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Introduction

Literature *and* Medicine in the Middle Ages and Renaissance

Recent scholarship on medicine and literature has yielded new understandings of the intermingling of medical and literary discourses, and particularly of the ways that medical concepts, metaphors, and thematics can function within literary texts. However, despite the considerable body of work that has built up since George Rousseau's seminal 1981 "state of the field" article, "the 'and' problem"—the question of what sort of relationship the *and* in *literature and medicine* denotes—persists (Jordanova 342). As the bioethicist Catherine Belling has pointed out, it is far from transparent what "'literature and medicine' mean[s], and to whom" (vii).

New work on literature and medicine, including scholarship undertaken through increasingly prominent approaches such as medical humanities and disability studies, promises to continue working through the "and" problem.[1] Although it has been argued that the logical underpinnings of medical humanities and of disability studies are mutually exclusive (Herndl 593), the category of medical humanities is becoming ever more inclusive of disability studies approaches (Dolan 1). Both disability studies and medical humanities, though, like the greater field of "literature and medicine," have been largely focused on modern, biomedicalized culture (Squier 335). While such a presentist focus has made sense within the field of medical humanities—which was developed as a part of the training of today's physicians—this almost exclusive concentration on the modern developed world has brought with it many unexamined presumptions about genre, narration, authority, and the boundaries of discipline.

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This special issue is structured in three parts that shed light on the multidimensionality of the interplay between medicine and literature in the medieval and early modern periods. It proposes to rethink this relationship from three vantage points: the phenomenon of cross-fertilization, characteristic of earlier periods; the use of medical discourse in literary texts as an interpretative tool; and the use of literature as a strategy of self-care.

1. Medicine and Literature and the Phenomenon of Cross-Fertilization

The first part of this issue considers a widespread phenomenon in medieval and early modern times: the cross-fertilization between medical discourse and literary practice. Partly for didactic purposes (i.e., in order to facilitate the memorization of basic scientific concepts), early medical treatises were frequently rendered into verse. There are many examples of this practice, but the most illustrious is without a doubt Avicenna's *Medical Poem*, which reads as a poetic summary of his encyclopedic textbook, *Al Qanun Fi Al-Tibb* (*The Canon of Medicine*). From such practice a specific genre came into existence, which generally borrowed its content from medicine and its form and rhetorical strategies from literature. Various aspects of this cross-fertilization phenomenon are discussed here as well as the uses made of it by several early physicians and poets. Taking as examples two medieval texts, one in verse by Gilles de Corbeil, the other in prose by Gentile da Foligno, Maggie Fritz-Morkin interrogates the specificity of what she calls "uro/poiesis," whereas Colette Winn examines the ways in which, in his *Palais des Curieux*, Béroalde de Verville makes use of a hybrid form (his medically themed short story reads like a case history) in order to revisit and give a new meaning to an old medical debate.

In "Poetry and Poetics in Gilles of Corbeil and Gentile da Foligno's *Carmina de urinarum iudiciis*," Maggie Fritz-Morkin interprets the conjunction of medicine and literature in a perhaps unexpected site: the uroscopy flask. Fritz-Morkin demonstrates how Gilles of Corbeil and other high medieval writers present their medical poetry *as poetry*, and how Gentile da Foligno's later prose commentary continues to position Gilles's poems as works that derive some of their truth-telling power from their verse form. She thus demonstrates that the *and* of "literature *and* medicine," like the *and* of "text and commentary," serves to amplify rhetorical efficacy through textual dialogue.

Colette Winn's "Béroalde de Verville, médecin conteur, et la seconde vie de la Querelle de l'Abstinente (1612)" takes as its object a specifically literary intervention in a medical debate that appeared already to have been resolved by the time the physician and writer Béroalde de Verville included it in his *Palais des curieux*: how long can a fasting woman survive without food or drink? Winn deftly exposes the currents of pleasure and surprise, excess and moderation,

that underlie this narrative, highlighting the primacy of *curiosity* in this self-consciously literary treatment of a medical question. She thus demonstrates that the structure of Béroalde de Verville's anecdote of the *abstinente* mirrors the author's larger project and its revindication of the spirit of free inquiry: even a closed medical debate remains open to literary investigation.

2. Medicine in Literature as an Interpretative Tool

The second part attempts to elucidate the unexpected or even disruptive presence of medical discourse in literary texts and the purpose behind its integration in literary discourses. The three studies included here show that this intrusion may take all kinds of forms. For example, in Joseph R. Johnson's study of beast fables, it appears in the profusion of medical metaphors and images and the medical knowledge expressed by the animals. Matteo Pace describes it as an intertext based on Avicenna's theory of *forma specifica* which permeates Guido Guinizzelli's theory of nobility. Kathleen Long, for her part, argues that it seeps into the story of the *Hermaphrodites* as an intriguing banquet scene. In all three cases, the unexpected medical discourse functions as an interpretative tool, that is as a strategy aimed at directing the reader's attention to the "real" message conveyed in these works.

Joseph R. Johnson's "The Physician's Species: Knowledge and Power in the Animal Clinic" explores the potential of the literature-medicine relationship to compound power differentials, especially when the tropes and stock characters of "beast literature" are allowed to run wild in a medical setting. Predators become patients or pose as physicians, creating an unstable dynamic that Johnson terms "the animal clinic": "an uncertain space that is produced when a surprising measure of genuine medical knowledge circulates alongside predatory desire, disclosing the frightening play of power that animates the medical scene." Through close readings of several of Marie de France's fables and a handful of stories from the *Roman de Renart*—including their manuscript contexts—he demonstrates the "dramatic reversals of meaning" in these medical scenes, tying them both to feudal relations of power and to alternate ways of knowing and modes of reading.

