



Hiscock



Walton



Michael of Rhodes

President's Letter.....	2
AVISTA At Kalamazoo 2009	4

Articles

<i>Patronal Programming in Medieval Abbeys and Cathedrals: The Question of Symbolism</i> by Nigel Hiscock.....	5
<i>“Now the French for the properties of a plow”: Agrarian Lexis in French and English in Late Thirteenth-Century Britain</i> by William Sayers	21
<i>reCOGNition: medieval gearing from Vitruvius to print</i> by Steven A. Walton.....	28
<i>FORUM COLUMN: Langland’s Diseased Vision</i> by Virginia Langum	42
<i>FORUM COLUMN: Villard de Honnecourt on the Counterweight Trebuchet</i> by William Sayers	46

Michael of Rhodes

<i>Michael of Rhodes: A Venetian Seafarer and his Book</i> by Alan M. Stahl	49
<i>Doing the Math: The Shipbuilding Text of Michael of Rhodes</i> by David McGee	56
<i>Michael of Rhodes between Practice and Elite Culture</i> by Pamela O. Long.....	60

AVISTA At Kalamazoo 2009

<i>Technologies of the Book I: Organization</i>	62
<i>Technologies of the Book II: Marking Places</i>	69
<i>Lines of Thought: Drawing Diagrams and Figures to Think, Analyze and Prove</i>	77
<i>New Directions in Medieval Architecture I</i>	82
<i>New Directions in Medieval Architecture II.....</i>	90
Kalamazoo Roundup 2009	97
Dissertations	146

Forum Column: Langland's Diseased Vision

Virginia Langum
Magdalene College, Cambridge

William Langland's fourteenth-century poem, *Piers Plowman*, depicts the seven deadly sins not merely as personifications but as people. The portraits occur in the fifth passus or division of the poem.¹ In context, the poet describes the vices internally and externally as they 'confess' themselves following Reason's sermon. Their detailed physicality offers an anatomical and physiological model for exploring how vice governs, or misgoverns, the body. The seven vices have bodies with eyes, ears, mouths and stomachs, which perform actual bodily functions, such as seeing, hearing, digesting and speaking. Among these physical traits, the conditions of the eyes are among the most vivid. All but one sin is described as having some kind of obstructed or misdirected manner of vision. Pride and Envy suffer wayward gazes. Pernele Proud-Heart looks down (*Piers Plowman*, V.62-3). Envy casts his eyes sideways (V.108). The other sins experience other visual impairments. Wrath has white eyes (V.133); beetle-browed Covetousness has bleary eyes (V.188). Glutton's eyes are dimmed (V.350) and Sloth's slimy (V.386). Lechery appears to have no eyes at all.

The pairings of impaired eyes and confessants, as well as the conditions themselves, evoke themes in late-medieval religious and medical texts. This note briefly considers these rhetorical contexts for Langland's charting of diseased vision to the sins. While disease and blindness are employed often as metaphors for both the sins and sin-hampered souls, the association of specific impairments with sins is rarer in pastoral literature, those works offering instruction in basic theology that proliferated after the Fourth Lateran Council. The specific conditions allocated to the sins in Passus V of *Piers Plowman* do occur, however, in medieval medical texts. Although impossible to argue Langland's awareness of any one particular text, recent work in the history of medicine demonstrates the increasing currency of medical knowledge in the later medieval period. In *Medicine and Religion c.1300*, for example, Joseph Ziegler argues that in the later Middle Ages "technical medical material was incorporated into religious discourse at various levels," serving to make medicine a "significant cultural agent" (49). In Langland's England, technical and medical texts, such as physiognomic treatises, surgical manuals, and encyclopaedias, were increasingly circulated and translated. The texts cited here form part of this trend.

Both pastoral and medical texts resonate with the importance of vision. In anatomy, the condition of the eye often denotes that of the whole body, and for both pastoral and medical writers, either general moral character or propensity to certain kinds of behavior correlate with metaphorical and physical vision. Langland's hamartiology of diseased

vision blends the spiritual and physical in drawing from both genres.

