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Moral and medical 'prescriptions' in a fifteenth-century Sacrament play

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The purpose of this article is to investigate the manner in which Christ, perceived as present in the eucharistic host, is portrayed as the Suffering Physician in the "quack doctor" scene in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. The dramatist's specific linguistic choices in this scene appear to have been made in an attempt to create images of and associations with the Passion and other perceived forms of healing. The many references to medicinal plants, which are particularly significant in relation to the medieval idea of Christ's role as the spiritual or moral Physician of humanity are considered in detail.

Mediese en morele 'voorskrifte' in 'n vyftiende-eeuse Sakramentspel

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die manier waarop Christus, wat deur middel van transubstansiasie as teenwoordig in die Nagmaal beskou word, in die "kwaksalwer"-toneel van die *Play of the Sacrament* van Croxton in Engeland, as die Lydende Geneesheer voorgestel word. Dit blyk dat die dramaturg spesifieke taalkundige keuses in hierdie toneel gedoen het om beelde van die Passie en ander vorms van genesing, asook assosiasies daarmee, te skep. Die veelvuldige verwysings na geneeskragtige plante is besonder betekenisvol in die lig van die middeleeuse konsep van Christus as die geestelike of sedelike Geneesheer van die mensdom word ondersoek.

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As is the case with any medieval literature (or other art), sacrament plays reveal a great deal about the medieval Catholic mentality. In this context, this study will focus on the portrayal of Christ as the Suffering Physician (perceived as a Real Presence in the Eucharistic host by means of transubstantiation) in the comic "quack doctor" scene in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. Christ is to be perceived as suffering in this play, as there is a symbolic re-enactment or reminder of His Passion involving a consecrated host (as in the Mass). He is also to be viewed as a physician, as His Passion was often seen and portrayed as the ultimate act of healing for the souls of humankind, offering salvation, the ultimate cure. Furthermore, in the drama, physical and/or spiritual healing takes place as a result of miracles performed by the power of the host (in other words, Christ).

Despite strong criticism of the "quack doctor" scene in the past, on both doctrinal and dramatic grounds (Craig 1955: 326-7, for example), it has recently received more positive treatment (Mills 1983: 150-1; Homan 1986: 332-4; McMurray Gibson 1989: 36-8). A single recent article (Scherb 1990: 161-71) discusses the scene in relation to healing and notes the strong *Christus Medicus* theme (Christ as the physical and spiritual Physician of humankind) in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*[1] as a whole. It is therefore not our intention to repeat Scherb's argument, but rather to illustrate the extent to which the theme is developed in the frequently neglected "quack doctor" scene (lines 525-652).

A number of scholars, such as Hardin Craig (1955: 326), Norman Davis (1970: lxxv) and John Coldewey (1993: 274) believe the comic "quack doctor" scene (with Master Brundyche, the physician, and his assistant Colle) to be a later addition to the play. Whether or not this is the case, the scene is well-placed in order to convey a pointed message concerning Christ as the true Suffering Physician. Thus the Croxton Play, and this scene in particular, aims not merely to entertain its audience, but also to instruct them. This is frequently the case in medieval literature. In the "General Prologue" to Chaucer's

1 All quotations from the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* are taken from *Early English drama: an anthology* (Coldewey 1993: 277-305).

Canterbury Tales (Benson 1987: 36), for instance, the genial Host suggests that the pilgrim who tells the best tale — a tale which brings pleasure ("solas") to its audience as well as being significant in meaning ("sentence") — will win the competition and a celebratory supper:

> And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle —
> That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
> Tales of best sentence and moost solaas —
> Shal have a soper at oure aller cost.
> (lines 796-799)

The Croxton Play (written in the late fifteenth century, after 1461) has as its central action a physical attack on the host (communion wafer) which, in the predominantly Catholic society of medieval England, was believed to become during the Mass the real body of Christ (referred to as the Real Presence) by means of transubstantiation.

The play opens with "banns" which give a short description of what is to be played. At the beginning of the play we are introduced to Aristorius, a rich Christian merchant; Isoder, his chaplain, and Peter Paul, his clerk. We are then introduced to a group of Jews: Jonathas, Jason, Jasdon, Maphat and Malchus, among whom Jonathas is the dominant character.

