon disobedient. Lechery comes as the first sin after plague as Fortune flatters the survivors:

> Fortune gan flatere thanne tho fewe that were alyve,
> And bihighte hem long lif--and lecherie he sente
> Amonges alle manere men, wedded and unwedded,
> And gaderede a greet hoost al agayn Conscience.
> (XX.110-13)

Conscience sends for a doctor skilled in healing the soul through confession, but this Doctor named Shrift:

> ...shoop sharp salve, and made men do penaunce-
> For hire mysdedes that thei wroght hadde,
> And that Piers [pardon] were ypayed, redde quod debes.
> (XX.307-09)

But penance is too harsh and people begin to ask if there is some physician who "softer could plaster." Sir Leef-to-lyve-in-lecherie ("Love-to-live-in-lechery") is particulary miserable from the sharp plasters of penance given by the physician--"he lay there and gronede" (XX.312). Contrition explains the situation to Conscience:

> There is a surgien in this sege that softe kan handle,
> And moore of phisik bi fer and fairer he plastreth-
> Oon Frere Flaterere, is phisicien and surgien.

(XX.314-16)

So Conscience, acting on advice contrary to the teaching of the Church, mistakenly admits this false physician-friar into Holy Church. The Friar's salves make penance so easy that people fall into a stupor, unable to withstand the power of Antichrist. Instead of healing ailing souls, the friar's remedies only make sin easier:

> The frere with his phisyk this folk hath enchaunted,
> And plastred hem so esily [that hii] drede no synne!
> (XX.379-80)

Conscience warns that a parish priest, a confessor, or bishop would be the best choice of physicians for curing sin. However, the treatment Friar Flatterer prescribes for the patient dying of lechery and gluttony is painless, unlike confession and repentance.

The connection between disease and sin becomes stronger in this passus when the friar's companion introduces the false physician to Peace as "Sire Penetrans-domos" (XX.341). This reminds Peace of a physician he once knew who "salved so oure wommen til some were with childe" (XX.348). Finally, at the end of the passus, Conscience leaves in search of Piers the Plowman and the poem ends (XX.381-87).

Though they persist in the popular tradition, medical recipes proved useless against catastrophic

disease, providing Langland with a useful emblem for false penance, described as salves for the ailing soul, administered by a false flatterer. Traditionally, physicians and clergy were charged with the task of healing disease: the physicians with the cure of bodily ailments, and the clergy with the cure of the diseases of the soul. But like so many physical remedies, Friar Flatterer's remedies for sin do nothing to heal the diseased soul.

3. The Dance of Death

Plague's indiscriminate attack on all of society during the late Middle Ages made the Church's claim that all were equal in the sight of God seem unquestionably true (Tristram, Figures 8). Thus, it is not surprising that popular interest in the dramatic presentation of the Dance of Death, which portrays the levelling of all sinners, increased after the Black Death. This increased interest may not have directly resulted from the plague, but must have been at least partially influenced by the sheer numbers of dead during plague times. Scholars believe that plague brought about certain changes in mural painting and tomb sculpture.[32] These, in turn,

[32] See Raymond Crawfurd's Plague and Pestilence in Literature and Art; Philippa Tristram's Figures of Life and Death.

were seen by writers like Lydgate, who translated the Dance of Death from French into English in 1424, the theme of which is the power of death over all people, regardless of their social standing or piety. "Most written accounts of plague," René Girard observes, "insist monotonously on this leveling of differences" ("The Plague" 834). During outbreaks of plague, death was ever present and grotesque, much as it is portrayed in the Dance of Death, or Dance Macabre.

