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## Gower's "Herte-Thoght": Thinking, Feeling, Healing

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## Gower's "Herte-Thoght": Thinking, Feeling, Healing

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### Gower's "Herte-Thoght": Thinking, Feeling, Healing

The heart is one of the principal organs of the human body in the Hippocratic-Galenic humoral system that became the basis of medical studies in medieval universities. Along with the other principal organs, typically identified as the liver and the brain, the heart was distinguished from the other two both by its anatomical location in the middle of the chest and by its recognition as the “organ that originated all life processes.”<sup>1</sup> To an Aristotelian way of thinking, one in which Gower appears to be conversant, the heart was the principal organ not only because it enabled the equal distribution of blood-based vital spirits throughout the body but because it embodied the soul. This was a concept that Galen contested centuries later, igniting a debate that reached into the later Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> According to Albertus Magnus (c.1200–1280), for instance, “Galen must have been mistaken . . . we will prove the words of the First Master [Aristotle] by setting forth the supposition that the soul is one power in and of itself, from which flows all the powers of the members. . . . Now it is agreed that the soul, with respect to the act and power of life is in the heart.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Clarke, “Aristotelian Concepts of the Form and Function of the Brain,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 37.1 (1963): 1–14. As Edwin Clarke observed years ago, “Aristotle insists that the heart, and not the brain, is the central organ of the body. For him the soul in man is the final perfection, and it comprises all the principles of human activity. It must of necessity therefore be found in the heart, for this organ is the centre of all those powers which constitute the principle of the human soul. Thus the processes of thought, movement, nutrition, as well as the site of production of the vital heat which makes life possible, are located in the heart” (4). Galen argued that the three organs—heart, brain, liver—worked together to regulate the arteries, veins, and nervous system as well as components of the soul.

<sup>3</sup> Albertus Magnus, *De Animalibus*, ed. Hermann Stadler (Munich: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916), 294. Trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr. and Irvn Michael Resnick, *On Animals* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 363. Albertus Magnus was commenting on Avicenna’s *Canon of Medieval* (written c. 1012) and the Persian physician’s

In what Georgiana Donavin has described as “an Aristotelian form of discourse that heals the soul and offers hope to the kingdom,”<sup>4</sup> Gower proves himself adept at deploying bodily metaphors in his critique of the body politic as well as describing the body’s organs and their functions in his education of the king in the *Confessio*, his discussion of Anger as heart disease in the *Mirour de l’Omme*, and his exploration of the dis-ease caused by rebellion in the *Vox Clamantis*. In so doing he calls attention to the heart-brain connection and the potential healing effects of “herte- thought,”<sup>5</sup> a notion brought to light in a recent article by Russell Peck.<sup>6</sup> To approach the poet’s work from a more medically inflected perspective, as I attempt to do in this short paper, enables us to engage the debate on whether the heart or the brain functioned as the principal organ of the body. This is the medical controversy that factors into Gower’s use of “herte-thought” and his understanding of the effects of heart disease in bodies both individual and sociopolitical.

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reconciliation of these conflicting notions. The 1999 translation by Kitchell and Resnick has been retitled *Albertus Magnus, On Animals: A Medieval Summa Zoologica* and reprinted by The Ohio State University Press, 2018. See also Heather Webb, “Cardiosensory Impulses in Late Medieval Spirituality,” in *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascination, Frames*, ed. Stephen Nichols, Andreas Kablitz and Alison Calhoun (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 265–85.

<sup>4</sup> Georgiana Donavin, “Rhetorical Gower: Aristotelianism in the *Confessio Amantis*’s Treatment of ‘Rhetorique’,” in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 155–73.

<sup>5</sup> See Jacques LeGoff, “Head or Heart? The Political Use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Three*, ed. Michel Feher, et al. (New York: Zone, 1989), 12–27. See also Takashi Shogimen, “‘Head or Heart?’ Revisited: Physiology and Political Thought in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *History of Political Thought* 28, no. 2 (2007): 208–29.

<sup>6</sup> Russell A. Peck, “The Materiality of Cognition in *Confessio Amantis*,” in *John Gower: Others and the Self*, ed. Russell A. Peck and R. F. Yeager (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 3–31 (18, n. 19).

While there is no direct evidence to suggest that Gower was intimately familiar with either medical philosophy or its political implications, it is likely that the poet shared an understanding of what it took to maintain the health and wellbeing of the individual as well as the community. When physician-surgeon Henri de Mondeville (c. 1260–1320) contends in his treatise on surgery that “[t]he heart is the principal organ par excellence which gives vital blood, heat, and spirit to all other members of the entire body,” it is a significant statement in and of itself. But when he transposes the Aristotelian notion of the heart’s function and location to the body politic it becomes even more so, especially in relation to Gower’s work: “It [the heart] is located in the very middle of the chest, as befits its role as the king in the midst of his kingdom.”<sup>7</sup> In Mondeville’s estimation the heart is not only responsible for distributing the “vital blood, heat, and spirit” to the entire body from its central position in the chest, but it is like a king ruling from the center of his kingdom, his authority emanating outwardly rather than from the pinnacle of the political hierarchy down to lower-status subjects.<sup>8</sup> The intersection between the private and the public bodies articulated here goes beyond mere artful analogy in its underscoring of the kinship between the physical body and the context in which it exists. Just as the microcosmic human forms the epicenter of the macrocosmic universe the body of the individual is at the center of community. When the king is understood to be the principal organ of that body, like the heart, he rules his kingdom from a central position.