The Jewish characters discuss the fact that they do not believe in the transubstantiation of the host as the Christians do and decide on a plan to prove their point. Jonathas then bargains with Aristorius to steal a host for them. Aristorius at first protests that he can not possibly do such a thing, but eventually agrees, for one hundred pounds (an enormous sum of money). The Jews then proceed to torture the host thus procured in order to disprove the Catholic belief in transubstantiation. They first pierce the host, making five wounds, thus paralleling the Five Wounds of Christ. The host bleeds, and then sticks to Jonathas's hand. His associates cannot remove it, and eventually nail it to a post in an attempt to pull his hand free, but his hand simply separates from his arm and remains attached to the host.

This is the point at which the comic "quack doctor" scene is interposed. Here Colle and his master, Doctor Brundyche of Brabant, appear and discuss the doctor's skill in healing. The long and detailed list of the curative abilities he claims resembles those in "quack doc-

tor" scenes in folk plays (Scherb 1990: 167). Doctor Brundyche offers his services to Jonathas, but is chased away.

The Jews then continue their torture of the host (still attached to Jonathas's hand) by wrapping it in cloth and boiling it in a cauldron of oil, upon which the oil becomes bloody. They then attempt to destroy the host by burning it in an oven, but the oven explodes. A vision of Christ in the form of a child with the bloody wounds of the Passion then appears and addresses them. They repent their sins (spiritual healing) and Jonathas is physically healed when he places his arm in the cauldron at Christ's instruction. The Bishop is called and the vision of Christ disappears. A procession then follows to return the host to the church. Aristorius and Isoder see it pass and Aristorius, guessing the cause, confesses to Isoder that he stole the host. They follow the procession to the church where Aristorius confesses his sin to the Bishop. He is ordered thenceforth to live for good deeds alone and never to buy or sell as a merchant again. Isoder, who had charge of the church from which the host was stolen, is chastised and ordered to take better care of the communion hosts in future. The Jews then confess their sins and are baptised, whereafter the play ends with the singing of the *Te Deum laudamus*.

The position of the "quack doctor" scene in the play clearly identifies it with the folk drama tradition as well as supporting the notion of Christ as the true Physician (both physical and spiritual) of humankind. The doctor was traditionally a character in sword dances and would usually come forward to resurrect whichever character was "beheaded" (Chambers 1903: 206-7). In the Croxton Play the doctor enters, metaphorically speaking, after Christ's "death", that is after the symbolic re-enactment of His Passion by means of the torture of the host, and after Jonathas's hand has been severed. However, Master Brundyche neither restores Jonathas's hand nor "resurrects" Christ in the form of the host. It is Christ who symbolically resurrects Himself (when the oven explodes and the image of the wounded Christ-child appears) and who then leads the Jews to spiritual healing (in the medieval Catholic view) when they repent their sins and convert to Christianity. Furthermore, Christ also heals Jonathas's hand, thus demonstrating His superiority over all earthly physicians, whom Master Brundyche represents. Thus, as Lascombes (1998: 269) points

out, the dramatist's use of the "notoriously incompetent [...] folk doctor demonstrates the absurd irrelevance of any paltry human medicine to heal spiritual damage".

Herbal lore was used by both professional and folk-healers for almost every disorder (Finucane 1977: 62). Lay herbalists of both genders were to be found in a range of social classes. The Arab invasion of Persia during the seventh century had greatly increased the use of plants for healing purposes in Europe and England. Instead of destroying the civilised culture which they had found, the Arabs had absorbed it and brought a number of its refinements to Europe by means of invasion through southern Spain. As a result, Greek and other pharmaceutical texts were introduced after being translated via Arabic into Latin. Thus European medical practitioners of the time were introduced to lengthy lists of medicinal plants when they were trained in the new medical schools (Landsberg 1995: 4). Monastery gardens often included an infirmary garden, and the infirmarian can be seen as like a nursing-home administrator, employing gardeners and making use of apothecary prescriptions or consulting physicians when his own remedies proved insufficient. However, "God was considered the supreme physician" (Landsberg 1995: 38). Thus the difference between natural and supernatural was not always distinct in the medieval mentality and the Church played a significant role in developing and managing medicine during the period. By forbidding the majority of pagan healing practices, the Church kept medicine within the bounds of a single religion (Krzywicka 2000).