The Dance of Death as a dramatic poem has as its source church murals depicting, with appropriate moral verses, the Dance Macabre in the late fourteenth century. Later, printed editions of these verses emphasized the inevitability of death (Warren, The Dance of Death ix-x). The idea of the Dance was most popular during the fifteenth century, especially in France, with the earliest literary version at Linngenthal, Little Basel, in 1312 (Warren x). The origin of this dance motif is obscure, although it was likely first invented in Latin by an ecclesiastic (Warren xv), perhaps in a sermon on the theme of death's warning (G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England 340).[33] In England, its best-known representation is Lydgate's Dance of Death,

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[33]Philippa Tristram remarks that the theme of the animate dead was a popular one in medieval sermons, which could include general references to the abstract figure of death (Figures of Life and Death 161).

preserved in twelve manuscripts, in one printed version (Guyot Marchand in 1488), and in one published version from Tottel's press (1544) (Warren xxiv).[34]

In all versions, the subject of the Dance of Death is the inevitability of death. Like the Dance, the poem has a dramatic quality--"more the character of a procession than a dance" (Warren x). Death leads all dancers, from Pope to peasant, as unwilling captives, and accuses each of certain sins, warning that the time has come to join him. Each character responds individually to Death's speech, often indicating great fear of death and remorse at having wasted life on the pleasures of sin rather than with preparations for eternal life. The number and names of characters vary from manuscript to manuscript, but most versions have characters representing the nobility (e.g., Emperor, King, Baron, Knight, Lady of Great Estate), the clergy (e.g., Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Bishop, Abbot and Abbess, Parson), commoners (e.g., Poor Man, Minstrel, Laborer, Merchant, Child), and characters representing the professions: Man of Law and Physician.

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[34] The term Dance Macabre is synonymous with the French Danse des Morts and the German Totentanz and is used to describe certain mural paintings with appropriate moral verses warning of the power of death (Warren, The Dance of Death ix n1).

Warnings of the Three Ages appear as motifs derived from the Legend or the Dance and the abstract personification of Death itself. It is difficult to distinguish among them (Tristram, Figures 167).

References to plague appear in Lydgate's version of the Dance of Death, which he translated shortly after visiting Paris where he observed murals depicting the Danse Macabre and their accompanying verses.[35] He refers to plague in the translator's preface, and later, in the dialogue between Death and the Physician. Death calls the Physician, describing, as he does, contemporary medical practice in a portrait very much like Chaucer's physician-portrait in the Canterbury Tales, and similar to the representation of ineffective medicine drawn in Passus 20 of Piers Plowman:

> Maister of phisik / whiche on 3owre vryne
> So loke and gase / & stare a-3enne the sunne
> For al 3owre crafte / & studie of medicyne
> Al the practik / & science that 3e cunne
> 3owre lyues cours / so ferforthe ys I-runne
> A3eyne my myght / 3owre crafte mai not endure
> For al the golde / that 3e ther-bi haue wonne
> Good leche is he / that can hym self recure.
> (Warren, ed. 53-54)[36]

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[35] Charles F. Mullett submits that the "the pestilence excited more varied attention from Lydgate than any other ailment. Indeed it alone received specific treatment, for [besides his Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence and Secrees of Old Philosoffres], it inspired his translation of The Dance of Death, the historical poem, 'How the Plague was ceased in Rome,' and several prayers" ("John Lydgate" 408).

For a discussion of Lydgate's Dietary and Doctrine for the Pestilence and Secrees, see Chapter Four (159-63, 164-71).

[36] GP 411-44. There are further connections between the Canterbury Tales and Lydgate's version of the Dance of Death in that both appear in the Ellesmere MS. Cf. Piers Plowman B.XX.165-79.

The Physician, helpless against the power of Death, recalls his own helplessness against the power of plague:

> Ful longe a-gon / that I vn-to phesike
> Sette my witte / and my diligence
> In speculatif / & also in practike
> To gete a name / thurgh myn excellence
> To fynde oute / a-3ens pestilence
> Preseruatifes / to staunche hit & to fyne
> But I dar saie / shortli in sentence
> A-3ens dethe / is worth no medicyne.
> (Warren, ed. 54)

Before he carries off the dancers, Death reminds each of his or her sins, and in some cases, not without a struggle. The Usurer must give up his gold, the Noble Woman, her fine clothes and possessions. The Knight even attempts to battle with Death, for in life, he was especially fond of the glories of war. The Physician must confront his medical failures, perhaps his greatest: restoring the health of plague sufferers, though he tried "thurgh myn excellence / To fynde oute a-3ens pestilence / Preseruatifes to staunche hit & to fyne" (428b-29a). Now, however, even the most powerful medicine cannot prevent his own death. In the poem, only the Hermit welcomes Death, and with the least amount of fear (Tristram, Figures 170) because he has spent life preparing for this moment.