The analogy of blindness and spiritual lack is conventional in pastoral writing, and I wish only to trace here what is relevant to the sins in Passus V: the relationship between vision, confession, and sin. Moved by the preacher's sermon, confession and contrition clear and perfect vision. The words literally unlock vision or become light. Of course, this is not the case in Passus V as the sins remain in a state of obstructed sight. In confessional manuals, darkened or blinded vision contrasts with the clear showing of the penitent. Explaining a condition of shrift, *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwit* states that the penitent should "show his sins clearly and nakedly so that the confessor openly sees the heart and mind of him who he confesses" (173).² In order to fulfill this condition, man must clear his spiritual eye from sin to know himself and to know God. As the Middle English translator of the *Book of Vices and Virtues* writes, "Just as the eyes of a sick man may not suffer to look upon great brightness, no more may man understand or look upon spiritual things [until he has been purged of the] blemishes of misbelief and all other filth" (222).³

In the pastoral tradition, penitents must be able to recognise their own sins to achieve the clear vision necessary to know God. Given that the blemishes and filth—the sins themselves—are visual impediments, they need external help, either through their confessors or pastoral literature, to see how sins impede this spiritual vision. In the *Speculum Guy de Warwycke*, for example, man's soul is through "deadly sin defiled" that he has no "understanding or sight" (33).

As man's spiritual eye is cleared and illuminated, the spiritual eye of the devil is put out or darkened. Various confessional exempla describe devils that can no longer see sinners once they have performed auricular confession. As the *Northern Homily Cycle* explains, "Confession of mouth makes a man's soul unrecognizable to the Devil" (III, 46).⁴ An exemplum found in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* illustrates that the seventh grace of shrift, which "blinds the Devil," puts out his "spiritual eye" just as "he stole spiritual sight from us" at the Fall (379-82).⁵

Lastly, vision is a significant trope as one of the five gates or windows by which sin enters the soul (Biernoff 2002, 54). The anonymous *Bonus tractatus de quinque sensibus* or *Good Treatise on the Five Senses* discusses sight as such. The writer warns, "My eyes have robbed me of my soul" (fol. 107r).⁶ The eye causes the soul to desire things "after looking upon the exterior and nothing of the interior."⁷ Bodily vision "may not perceive any more than the most exterior quality of shape or

colour or quantity of anything.”⁸

Thus far, the connection to be drawn between the pastoral tradition of diseased vision and the sins with the confession scene in *Piers Plowman* is quite general. It is conventional that the sins be associated with blindness or impaired vision. As embodiments of the vices, they see a world colored by their moral characters. Their eyes are not cleansed because they cannot see beyond their sin. For example, Covetousness appropriates the vocabulary of confession for his own end. When Repentance asks if he has ever made restitution for his sins, he answers, “Yes, once I was living with a group of peddlers, I awoke when they were sleeping and plundered their bags” (V.229-30).⁹

From the pastoral perspective, what makes the diseased vision found in *Piers Plowman* unusual is not the general condition but the particular impairment. As the examples cited above have shown, images of spiritual or ‘goostly’ sight in relation to sin occur frequently. However, there are far fewer instances of specific visual impairments. Certain sins are sometimes singled out in this manner. In *Piers Plowman*, “the smoke and the vapour that smites our eyes is covetousness and unkindness” (XVII.343-4).¹⁰ A sermon for the sixth Sunday after Epiphany warns against “the smoke of vanitie” and the “powder of covetousness” that “men sometimes see” (*Northern Homily Cycle*, I, 280).¹¹ However, it is difficult to determine an analogue for these images. Smoke and powder are commonly listed as sources of ocular irritation in medical texts. For example, in Gilbertus Anglicus’s *Compendium medicinae*, “ache of the eye” comes from “smoke or powder” (32). Other texts, such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De proprietatibus rerum* (I, 359) and the Guy de Chauliac’s surgery (253) also note smoke and powder. However, the association of pride with smoke appears to be a common one with or without a visual association. *The Orchard of Syon*, for example, speaks of “the smoke of pride” (258). The image may just as likely derive from biblical references related to billowing wind rather than from any tradition of the sins and diseased vision (Timothy 3:6).

Fewer pastoral passages develop comprehensive schemes for the sins based on visual impediments. One occurs in a Quinquagesima sermon found in the fifteenth-century sermon collection British Library MS. Harl. 331. In the Harley sermon, the writer expands the general theme of blindness and sin to seven kinds of visual impediments specific to the seven deadly sins. As in the *Northern Homily Cycle*, pride is compared to a smoke, which blinds man spiritually. Envy is likened to shadows, Wrath to fiery rock, Avarice to shiny metals, Gluttony to clots of dirt, Lust to stains, and Sloth to smoky vapour.¹² Certainly, dust and smoke are actual ocular grievances that occur in medical writing. In its description of “outward things” that cause “aching and smarting of the eyes,” *De proprietatibus rerum* mentions “powder which hurts the eyes and the tender substance thereof, and of smoke that dims the eyes and makes them smart” (Bartholomaeus Anglicus, 1975-88, I, 359).¹³ However, others, such as *splen-*

dens metallum, are more likely symbolic. Another instance of specifying visual disorders occurs in a Middle English sermon in Lambeth Palace Library MS. 392. The homilist attributes spiritual and physical causes to spiritual and physical blindness. The deleterious effect of old age signifies the state of the soul which has dwelled long in sin, the bright light of the good works of others blinds the envious, bird droppings blind lechers, smoke the proud, dust or powder the boastful, and blood the lustful (fol.189^v-191^v).