Physicians were often viewed in a negative light in the Middle Ages. The clergy, in particular, had reason to dislike the medical profession since those clerics in charge of the shrines of saints who were claimed to have healing abilities were in competition with physicians. As a result those responsible for recording miraculous healings often demonstrated a negative attitude when referring to medical practices not involving religion. Also, the sick who visited shrines had often consulted physicians first and if they were subsequently "cured" at a shrine were only too happy to derogate the physicians' efforts. Not only did the clergy consistently emphasise the superiority of sacred healing over profane healing; the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, as well as repeated diocesan legislation in England during the thirteenth

century, constantly reminded Christians that spiritual health was more important than physical health (Finucane 1977: 63-4).

Another reason why physicians were disliked was that their remedies were often useless. They used a number of means to treat their patients, many of which seem ridiculous to today's scientifically advanced world. The movements of the planets were believed to influence the prognosis for a patient and astrological computations were used to determine the appropriate times to change or commence treatment. Such astrological calculations were often combined with Galen's (129-199 AD) instruction on the bodily "elements" or "qualities" and "humours" (Rubin 1974: 191).

Certain diagnostic tools, on the other hand, are still in use today For instance, urine samples were often taken in the Middle Ages to assist in diagnosis. Manuscripts with colour charts indicated all the possible hues of urine (twenty to twenty-two), arranged neatly from lighter yellows to darker yellows and browns, with suitable diagnostic information (Finucane 1977: 62). Medical science had specific rules for handling and interpreting such samples. For instance, the sample had to be taken in the morning, the first time the patient urinated that day, and it was not to be left standing for too long. Primarily, samples of urine were believed to provide information concerning the arteries, bladder and liver (Piltz 1978: 157). Thus, although the urine sample was a tried and trusted tool in diagnosis, it lends no authority whatsoever to Doctor Brundyche that he and Colle seek a urine sample from Jonathas,

> In a pott yf yt please yow to pysse,
> He can tell yf yow be curable.
>
> (lines 648-649)

Not only could such a urine sample not possibly offer information concerning the condition of a hand, but there is no need for diagnosis in Jonathas's case, as his severed hand is patently obvious to all.

Another common complaint against physicians in the Middle Ages was the high fees they demanded. Finucane (1977: 64-5) states that almost every collection of miracle stories (written mainly by clerics in charge of shrines of healing) contains some version of the Biblical narrative of the woman who spent nearly all her money on phy-

sicians but was not cured (Luke 8: 43-48).[2] In an attempt to prevent clerical practitioners from financially abusing people through the medical services which they provided, Pope Innocent II (d.1143) barred the clergy from the study of medicine in 1139, and in 1163 the Council of Tours banned monks from teaching or practising medicine as well as from absenting themselves from their monasteries for more than two months. It was even thought that physicians were so avaricious that they prescribed gold as a medicine in order to entitle themselves to charge outrageously high fees (Rubin 1974: 193). Both the fees charged by physicians (and their love of gold) were denounced, not only at shrines of healing, but also by authors such as Langland and Chaucer.

Concerning his Doctour of Phisik in the "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* (Benson 1987: 30), Chaucer states with strong irony:

> Of his diete mesurable was he,
> For it was of no superfluitee,
> But of greet norissyng and digestible.
> His studie was but litel on the Bible.
> In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,
> Lyned with taffata and with sendal.
> And yet he was but esy of dispence;
> He kept that he wan in pestilence.
> For gold in phisik is a cordial,
> Therefore he lovede gold in special.
> (lines 435-444)

Thus Chaucer's doctor follows a healthy diet which is moderate and full of nourishment, but spends little time on the healthful spiritual nourishment of the Bible. He wears rich silken clothes and keeps all the money he earns from the suffering of others during plague years. He also professes to love gold as a medicine for the heart ("cordial"), but has an arrangement with the apothecary which enables them both to profit by such prescriptions (lines 425-427)! It therefore appears that he is guilty of the deadly sin of avarice. Instead of being a good medicine for the heart, gold may be seen here as actually leading to spiritual disease, by means of the deadly sin of avarice.