In his translation of the Physician's encounter with Death, Lydgate suitably incorporates plague references which serve as a reminder that physical

medicine was not sufficient during plague. By doing so, Lydgate connects this section of the poem with the preface, where he has also added a reference to plague:

> O 3ee folkes / harde herted as a stone
> Which to the world / haue al your aduertence
> Like as hit sholde / laste euere in oone
> Where ys 3oure witte / where ys 3oure prouidence
> To see a-forne the sodeyne / vyolence
> Of cruel dethe / that ben so wyse and sage
> Whiche sleeth allas / by stroke of pestilence
> Bothe 3onge and olde / of low and hie parage.
> (Warren, ed. 2)

The phrase "Stroke of pestilence," often applied to plague itself, serves as a reminder of Death's power over young and old, noble and commoner.[37] But in this passage, we are also reminded of the moral circumstances in which plague occurs--to those "harde herted as a stone," a biblical commonplace adopted by English literary writers almost to a tedious degree. The narrator gives a final deposition concerning the transitory nature of life:

> Man is nowght elles / platli for to thenke
> But as a wynde / whiche is trasitorie
> Passyng ay forthe / whether he wake or wynke
> Towarde this daunce / haue this yn memorie
> Remembr[ing]e ay / ther is [no] bette victory
> In this life here / than fle synne atte leste
> Than shul 3e reigne / yn Paradyse with glorie
> Happi is he / that maketh yn heuene his feste.
> (641-48)

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[37] Elsewhere in his poetry, Lydgate employed pestilence in various figurative descriptions: "plague of pestilence," "ghostly pestilence," "sword of pestilence," "stroke of pestilence," and "eternal pestilence," especially in prayers he composed to the Virgin (qtd. in Mullett "John Lydgate" 410-13).

The advice to the living, "fle synne atte leste" (646) echoes the Physician's concluding words in Chaucer's Physician's Tale: "Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake" (286).

4. Conclusion: The Literary Interpretation of Plague

The agony of death caused by plague has been described by both physicians and poets alike, but, as Raymond Crawfurd believes, "While plague was an affair of the body for physicians, for literary writers, it was an affair of the mind" (The Plague 1). On a literal level, plague was immeasurably horrible, according to contemporary chroniclers who reported on the spread of this disease and its destruction. But these vivid descriptions of contemporary events appear more often in Continental writing than in English literary works.[38]

[38] One such chronicler, Robert of Avesbury, describes the plague as it reached the coast of England in 1348:

> It began in England in the neighborhood of Dorchester, about the East of St. Peter ad Vinculas...immediately spreading rapidly from place to place....Many persons who were healthy in the early morning, before midday were snatched from human affairs. It permitted none whom it marked down to live more than three of four days, without choice of persons, save only in the case of a few rich people. On the same day of their death, the bodies of twenty, forty, sixty and many times more persons were delivered to the church's burial in the same pit.
>
> (Trans. Roger Hart, English Life 84-85)

This passage is typical of others which describe plague

Most references to plague in English literary works derive from earlier medical and religious sources and not from contemporary experience with the disease. Even Langland's references to a Saturday wind carrying plague, which appears to describe a contemporary storm, is analogous to descriptions of plague-bearing winds in the writings of Hippocrates who, like other ancient physicians, attributed plague to south western winds.[39]

In fourteenth-century English poetry, plague references are often placed in the context of moral tales where they serve as an emblem of disorder, an archetypal horror experienced by rebellious humans. English writers like Langland see the plague as another event in a series of apocalyptical warnings. After the fourteenth century, writers of belles lettres continued to use the metaphor of plague in this way, long after

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rather than interpret its presence. Interpretations of plague are more common in didactic works and belles lettres.

[39] See Chapter Two, n1.