Patristic commentary may offer an analogue for this use of specific visual ailments. In his commentaries on the Gospel of John, Augustine draws a comparison between the blind and the sinful. He writes, “Just as if he could not see because he had dirty and sore eyes, with dust or mucus or smoke irritating them, the doctor would say to him, ‘Cleanse from your eye whatever foul thing is there that you may be able to see that light of your eyes.’ Dust, mucus, smoke [these] are sins and iniquities” (I.19).¹⁴ Augustine, however, does not map specific sins to these ailments in the manner of the Harley sermon or the *Northern Homily Cycle*.

Although the evidence for a theological and pastoral tradition may be exiguous, physiognomic and medical texts offer closer parallels to the specific kinds of diseased vision from which Langland’s sins suffer. As is to be expected, the spiritual often blends with the physical in physiognomic texts, such as the English versions of the *Secretum secretorum*. However, other encyclopaedic works, such as Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De proprietatibus rerum* also associate spiritual conditions with medical diseases, particularly those of the eyes. “Among all the senses, the eyes are nearest to the soul, for in the eyes are the tokens of the soul. For in the eyes are known and seen all the judgment of mind, disturbance and gladness of the soul and other passions” (I, 178).¹⁵ The condition of the eye and its ability to see take precedence over other ailments in the body because disease in the eye is thought to indicate disease in the interior body and soul.

Other medical writers focus on the interior condition of the body that is to be known by looking at the eye. Ocular grievances may be their own cause, or they may represent other sicknesses elsewhere. As in Guy de Chauliac’s *Cyurgie*, “The origins of sicknesses and symptoms of the eyes are often the first signs of illnesses of other limbs of the body” (437).¹⁶ Thus, invisible conditions of the rest of the body may be read in the eyes. Likewise, the diseased eyes of Langland’s sins also suggest the character of the whole. Eyes and vision are critical to salvation where Christ is “to know us by our genuine heart and the casting of our eyes” (XI.187).¹⁷

The specific kinds of diseased vision exhibited by Langland’s sins are associated with particular ethical behaviors or moral qualities in medical texts. For example, a warning in the *De proprietatibus rerum* against “inordinate diet and continual drunkenness that dims vision” (I, 360)¹⁸ corresponds to Glutton’s condition after drinking at the tavern: “And when he drew to the door, then his eyes dimmed” (V.350).¹⁹

‘Beetle-browed’ Covetousness with his ‘two bleary eyes’ has

several analogues in medieval medical writing. Bartholomaeus Anglicus's description is particularly relevant:

In the bleary-eyed, the pupil is whole and sound ... but the humour falls away and the eyelids grow large and by often washing, the eye appears again. And this [condition] signifies that [the sufferer] has great wit and knowledge of truth; however, the work of worldly desire has made him dark and dim. (I, 361).²⁰

Langland's Covetousness is, indeed, clever but he misdirects his intellectual abilities on worldly wealth and deceit. For example, mastering his 'Donet' refers not to the moral art of grammar but rather tricks to cheat customers (V.205).²¹

Wrath's 'two white eyes' might either refer to a pale colour or pupils rolled back in fury. Both conditions are associated with wrath. In an English version of the *Secretum secretorum*, 'pale' eyes "reveal impatient (men) and murderers" (96).²² Also, "if the eyes are immobile, pale or red with dryness, these are signs of wrath, madness and of perverseness" (97).²³ Whereas, "eyes that whirl about suggest impatience without pity" (97).²⁴

Curiously, given its prolific association with blindness, there is no mention of Lechery's eyes in Passus V. Sexual excess was thought to dry up the body's fluids and cause blindness (Jacquart and Thomasset, 56). In this vein, *De proprietatibus rerum* warns "service of Venus" may "corrupt and dissolve the crystalline lens" (I, 360).²⁵ The omission of Lechery's eyes in *Piers Plowman* may be assumed to be intentional, particularly when the eyes of all the other sins are described.