2 Biblical references are taken from the *New Catholic edition of the Holy Bible* (Catholic Bible 1957).

This is in contrast with one of Chaucer's touchstone characters, the Parson, who although he is not financially well off is spiritually rich and healthy:

> A good man was ther of religioun,
> And was a povre persoun of a toun,
> But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk.
> (lines 477-479)

In passus twenty of *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (Schmidt 1978: 256), Langland also condemns physicians for their love of gold and notes that a doctor's aid is ultimately futile since death is inevitable:

> And Lif fleigh for feere to Phisik after helpe,
> And bisoughte hym of socour, and of his salve hadde,
> And gaf hym gold good woon that gladede his herte -
> And thei gyven hym ageyn a glazene howve.
> Lyf leeved that lechecraft lette sholde Elde,
> And dryven awey deeth with dyas and drogges.
> And Elde auntred hym on Lyf — and at the laste he hitte
> A phisicien with a furred hood, that he fel in a palsie,
> And there dyed that doctour er thre dayes after.
> 'Now I se,' seide Lif, 'that surgerie ne phisik
> May noght a myte availle to medle ayein Elde.'
> (lines 169-179)

Even as late as Shakespeare's time (1564-1616), the distrust of physicians is still apparent. In *Timon of Athens* (Oliver 1959: 115) this distrust is expressed when Timon comments to a bandit:

> ...for there is boundless theft
> In limited professions...
> Trust not the physician;
> His antidotes are poison, and he slays
> More than you rob.
> (lines 430, 431 and 434-436)

In the light of this widespread negative view of physicians, thus, the "quack doctor" scene in the Croxton play can justifiably be seen as representing a corrupt earthly contrast to the actions of the true Suffering Physician, Christ. There are grotesque parallels not only

with the Passion, but also with the sacrament of the eucharist. In referring to his master, Colle states:

> Mayster Brendyche of Braban,
> I tell yow he ys that same man,
> Called the most famous phesy[cy]an
> That ever sawe uryne.
>
> (lines 533-536)

The reference to this earthly physician (possibly a quack) as the most famous would, in the context of the play, probably be intented to bring to mind the belief that the true physician (and the most famous in medieval Christian society) is Christ. It also becomes clear that the earthly physician must rely on outward, physical elements in order to make a diagnosis and then attempt to heal a patient at a purely physical level. By contrast, Christ can see the true spiritual nature of every person and heal the soul, thus ensuring its eternal life and health, not merely the temporal health of the body which will eventually die.

Colle also states concerning Master Brundyche:

> He syttyth with sum tapstere in the spence.
>
> (line 531)

This image implies that the doctor may be guilty of the deadly sins of lechery (lust), gluttony and sloth (which drunkenness can lead to) and may therefore not be spiritually healthy himself. Furthermore it reminds one of the wine served at the Last Supper and the eucharistic wine used at Mass (a reminder of the blood of Christ, shed to heal humanity of sin). However, in the context of the tavern wine is put to a "low" and unholy use, while in the Church the wine is holy and used for "higher" purposes such as the eucharist, which conduces to spiritual health.

The doctor is then described in a passage full of double meanings:

> He ys allso a boone-setter;
> I knowe no man go the better;
> In every tauerne he ys detter;
> That ys a good tokenyng.
>
> (lines 541-544)

A "boone-setter" can be a surgeon — or a dice-player (Coldewey 1993: 292). The *Oxford paperback dictionary* (Hawkins 1988: 74) gives three meanings for "better": "of a more excellent kind", or "partly or fully recovered from an illness", or "a person who bets". Coldewey (1993: 292) glosses the word as "better (and a bettor)". Furthermore, "tokenyng" can mean "a sign" or "the use of bet markers" (Coldewey 1993: 292) but according to the *Middle English dictionary* also refers to "the sign of the cross, the Christian emblem; the sign of the cross made with the hand" (Lewis 1996: 850). All these sub-textual references to gambling recall the soldiers who gambled at the foot of the cross to determine who would win Christ's robe, a scene which features in most medieval plays of the Passion and, in the sixteenth pageant of the Chester Plays (lines 25-50), is enacted with the substitution of Jews for the Roman soldiers (Thomas 1966: 115). This description of the doctor therefore aligns him with the negative image of those who were temporally responsible for Christ's death. (The belief that all humanity is guilty of Christ's death through the sins of each individual would have been understood by the educated portion of the original medieval audience, but presumably not foregrounded during the performance of a play such as the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*).