Avicenna also mentions the connection between foul air and pestilence: "Very often, too, the air itself is the seat of the beginning of the decomposition changes--either because it is contaminated by adjoining impure air, or by some 'celestial' agent of a quality at present unknown to man" (A Treatise on the Canon of Medicine 445).

the physical threat of the disease had ceased, but while it was still vivid in memory.[40]

Whether or not future generations would see the plague as an historical event was of less concern to literary writers. Their main concern was with moral values, and with elaborating on and interpreting the moral stories they had learned from previous "auctors." R. W. V. Elliott explains the importance of the past for literary writers like Chaucer:

> The Middle Ages placed no great premium upon invention of plot; what mattered was rather the manner of the telling than originality of the tale, so that Chaucer was by no means alone in turning to new use what he found in his books.
> ("Chaucer's Reading" 51)

The truth of fables was to be found in their immutable moral value, even during crises, and not in their accurate rendering of life's events. As Petrarch had assumed, even when the physical threat of plague had gone, future generations would read accounts of the disease as though they were stories, and not real events. Yet Petrarch also predicts, and quite accurately, that the memory of plague's horror would remain with future generations. While the disease itself

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[40] See, for instance, references to plague in Albert Camus' The Plague, written during the mid-twentieth century, where plague serves as metaphor for political tyranny.

might be forgotten, in time, it would be generally associated with human misery and evil times.

The three major literary works considered in this chapter contain warnings for those who would abuse the body through sin, as the body is a microcosm of God's orderly universe. Violations of this divine scheme occur in the Physician's misuse of rhetoric and the actions of characters in his "pitous tale," and in the Pardoner's abuse of rhetoric and the actions of the rioters in his tale. Violations also occur in the words and actions of the "field of folk" in Piers, who repeatedly turn from sin to obedience and then back to sin. In the Dance of Death, Death interrupts the procession as he calls on each chorisant. Each, in turn, must account for his or her sins before being led from this life.

These poems include characters who ignore the imminence of death even during such obvious warnings as plague. In Fragment Six of the Canterbury Tales, plague is associated with the sins of lechery and avarice, and with the other tavern sins of the revelers in the Pardoner's Tale. In Piers and the Dance of Death, plague is associated with the cardinal sin of pride and other sins arising from it. But references to this new disease are not new themselves, except in the context of older stories where they appear. Each of these poems explores the meaning of disorder in the context of an orderly

cosmology, providing a moral solution for the problem of disorder in the world through righteous living and obedience, the best remedies for plague and other scourges, and the best means for preventing their return.

Epilogue

> Thus the poets of England themselves become figures of Life, Death, and enduring, Life.
>
> Philippa Tristram, Figures of Life and Death (19)

The major connection among the examples of plague writing in this study concerns the idea of order, a concept of great importance to medieval authors. Medical writers explained that plague had come about as the result of distant and near causes, from the conjunction of planets and pestilential atmosphere. Moral writers, whose interpretation was rooted in the Bible and explained by the Church Fathers, stressed that human sin caused God to release plague on earth through natural forces. The difference between these two positions was not so much a difference between truth and error as it was an expression of the two traditional causes of plague: the spiritual forces of sin and the physical forces of nature. Clerks like John Lydgate, who saw both natural and divine forces at work in contemporary outbreaks of this scourge, took advice from plague

treatises, which he incorporated into a moral interpretation.[1]

Although medieval writers tended to embrace one or the other explanation, the medical and moral interpretations of plague were themselves rooted in a common cosmology which emphasized connections, with neither interpretation being exclusive. Consequently, the texts considered in this study may be looked at as a microcosm of medieval thought, not only with respect to medical and moral interpretations, but also in terms of the social, historical, and philosophical interests of their writers. Both interpretations served as a means for understanding the devastating results of plague, whether those results, like the causes, were medical or moral.

The medical tradition taught that the workings of the body reflected a divine plan as a mirror of creation. Medical authorities had taught that plague imbalanced the humors and unless this balance was

[1] Medical and moral interpretations were yoked long after the fifteenth century. Three hundred years later, when an outbreak of plague raged in Florence, the Prior of the Monastery of St. Marco was unable to sleep because he worried that men failed to understand that the disease had come "from the treasury of His [i.e. God's] wrath." The epidemic persisted, the Prior reasoned, because of "the blindness of men who think they can remedy this loss of life that is sent from Heaven, solely with human care [i.e., medical care] contra consilium Altissimi [contrary to the Almighty's purpose]" (qtd. in Carlo M. Cipolla, Faith, Reason, and the Plague 7).

restored through phlebotomy or remedies, death would result. Earlier physicians like Galen regarded Nature, which formed the body, as a divine instrument. The moral tradition taught that the body housed the soul; both should work harmoniously as part of a larger, divine plan. Writers who held a moral view believed that plague resulted from poor governance of both soul and body. Generally, literary writers applied the metaphor of plague to religious and social health, and didactic writers, being more practically oriented, tended to locate plague in a religious and medical context.