Pride's eyes are turned down. In the *Secretum secretorum*, "eyes that turn downward as though they were travelling westward or going to close" denote "un-meek and un-pleasing people," (96) suggesting an appropriate direction for Pride.²⁶

Envy's misdirected gaze is less common in medical writing. However, the references to what he sees, Eleyne's "new coat" and "all the web" or "cloth" (V.109-10) echo medical descriptions of the eye disease, *obtalma*. Bartholomaeus Anglicus describes this condition as an infection that over time "turns and grows into a thick web." This web eventually becomes "by more thickness a cloth" (I, 360).²⁷ Although a particular sin is not associated with this condition, the *Secretum secretorum* writes that "webbed or filmy eyes" denote those "versed in bad crafts" and "the untrue and intemperate" (98).²⁸ The condition is also listed as common among those of a melancholic disposition in an anonymous English surgical manual of 1392. The compiler notes that there is often some darkness obscuring the melancholic's sight, "as though there were gnats or cobwebs or something similar" ('Le MS. Wellcome 564', 177).²⁹

In her article "The Practice of Medicine in *Piers Plowman*," Rosanne Gasse argues that Langland's use of medicine in the poem has been dismissed as merely metaphorical (177). An understanding of the sins' diseased vision might help to correct this misconception. The use of medicine in Passus V allows the accident, actual physical conditions, to reveal the substance, the character and behavior of the sins. Given the

parallel use of particular ocular impediments with moral traits in medical writing and the association of spiritual blindness and confession in pastoral writing, it is likely that Langland was familiar with both rhetorical contexts.

Notes

1. Although all quotations here are taken from the B-Text, they occur in other versions of the poem.
2. 'Zigge his zennes clyerliche and nakedliche zuo þat þe sssruiere izi openliche þe herte and þe onderstondinge of him þe he scriffþ'.
3. 'For riȝt as þe eiȝen of a seke man may not wel loke on þe gret bryȝtnesse, nomore may þe vnderstondyng of men as of hemself ne may not loke ne knowe gostliche þinges but þei ben wel y-purged of alle tecches of mysbileuynges and of alle tecches of mysbileuynges and of alle oþere filþes...'
4. 'Schrift of mouth/ Make man saul to þe fend vnkouth'.
5. 'Pat oure shryfte, þe deuyt blyndeþ/ whan he made vs falle yn plyght,/ He refte vs alle gostely syȝt'.
6. 'Myen eyȝe haþ byraft me my soul'.
7. 'After byholdyng of þe vturmoste and nouȝt of wiþinne'.
8. 'May no more perceyue bot only þe vturmost accident of schap oþer colour or quantite of þyng þat he seyþ wiþ accident is seperable fro þe body'.
9. 'Yis: ones I was yherberwed ... with an heep of chapmen/ I roos when thei were a-reste and riflede hire males'
10. 'The smoke and the smolder that smyt in oure eighen,/ That is covetise and unkyndenesse'.
11. 'þe smoke of vanitese' and the 'pouder of couatise' that 'sumdele men sese'.
12. 'Primum est fumus superbia (fol. 58') ... Secundum quod facit hominem spiritualiter cecum est tenebra invidie (fol. 59') ... Tertium quod facit hominem spiritualiter cecum est ardens ignus iro (fol. 59') ... Quartum quod facit hominem spiritualiter cecum est splendens metallum auarice (fol. 59') ... Quintum quod facit hominem spiritualiter cecum est lutum (fol. 60') ... Sextum quod facit hominem spiritualiter cecum est maclam luxuria (fol. 60') ... Septem quod facit hominem spiritualiter cecum est fumosus vapor accidie (fol. 61')'
13. 'Hechinge and smertinge of yȝen comen somtyme of outward þinges, as ... of poudir þat hurtiþ þe yȝen and þe tendir substaunce þerof, and of smoke þat dymmeþ iȝen and makeþ hem smerte ...'
14. 'Quomodo si propterea uidere non posset, quia sordidos et saucios oculos haberet, irruente puluere uel pituita uel fumo, diceret illi medicus: Purga de oculo tuo quidquid mali est, ut possis uidere lucem oculorum tuorum. Puluis, pituita, fumus, peccata et iniquitates sunt'.
15. 'Amonge alle þe wittes þe yen beþ next to þe soule, for in yȝen is þe token of þe soule. For in þe yȝen is iknowe and iseye al þe dome of mynde, disturbaunce and gladnes of þe soule, and also loue and wraþþe and oþir passiouns'.
16. 'The causes forsothe of sykenesses and of þe sinthomates of the eyȝen, after þe more and þe lesse, ben þe firste causes, the causes goyng tofore and þe ioynede causes, as of oþer membres'.
17. 'To knowen us by oure kynde herte and castyng of oure