A further set of images associated with the crucifixion is then adduced in connection with the doctor when Colle exclaims:

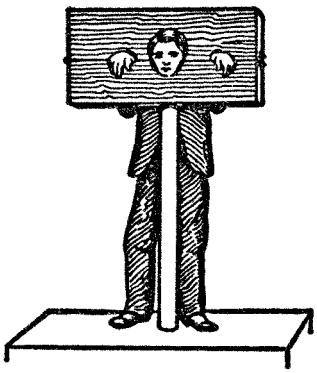
> Yf any man can hym aspye
> Led hym to the pylleri.
> In fayth, yt shall be don
>
> (lines 562-564)

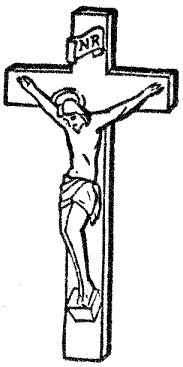
and

> A therde-bare gowne and a rent hoose;
> He spekyt[h] never good matere nor purpoose;
> To the pyllere ye hym led!
>
> (lines 570-572)

According to Webster's (1954: 396) *Comprehensive reference dictionary and encyclopedia* a pillory is "a wooden frame supported by an upright post, having holes through which the head and hands of a person exposed to disgrace were passed and secured" (see diagrams) and

to be pilloried is to be "expose[d] to public disgrace or abuse", while the *Oxford paperback dictionary* (Hawkins 1988: 611) describes the pillory as "a wooden framework with holes for the head and hands, into which offenders were formerly locked for exposure to public ridicule". This creates a noteworthy, if grotesque, parallel with the crucifixion of Christ. When He was crucified, Christ was exposed to public abuse, ridicule and disgrace, as is recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 27: 27-31; Mark 15: 16-20; Luke 22: 63-65 and John 19: 1-3). Furthermore, the stance of someone secured in a pillory would be roughly similar to that of someone being crucified, with the arms extended outwards on either side of the body. What is more, both these punitive structures were made of wood. This is relevant in terms of the medieval notion of *figura*, whereby for example the Ark, which saved Noah and his family, may be seen as a partial prefiguring of the cross, which saves humanity. The correspondence between the two instruments of punishment must have been noted in medieval England as well, since according to the *Middle English dictionary* (Kuhn 1983: 932), the word "pillory" was also used to refer to: "a cross for crucifixion, especially the cross of Christ".





The stance of someone secured to a pillory would be similar to that of someone being crucified (Gove 1961: 545 and 1716).

The idea of the communion host, Christ's crucifixion and medieval forms of public punishment are similarly brought together in the "Coliphizacio" ("Buffeting") play in the *Towneley Mystery Cycle* (Cawley 1958: 83) when Cayphas says concerning Christ:

> Shall I neuer ete bred to that he be stald
> In the stokys.
>
> (lines 202-203)

The *Oxford paperback dictionary* (Hawkins 1988: 805) defines the stocks as "a wooden framework with holes for the legs of a seated person, used like the pillory". Clearly, however, the choice of the pillory in the Croxton Play is even more significant in terms of crucifixion imagery, due to the upright stance which it enforces.

While Christ did not deserve the punishment meted out to Him, He accepted it in order to save the souls of all humanity. Doctor Brundyche would no doubt deserve the punishment of being pilloried and he and all humanity also deserve the punishment which Christ suffered. The medieval audience would have been aware that all humanity (including themselves) is sinful and deserves the forfeiture of the soul, but that Christ's death created the possibility for spiritual health and salvation for all.

In the next portion of the scene, various medicinal herbs and remedies are mentioned. Colle and Doctor Brundyche discuss one of the doctor's patients and her treatment. Brundyche claims to have given her a drink including "oxennell" (line 586), which contains vinegar, and "letwyce" (line 587), which was considered to be bitter, thus reminding one of the drink which Christ was offered shortly before His death on the cross (Matthew 27: 48, Mark 15: 36, John 19: 29). Also, the list of herbs contained in the medicinal concoction is full of latent meanings.

According to the *Middle English dictionary* (Kuhn 1981: 539), "oxennell" (line 586), or oximel, is a "preparation of vinegar and honey, often with other herbal ingredients, principally used as a medicinal drink or component". Honey is one of the symbols of the Passion, as the disciples offered Christ fish and honey in Luke 24: 42 when He appeared to them after the resurrection (Lurker 1973: 183 & 474). The resurrection and later events are not strictly part of Christ's Passion, but they often form part of Passion plays and are therefore considered here as part of the Passion. Vinegar can also be viewed as a symbol of the Passion as Christ was offered sour wine or vinegar while He hung on the cross. Thus these medicinal components of Doctor Brundyche's

potion contain a number of latent references to Christ's Passion, creating a connection between the Passion and medicine or healing in the play. Some of these references warrant further discussion, such as "scamoly" (line 586) and "pympernelle" (line 587) as well as lettuce and sage.