In the Secrees of Old Philosoffres, discussed in Chapter Four, Lydgate and Burgh explained plague with advice from both medical and moral traditions. Following the advice of learned medical authorities, they stressed the physicality of plague and, accordingly, offered advice on physical remedy and prevention. Following the Church's official explanation of cause, they warned of the dangers of immorality. Health could best be restored by attending to the needs of the body through diet and bloodletting, and to the needs of the soul through prayer and proper behavior.

Literary writers were also concerned with medical and moral aspects of plague, but in varying degrees. Piers Plowman, for instance, gives credence to the medical interpretation of plague in references to

astrological causes and their effects on the offspring of plague survivors, primarily in the context of biblical teaching. But, stripped of remedies and preventives, the medical interpretation of plague in Piers functions as a moral warning, not because plague has great power over the body, but because it threatened the eternal soul.

Medical writing therefore considers physical causes, while literature explores the meaning of plague in a wider cultural perspective. It searches for answers to the questions Arcite raises in Chaucer's Knight's Tale:

> What is this world? What asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave,
> Allone, withouten any compaignye.
> (2777-79)

Literary writers have traditionally questioned catastrophes, often in the context of similar disasters from the past, explaining that social upheaval produces conditions ripe for disease as often as disease occurs as the result of upheaval. When plague came, they saw in it what René Girard has described as "a reciprocal affinity" between disease and social disorder ("The Plague" 834), not only as a way of making sense of plague, but as a means for incorporating it into a larger and well-established cosmological framework.

Though plague treatises occupy a sizeable proportion of medical writing in the Middle Ages, the

scarcity of plague references in English literary works is puzzling, especially when compared to the magnitude of this disaster. Nancy Siraisi believes that by the time plague arrived in Europe in 1347, medieval people had developed certain mechanisms for coping with widespread disasters.[2] The magnitude of this epidemic, however, was recognized by some literary writers in England, though usually in passing references.

In Illness as Metaphor, Susan Sontag explains that "the medieval experience of plague was firmly tied to notions of moral pollution..." (71), earlier noting that "the whole point of Boccaccio's description in the first pages of the Decameron of the great plague of 1348 is how badly the citizens of Florence behaved" (41). The metaphor of plague consequently became useful for

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[2] The few surviving references to this disease in medieval English literature might, at first, suggest that people in the Middle Ages were able to cope successfully with disasters, and were therefore less likely to be affected by them in their day-to-day lives and in the production of literature particularly. Nancy Siraisi speculates on fourteenth-century people's ability to cope with the disastrous effects of epidemic disease:

> Both the harsher realities of medieval life, even in such relatively good times as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries--high infant mortality, extensive malnutrition among the poor, ineffective therapeutics--and the teachings of Christian tradition on the transitoriness of human life had combined long before 1347 to provide people with very adequate psychological and cultural mechanisms for dealing with the shock and horror produced by sudden death from foul and unexplainable disease. (in Williman, The Black Death 17).

writers who wished to warn their readers of moral corruption. In Middle English literary works particularly, not only the warning of plague itself, but the catastrophic circumstances in which it occurred were derived from biblical commonplaces rather than from examples taken from the ravages of contemporary life. Why did these English writers prefer biblical and pre-medieval sources to contemporary events as a means for creating order? Literary writers' response to the crisis of plague is analogous to the response twentieth-century writers have had to the devastation of World Wars.[3] One result of global disaster (and plague was perceived that way in the fourteenth century) is to force its survivors to come to terms with the value and permanence of life and the cultural forms which give integrated meaning to that life.