In "'Come vertute in petra preziosa': An Avicennian Thread in Guinizzelli's Theory of Nobility," Matteo Pace explores how the "scientificity" of thirteenth-century Italian vernacular lyric establishes poetry as a "battlefield" in which ideas about natural philosophy are tested and contested. More specifically, he uncovers how Avicenna's theory of *forma specifica*, as discussed in medical commentaries by Taddeo Alderotti, emerges as a crucial intertext through which to understand the poet Guido Guinizzelli's innovative conception of the lover's nobility. Positing the relationship between the two Bolognese writers' texts

not as the direct influence of a source, but as a parallel working through of a shared methodological problem, Pace sheds new light on the ways both medicine and literature served as instruments with which medieval Italian intellectuals sought to untangle "the webs of the natural world."

"In Dining with the Hermaphrodites: Courtly Excess and Dietary Manuals in Early Modern France," Kathleen Long interrogates the presence and meaning of the banquet scene in *The Island of Hermaphrodites* (1605), a text which is usually read as a satire of the excesses at the court of Henry III of France. Various aspects in this scene such as the emphasis on moderation and the maintenance of health that seem totally out of place in a work supposedly condemning excess lead her to believe that this episode is meant to be read as a dietary narrative reminiscent of the long tradition of dietary regimens beginning with Galen's own regimen. Her close reading further demonstrates that this episode takes after the dietary advice of the day, particularly that of Joseph Du Chesne who, in his *Pourtraict de la santé*, a work contemporary of *The Island of Hermaphrodites*, describes diet "not only as a means of balancing the bodily humors and preserving health, but also as a way of assuring better moral character." In view of the affinities between these two works and the cultural and political climate of early modern France, she concludes that the dietary discourse embedded in the Hermaphrodites' story of excess, by no means anodyne, is a means to call attention to the moral component of this political satire, that is the need for restoration of order by moral correction.

3. Literature as Medicine: Strategies of Self-Care

Considering what literature can offer to medicine, the last part takes as a case in point the illness story as a tool for healing. Two examples of this genre are taken here, the biographical narrative and lyrics composed by the fourteenth-century chronicler Gilles li Muisis about his loss of sight and subsequent cataract surgery, and the eclectic treatise by the fifteenth-century hearing-impaired Castilian nun Teresa de Cartagena. Yonsoo Kim illuminates the exceptional aspects of Teresa's writing at a time when it would have been unheard of for a woman to take the pen in order to speak of her torment as a physically challenged person. Julie Singer, on the other hand, focuses her attention on the methodological issues and the inevitable limitations of the illness narrative.

In "Chronicle Conditions," Julie Singer explores the illness story by Gilles li Muisis, as it is told in the biographical piece placed at the end of his *Annales* and in his vernacular lyrics. Both the narrative following the chronicle and the poems describe in detail the cataract surgery performed on li Muisis in 1351 and its results. Such personal accounts are difficult to come by and are therefore invaluable testimonies of the early beginnings of surgery. The use of writing and

in particular of the narrative form to overcome chaos and make sense of being ill provides a window to the origins of narrative medicine, a field of inquiry that has enjoyed a resurgence of interest in recent decades. Singer focuses on various issues raised by these texts, for example the disturbing presence of an autobiographical narrative about eyesight impairment in a chronicle, a genre whose reliability is based precisely on eyewitnessing. Another type of issue is the difficulty encountered by the narrator/poet as he tries to reconcile the tensions emergent from the multiple disruptions that the disabling illness brings to human life, including, on the one hand, "chronotype disruption,"[2] the changed relation to time that comes with progressive bodily deterioration, but also li Muisis's focus on ruptured time (then/now) as he writes from a simultaneously blind and sighted point of view; and, on the other hand, biographical disruption as the lived experience of disability elicits questions around the mutability and the agency of the self. Was it the right thing to do, the storyteller wonders, to seek surgical correction of God-given blindness? Should he return to his normal activities once he recovers his sight? Curiously, li Muisis did not resume his writing after he recovered his sight.

Yonsoo Kim analyzes the interplay of literature, religion, and medicine—and of gender, ethnicity, class, and ability—in "Teresa de Cartagena's Illness and Disability as Embodied Knowledge." Adopting an intersectional framework, Kim argues that the fifteenth-century deaf writer Teresa de Cartagena finds, in the categorical intersections she inhabits, the heuristic tools for her own literary self-fashioning. Though Teresa's disabled body changes her sense of self, the writer fashions a new self in her *Arboleda de los enfermos* (ca. 1475), rewriting her body as a source of power and as a marker of a redefined status that has altered the preexisting calculus of gender, ethno-religious identity, and familial lineage. Kim thus historicizes the notion of intersectionality: grounding the concept in a nuanced study of premodern power dynamics, she underlines the essential role of literature in the contestation of the body's power to shape social identity.

What, ultimately, does a specific focus on medieval and early modern European contexts bring to the broader study of literature and medicine? Each essay in this volume invites the reader to entertain new interpretative possibilities—including the proposition that "the 'and' problem" is not a problem at all, or that medieval or early modern "literature" and "medicine" configure and conjoin themselves in a way that a simple "and" cannot capture. These studies offer a window onto earlier iterations of medicine/literature that are capacious enough to encompass each other, even to instantiate each other, as a site where textual culture, institutional power, and lived experience meet.

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NOTES

1. On these rapidly developing fields of study see Jones, Wear, and Freedman, *Health Humanities Reader*. See also Oxford Bibliographies Online, s.v. "Disability," by Rebecca Sanchez, last modified November 29, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199827251-0131.

2. On the concept of the chronotope, see Bakhtin; on chronotope disruption as a tool to approach the illness narrative, see Gomersall and Madill.

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