Webster's third new international dictionary of the English language (Gove 1961: 2025) defines "scamoly" or scammony as "a twining plant [...] having [...] white flowers"; "the resin obtained as an exudation from the living root of scammony or prepared by extracting the dried root with alcohol and precipitating with water and used as a drastic cathartic". The *Middle English dictionary* also defines "scamoly" as the "root of scammony [...] or a gum resin obtained therefrom, used in purgative medicines" (Lewis 1986: 164). The fact that the plant is mixed with alcohol and water reminds one of the eucharist (and of the Last Supper) where wine is served mixed with water, due to the fact that water (and blood) ran from Christ's side when it was pierced at the crucifixion (Harris 1992: 5). According to *Webster's third new international dictionary of the English language* (Gove 1961: 1845) a cathartic or purgative has a "cleansing or purifying" effect, "especially from sin or sinful inclinations"; it can also mean "freeing legally from fault or blame: clearing from guilt". Thus on the physical level scamoly can cleanse the body of unwanted matter, but on the spiritual level (in the context of the play) the audience is reminded of the cleansing or purgative effect which Christ's death has on the souls of humanity. Christ's crucifixion may also be seen in legal terms as releasing humanity from the fault or blame incurred at the Fall through sin.[3]

"Pympernelle", which according to the *Middle English dictionary* (Kuhn 1983: 938) was also occasionally mixed with water and/or wine to form medicinal potions, is a root which was formerly used for its diaphoretic and diuretic properties (Gove 1961: 1717) and enjoyed

3 The idea of Christ's having legally released humanity from the fault or blame incurred through sin at the Fall touches on a complex concept which has been surrounded by controversy since the twelfth century: the idea of the devil's rights in the redemption. Simply put, it was determined by the Church Fathers (Saint Augustine in particular) that God decided to win humanity back from the devil by means of justice rather than power so as to set a good example for humanity. He did this by allowing the devil to carry out the unjust act of killing the sinless Christ (disguised by means of His Incarnation in human flesh). As a result, the devil forfeited the souls of the faithful (Marx 1995: 8-11).

much renown in medicine (Grieve 1995-2002). *Webster's third new international dictionary of the English language* defines a diaphoretic as a substance "having the power to increase perspiration" (Gove 1961: 624) while a diuretic is "an agent that increases the flow of urine" (Gove 1961: 662).

Thus, both scamoly and pimpernel are forms of purgative. On one level the playwright could be having the quack doctor use all these references to purgatives in an attempt at low humour. While these plants have the power or potential to purge the physical body, on a more spiritual level Christ (through the Passion) is the spiritual physician with the power to purge the soul of sin.

The reference to lettuce is more significant than may at first be apparent. In the Middle Ages "letuse" meant, according to the *Middle English dictionary* (Kuhn 1972: 931), "in biblical translation and commentary: the bitter herbs of the Passover meal". Thus, the reference to lettuce can be understood on the level of the herb's medicinal value or in relation to its religious connotations. In connoting the Passover meal it recalls the Last Supper which Christ shared with His disciples, which (in Christian understanding) may simultaneously be seen as the final Passover and the first celebration of the eucharist. As lettuce was believed to be the bitter herb served at the Passover meal it relates not only to the sorrow and bitterness of the captivity of the Jews in Egypt (Stowell 1962: 116) in the Old Testament, but also to the (bitter) suffering and sorrow of Christ's Passion in the New Testament, which released all humanity from the bitter captivity of sin just as the Jews were released from the captivity of the Egyptians.

As can be ascertained from the *Middle English dictionary*, sage was a herb well-known in the Middle Ages, especially for its medicinal qualities and was perceived as something of a panacea. It was specified as an ingredient of certain recipes prepared around Easter (or Passover) time, as well as being used in a medicinal capacity (Lewis 1986: 116 and Wallace 1999-2003). According to *Webster's third new international dictionary of the English language*, sage was also used as a "mild tonic and astringent" (Gove 1961: 1999).