During worldwide crises, tension develops between life as it is and the re-creations of that life in cultural forms like art and literature which claim to be permanent records of human experience. But in a global crisis such as a World War or the fourteenth-century

[3] "The Great War," G. G. Coulton remarks, "if we may judge from several indications around us, has done a great deal to revive public interest in the Great Pestilence, which, in its own day, exercised an equal influence, or perhaps even greater, upon European development" (The Black Death 9). For other parallels between WWI and Black Death, see also J. W. Thompson, "The Aftermath of the Black Death and the Aftermath of the Great War."

plague pandemic, even culturally permanent forms, like ineffective physical remedies for plague, may appear less durable, less able to provide stability and consolation in time of disaster. Humans do have certain mechanisms for coping with large-scale disasters, as Nancy Siraisi explains, but when those mechanisms fail, survivors search for stability and comfort in established frameworks. Whether in the fourteenth century or the twentieth, it is not surprising that writers should turn to disasters described by earlier authors and the resolutions proposed by those authors as a way of coping with contemporary crises.[4]

In The Theater and Its Double, which employs plague as a metaphor for crisis leading to cultural change, Antonin Artaud comments on the relationship between crisis and culture during World War II:

> Either these [philosophical] systems are within us and permeate our being to the point of supporting life itself (and if this is the case, what use are books?), or they do not permeate us and therefore do not have the capacity to support life (and in this case what does their disappearance matter?). (8)

Some fourteenth-century physicians did question their books, finding in experience more useful ways of coping

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[4]Hence, the persistence of Henry Miller's remark in The Air-Conditioned Nightmare, quoted as the epigraph to Chapter One, referring to the blight of poverty in the America of the 1940's as a scourge, almost in the commonplace biblical sense of punishment for political misrule: "A great scourge never appears unless there is a reason for it" (18).

with crisis: to flee plague-infested areas became an important means for coping with plague, more effective than any remedy or explanation. Yet literary writers consistently, and in England especially, attempted to avoid the terror of plague, not by turning from books to personal experience, but by questioning, like Artaud and Miller, the meaning of crisis itself with regard to established authority. For literary writers both then and now, plague as a physicality in itself was not so useful as a theme in itself, but rather as a metaphor for disorder, an echo of the crisis caused by physical disease within the microcosm of the body. Like Artaud, medieval writers were drawn to explain the fracture between what is permanent--books and their stable authority--and what is transitory--human life, especially during pestilential times.[5] Rather than understand plague as an existential crisis robbing life of meaning, and eventually forcing the creation of new cultural forms as Artaud, Miller, and Camus have done in the face of twentieth-century crises, late medieval

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[5] Chaucer's narrator in the Parliament of Fowls explains the consolation he finds in reading:

> Of usage, what for lust and what for lore,
> On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde.
> But wherefore that I speke al this? Nat yore
> Agon it happede me for to beholde
> Upon a bok, was write with letteres olde;
> And therupon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
> The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne.
> (15-21)

English writers saw in the crisis of plague an opportunity to question a lifestyle they perceived as immoral, which, like biblical plagues, disrupted God's plan for an ordered universe.

The near-hysteria of Artaud's plague-ridden world, where bodies are portrayed in heaps with rats gnawing at the ragged edges, appears overdrawn when compared to medieval plague and its effects as Middle English literary and medical writers describe them. Though it cannot be said of Continental Europe, in England, few people took measures as extreme as those of the flagellants, who sought to prevent pestilence by flogging themselves publicly in a penitential frenzy.[6] However, a concern with the power of pestilence did encourage moral questioning in England.

Siegfried Wenzel draws the following conclusions concerning the influence of plague on medieval literature:

> As the analysis of the Grimestone verses has shown, the experience of the Black Death and succeeding plagues cannot be credited with producing anything new in English lyrics on death. [Instead]...the

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[6] In Europe, and especially on the Continent, groups of flagellants roamed about, whipping themselves while pleading for God's mercy. Various flagellant sermons tell of Christ's anger over sin, and warn of great punishment as they admonish the sinners to reform and do penance.

Consult also George Deaux, The Black Death: 1347 180-85, and Philip Ziegler, The Black Death 86-97. Cf. the use of plague as a social and political metaphor in Peter Barnes' Red Noses.