- eighen’
18. '[Vn]ord[i]nat diete and contynuel dronkenes þat dymmeþ þe siȝt ...'
 19. 'And whan he drough to the dore, thanne dymmed hise eighen'.
 20. 'In blereȝed yȝen þe blacke is hole and sound ... but þe humour falliþ away and þe yȝeliddes waxiþ grete and by ofte waisschinge þerof, þe yȝe apeireþ. And tokeneþ hem þat haueþ briȝt wit and konnyng [of] treuthe; but þe work of fleisschlich lif makeþ hem derke and dymme'.
 21. In the *Secretum secretorum* 'bitebrowede eyen' are associated with envy (95).
 22. 'And yf [[þe eyen] be pale, it sheweth vn-pacient and mensleers'.
 23. 'Yf immobill, pale or rede with drynesse ben the eyen, tho ben signes of wrath, wodnesse and of dyuersité'.
 24. 'Eyen whirlyng aboute sheweth impacientis without pité'.
 25. 'And ofte seruyse of Venus þat corruppiþ and dissolueþ þe spiritis and þe humour cristallyne ...'
 26. 'Eyen [þat] tourne downward as þei were westerynges or goyng to glade, it sheweth vn-meke and vn-plesyng folkes'.
 27. '*Obtalmia* ... turneþ and growiþ into a webbe and þicke ... this webbe turneþ into cloop by more þicnes'.
 28. 'Eyen webbed or perled, þei ben lerned with bad craftes, þei ben vntrew and intemperat'.
 29. 'As it were gnattis or coppewebbis & oþere siche'.

Works Cited

- [CCSL] = Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols.
 [EETS] = Early English Text Series. Oxford and London: various.
- Augustine. 1954. In *Iohannis euangelium*, CCSL 36. Turnholt: Brepols. Trans. as *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, V vols. by John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988)
- Bartholomaeus Anglicus. 1975-88. *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*. III vols. Ed. M. C. Seymour et al. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Biernoff, Suzannah. 2002. *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- The Book of Vices and Virtues: a Fourteenth-century English Translation of the Somme le Roi of Lorens d'Orléans*. 1942. Ed. W. Nelson Francis. EETS o.s. 217. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*. 1971. Ed. Margaret S. Ogden. EETS o.s. 265. London: Oxford University Press.
- Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwit, or Remorse of Conscience in the Kentish Dialect, 1340 A.D.* 1886. Ed. Richard Morris. EETS o.s. 23. London: N. Trübner.
- Gasse, Rosanne. The Practice of Medicine in *Piers Plowman*. *The Chaucer Review*. 39 (2004): 177-97.
- Harley MS. 331. British Library, London.
- Harley MS. 2398. British Library, London.
- Healing and Society in Medieval England: a Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*. 1991. Ed. Faye Marie Getz. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Jacquart, Danielle and Claude Thomasset. 1988. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity.
- Lambeth Palace MS. 392, Lambeth Palace Library, London.
- Langland, William. 1995. *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. Ed. A. V. C. Schmidt. London: Everyman.
- 'Le MS. Wellcome 564 Deux Traites de Chirurgie en Moyen-Anglais'. 1982. Ed. Richard Grothé. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Institut d'Etudes des Arts et des Sciences, University of Montreal.
- Mannyng, Robert. 1901. *Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne*. Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. EETS o.s. 119, 123. London: K. Paul, Trench and Trübner.
- The Northern Homily Cycle: the Expanded Version in MSS Harley 4196 and Cotton Tiberius E vii III*, III vols. 1972-84. Ed. Saara Nevalinna Helsinki: Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique.
- The Orcherd of Syon*. 1966. Ed. Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey. EETS o.s. 258. London: Oxford University Press.
- Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*. 1977. Ed. M. A. Manzalaoui. EETS o.s. 276. London: Oxford University Press.
- Speculum Gy de Warewike: an Early English Poem*. 1898. Ed. Georgiana Lea Morrill. EETS e.s. 75. London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner.
- Ziegler, Joseph. 1998. *Medicine and Religion c.1300: The Case of Arnau Vilanova*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