The etymology of the word "sage" is also worthy of attention here. The modern term "sage" derives from the Middle English words "sauge" and "sage", which in turn derive from the Middle French "saulge" or

"sauge", from the Latin "salvia", which comes from "salvus", meaning "safe, whole, healthy" (Gove 1961: 1999). The *Shorter Oxford English dictionary* also derives the word "sage" from the Latin "salvia" and describes it as "the healing plant" (Onions 1973: 1874). It is interesting to note that in Middle English, "hal", also means "healthy" and "whole" and that "hali", meaning holy, derives from "hal" (Bradley 1891: 319 and 321). Thus from the perspective of language and etymology, spiritual and physical health are closely connected, and the use of sage in the "quack doctor" scene is especially interesting when one considers its root meaning.

Furthermore, as the *Middle English dictionary* indicates, both sage and pimpernel were recommended to heal the heart (Kuhn 1983: 938 and Lewis 1986: 116). It is uncertain whether many members of a medieval audience would have been aware of these uses, but it is likely that a number may have been, due to the widespread medicinal use of herbs (Finucane 1977: 62). Certainly the playwright (probably an educated cleric, if one considers his use of Latin and the extensive knowledge of eucharistic dogma demonstrated in the play) could well have been aware of it.

Whether intentionally chosen or merely a reflection of current mental associations, these allusions are worthy of closer attention. The playwright has the quack doctor use two herbs that are physically beneficial to the heart, yet he can offer only a physical cure; Christ, on the other hand, offers a spiritual cure for the heart: salvation in Himself. (The very word "sage" reminds one of a salve or balm — a type of medicinal cream, which heals wounds and eases pain).

Thus, an apparently passing reference by Doctor Brundyche to the treatment of a patient may be seen to have a much deeper and more significant religious meaning in the context of the play. On the literal level, the herbs listed were medicinal components considered in medieval times to have properties of healing for the physical body. On the spiritual level the list reminds one that one may be purged (scamoly, pimpernel) of one's sins by means of Christ's Passion (oxennell, lettuce) so that one may be whole and healthy (sage, pimpernel). It is therefore clear that while the earthly physician can offer only a temporary and temporal cure, Christ offers a permanent spiritual cure. Thus, the patient treated by the doctor may be "full save" (line

588) in physical terms, but not necessarily in spiritual terms. In fact, there is the suggestion that Doctor Brundyche may even have placed this female patient in great spiritual danger by tempting her into the deadly sin of lechery, as Colle suggestively states:

> On wydowes, maydese and wyfe
> Yowr connyng yow have nyhe spent.
> (lines 595-596)

Furthermore it is claimed (line 619) that Doctor Brundyche may even make a healthy person sick. This reference may also be understood both spiritually and physically.

Towards the end of the scene Doctor Brundyche states:

> Here ys a grete congregacyon,
> And all be not hole, without negacyon;
> I wold have certyfycacyon:
> Stond up and make a proclamacion.
> Have do faste, and make no pausa[c]yon,
> But wyghtly mak a declaracion
> To all people that helpe w[o]lde have.
> (lines 601-607)

Here he is clearly trying to attract patients from among the audience. His specific choices of vocabulary here are noteworthy. He refers to the audience as a "congregacyon" (line 601) and, although the medieval usage of the word was not exclusively religious, the *Oxford paperback dictionary* (Hawkins 1988: 168) defines a congregation as "a group of people gathered together to take part in religious worship". It thus follows that while all the members of the audience are most likely "not hole" (line 602) or healthy physically, the same is probably true of the spiritual state of many. This speech also reminds one of Christ's prophetic reference at the Last Supper (Mark 14: 18-21) to His prospective betrayal by Judas (Mark 14: 18-21) who, as a result of his intention to betray Christ, was not spiritually whole or healthy. It is thus also implied that the audience should take action concerning the state of their souls or spiritual health, as urgently as they would seek help for a physical illness or injury.

A connection between the Croxton Play, *Everyman* and *Elckerlijc* in relation to medieval Catholic views on holy dying may be noted when Colle states concerning Doctor Brundyche:

> He wyll never leve yow tyll ye be in yow[r] grave
> (line 611)

— which, of course, is where his treatment may well put one! Although an earthly doctor must "leve", or cease to treat one when one dies, Christ will never desert one, not even in death, once one has chosen Him as one's Saviour (in the medieval Christian view). A similar situation is emphasised in both *Everyman* (Cawley 1956: 232) and *Elckerlijc* (Schutte & De Klerk 1987: 91 & 94). *Everyman* (the character representing all of humanity) is accompanied into death and judgement only by his own Good Deeds as he commends his soul to God:

> Nay, Everyman; I [Good Deeds] will bide with thee.
> I will not forsake thee indeed;
> Thou shalt find me a good friend at need,
> (lines 852-854)

and

> Into thy hands, Lord, my soul I commend;
> Receive it, Lord, that it be not lost.
> (lines 880-881)

And in *Elckerlijc*,

> Ic [Doecht: Virtue, or Good Works] en sal niet wyken,
> Om leven, om sterven, oft om geen torment,
> (lines 824-825)

and

> In uwen handen, vader, hoe dat sij,
> Beveel ic u minen geest in vreden.
> Ic vaer metter doecht.
> (lines 854-856)

In the context of the importance of good works (also as evidence of the faith required for salvation), it is not surprising that in the Croxton Play the Bishop should order Aristorius:

> Ever whyll thou lyvest good dedys for to done.
> (line 914)

Colle's potentially ambiguous statement that Doctor Brundyche will not leave a patient until he/she is dead (line 611) may also be considered to refer to the fact that doctors cannot cure everything, while Christ can "cure" anything He wants to. What is more, doctors can also kill a patient by making mistakes (due to human fallibility) or by negligence or lack of knowledge or skill, and can then simply bury their victims, while they display their successful cases, to the admiration of all. As Francis Quarles (1592-1644) writes in *Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man*:

> Physicians of all men are most happy; what good success soever they have, the world proclaimeth, and what faults they commit, the earth covereth (Moore 1997: 263).

Similar sentiments concerning doctors were expressed from before the 1500s until well into the 1700s (Smith 1970: 193).

Even the location of Doctor Brundyche's home and practice may be significant. According to Colle, Doctor Brundyche lives in:

> the colkote, for ther ys hys loggyng,
> A lytyll besyde Babwell Myll, yf ye wyll have und[er]stondyn[g].
> (lines 620-621)

From this quotation it is clear that the reference to Babwell Mill was intended to have some additional, possibly local, meaning for the Croxton play's original audience. According to McMurray Gibson (1989: 37) the "colkote" (line 620) has been mistakenly glossed as a coal-shed instead of a tollhouse (which makes much more sense in reference to doctors' supposed love of money). It may be assumed that the original audience would have been aware of the fact that Babwell Mill was located close to the North Gate tollhouse of Bury St Edmunds, in the vicinity of St Saviour's Hospital, considered in the late Middle Ages to be the most fashionable and famous of the numerous hospices in the town (McMurray Gibson 1989: 37).

St Saviour's Hospital, which was owned and administered by the Bury St Edmunds monastery, was much more like the modern conception of a hospital than other abbey hospices. It was staffed by a

resident community of eminent physicians and had been well-known for its care of the infirm and ill since the twelfth century. Due to its immense popularity during the fifteenth century (particularly among the nobly born and the wealthy), those requiring access had to be placed on a waiting list, to have their cases reviewed by an elected committee of town burgesses and monks. Much of Colle's joking in the play is based on such inside knowledge, in this instance with the fame of St Saviour's being compared with Doctor Brundyche's own implied lack of skill (cf McMurray Gibson 1989: 38).

Another significant reference exists in the name of the hospital, St Saviour's, which affirms that the true physician is the "Saint [and] Saviour" Himself, Christ, who became the Saviour of all humankind when He sacrificed Himself on the cross to gain salvation for all. In the play He not only heals Jonathas's hand, but also effects the spiritual healing of all the Jewish characters as well as Aristorius (McMurray Gibson 1989: 37-8).

It should by now be evident that the theme of healing (and specifically of Christ as the Suffering Physician) as presented in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is focused upon with particular emphasis in the "quack doctor" scene. In accordance with the strongly religious nature of the age, spiritual healing is shown to be of paramount importance. Thus earthly, physical medicine is negatively compared with the Suffering Physician and His spiritual remedies.

By means of careful choice of diction and references to various herbal remedies the playwright is able to conjure up the medieval notion of Christ as the Suffering Physician, whose Passion was seen as leading to salvation, the ultimate spiritual healing in the medieval Christian view. The "quack doctor" scene in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is therefore not merely a comic interpolation stemming from the folk play tradition, as was once thought, but an important scene which actively contributes to the drama's instructive Christus Medicus theme by means of its subtle references to the "medicinal" and healing aspects of the Passion. This scene in particular (in the context of the drama as a whole) thus adds significantly to our understanding of a key aspect of medieval thought and belief.

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