> plague experience invariably led to criticism of <u>moral</u> failures.
> (150-51)

Wenzel points out that the "moralistic tendencies" of Langland and Chaucer led them to a criticism of these moral failures (151-52). Therefore, while these writers' references to plague are few, their concern with its impact was strong.

In the twentieth century, popular conceptions of life in the Middle Ages tend to characterize medieval people as barbaric and superstitious, far removed in time and culture from our own, so-called age of high technology. A study of contemporary medical and moral writing about Black Death, however, indicates that medieval English authors consistently turned neither to panic nor magic, but rather to a logical and orderly cosmology capable of reconciling the horrors of this disaster within the framework of other experiences. As overwhelming as plague may have been in the fourteenth century, the lack of references to it in literature supports the notion that these people were not only more resilient than popular twentieth-century beliefs about the Middle Ages might suggest, but as capable as any age of interpreting the meaning of calamity. As examples from the moral interpretation of plague have shown, English writers turned to the Bible as a source-book. Even today, as George Steiner observes, twentieth

century writers continue to use the Bible as a pattern book, reflected in the style and structure of their writing ("Good Books" 94-95).[7] Rather than disrupt order, plague became part of a well-established order: a disease among others in need of treatment and, like other collective disasters, a metaphor for disorder.

In both Middle English and twentieth-century literature, art endures through crisis, unlike the mutable civilizations it represents. In this respect, the work of literary artists serves future generations along with the records of medical inquiry, transforming the horror of epidemics into a more stable and permanent picture. Images of plague in Middle English writing become records of the biblical and ancient precedents on which they are based. The only distinction plague references claim is their addition to older tales retold by contemporary writers, reworked for a contemporary

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[7] Steiner explains the persistent force of biblical patterning on modern writers in these terms:

> The shaping universality of the scriptural code significantly outlasts the general force of religion. The God of the philosophers and of the enlightened laity may have died in the nineteenth century. The Biblical God and the idiom and the world image generated by his narrative presence continue formidably alive and instrumental in the writings of Thomas Hardy, of Thomas Mann, of Gide, of Proust. We would not have the prose cadences of Hemingway without Ecclesiastes, or the dynastic sorrows of Faulkner without Chronicles and the Books of Kings" ("Review" 94).

generation of readers as Chaucer has artfully done in the Pardoner's Tale.

In time, of course, permanent cures are found for great epidemics; but the power of those epidemics is not forgotten by literary writers. Since the Middle Ages, plague has served as metaphor for later writers who also wished to comment on the depravity of the human condition. While the disease of plague was transient, the horror that lingered from it survives. The disastrous effects of sin could spread, causing evil times, in much the same way that the plague bacillus hides in the background of Albert Camus' The Plague as a metaphor for the spread of political tyranny:

> And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperilled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city.
>
> (Trans. Justin O'Brien 250)

Yet, as the examples from Middle English medical and moral writing on plague demonstrate, neither medical nor moral interpretations solved the problem of

plague.[8] It disappeared, not as the result of medical or moral remediation, but through the work of Nature, which survives in the framework of a larger cosmology. The words of the nineteenth-century epidemiologist J. F. C. Hecker, cited in Chapter Five, provide a fitting deposition for this study:

> We must bear in mind also, that human science and art appear particularly weak in great pestilences, because they have to contend with the powers of nature, of which they have no knowledge.
> (The Epidemics of the Middle Ages, trans. Babington 50)

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[8] Ivan Illich thus questions the mid-twentieth century popular belief in medical utopias in these terms:

> After a century of pursuit of medical utopia, and contrary to current conventional wisdom, medical services have not been important in producing the changes in life expectancy that have occurred. A vast amount of contemporary clinical care is incidental to the curing of disease.
> (Medical Nemesis 5)

The discovery of the plague bacillus and its effective treatment with antibiotics came about long after any major outbreak of the disease, not through medical intervention, but through an increase in natural immunity and a decrease in the virility of the bacillus (consult Colin McEvedy, "The Bubonic Plague," and J. F. D. Shrewsbury, A History of the Bubonic Plague).

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