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<sup>7</sup> Henri de Mondeville, *Chirurgie de Maître Henri de Mondeville*, ed. and trans. E. Nicaise (Paris, 1893), 60. See also Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Jeremy J. Citrome, *The Surgeon in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) for additional contextualization and discussion.

<sup>8</sup> See “Henri de Mondeville,” in *Science and Its Times: Understanding the Social Significance of Scientific Discovery*, vol. 1, ed. Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer (Gale Group, 2001).

## The Heart of Education

In Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis* on the education of a king Genius/Confessor cites the heart as the “chief lord” of the body: “As it is in Phisique write / Of livere, of lunge, of galle, or splen, / Thei alle unto the herte ben / Servantz, and ech in his office / Entendeth to don him service, / As he which is chief lord above.”<sup>9</sup> As written in “physique” (physic), which can be understood as “medicine” as well as Aristotle’s *Physica*, the heart is served by four organs—the lungs, the spleen, the gall bladder, and the liver—in its sovereign rule over the body. Just as the king oversees his kingdom in Mondeville’s analogy, Genius identifies the heart as the body’s principal organ in its capacity to govern the other organs and their functions, most importantly the cognitive aspect of the brain he describes as “reson”: “For as a king in his empire / Above alle othre is lord and sire, / So is the herte principal, / To whom reson in special / Is gove as for the govenance.”<sup>10</sup> In an educational program modeled on medical notions of the humoral body, albeit with some variation, Genius introduces his anatomy and physiology lesson by citing the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth—followed by what he understands to be the four humors—melancholy, blood, phlegm, and choler—each of which he assigns an anatomical “home”: melancholy (spleen); blood (liver); phlegm (lungs), choler (gall bladder).<sup>11</sup> For Genius,

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<sup>9</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, VII, lines 463–69. All citations of the *Confessio Amantis* are taken from Peck’s first edition, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, VII, lines 485–89.

<sup>11</sup> *On the Properties of Things: John of Trevisa’s Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–1988), vol. 1. This is an explanation offered by Trevisa in his translation that differs from medical texts that identify black bile as the humor most responsible for melancholy: “melencoly is bred of trowbly drastis of blode and hath his name of melon that is blak and . . . so is iseyde, as it were a blak humour. . . for the colour therof lynyth toward blackenes” (159).

melancholy is not a temperament as defined by knowledgeable medical practitioners of the time, but rather one of the four humors that inhibits the will to pursue love, generating instead an excess of imagination as well as fear and anger: “For unto loves werk on nyht / Him lacketh bothe will and myht / No wonder is, in lusty place / Of love though he lese grace. / What man hath that complexion / Full of ymaginacion / Of dredes and of wrathful thoghtes, / He fret himselven al to noghtes.”<sup>12</sup> Amans appears to be suffering from lovesickness, an illness characterized by many of the symptoms of melancholy,<sup>13</sup> a disorder taken to be “fatal if not treated,”<sup>14</sup> according to the medical experts. And while there was agreement among practitioners that lovesickness was caused by a humoral imbalance, they “debated whether the disease afflicted the brain, the heart, or the generative organs,” usually concluding “that the malady was located in the brain.”<sup>15</sup>

The debate about which part of the body was more susceptible to lovesickness returns us to Gower’s notion of “herte-thoght,” or “herte’s thoght,” as the phrase is most often iterated in the poem. In a concept transposed into “emotive cognition” by Peck,<sup>16</sup> the kinship between the heart and the brain enables thinking to be influenced by feeling and feeling to be affected by thinking. As indicated in the poet’s repetition at strategic points in the poem, “herte’s thoght”

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<sup>12</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, VII, lines 405–11.

<sup>13</sup> Gower’s identification of melancholy as a humor makes sense in relation to Trevisa’s definition. That the malady appears in Book III (Anger) as well as in Book II on Envy suggests its importance in the poet’s mind. “Malencolie. . . which in compaignie / An hundred times in an houre / Wol as an angrī beste loure” (*Confessio Amantis*, III, lines 27–30).

<sup>14</sup> Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The ‘Viaticum’ and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), x.

<sup>15</sup> Wack, *Lovesickness*, xii.

<sup>16</sup> Russell A. Peck, “The Materiality of Cognition,” 18, n. 19.

calls attention to the heart-brain symbiosis linking the emotions associated with the former with the cognitive functions of the latter. Such a connection has the potential to repair the disconnect between Amans's heart and the part of his brain that affects his ability to recognize the difference between genuine love and erotic fantasy, between frustrated desires and affective compassion. Given the lovesick Amans's need for medical attention, how appropriate (or ironic) that Venus and her priest assume the role of physician to the Lover's role as heartsick patient.

To underscore this heart-brain connection in the *Confessio* and attempts to find balance between the two narrators—sometimes Genius, sometimes Amans—Gower deploys the phrase in a variety of contexts that taken together suggest a more complicated relation than appears to be the case at first glance. Sometimes used in dialogues between Genius and Amans, other times to explicate the ethical lessons of the tales being told, there is more than meets the eye or enters the ear in these repeated utterances. When Genius asks Amans in Book I (Pride) whether he is a hypocrite in love or merely pretending to be sick, for instance, Amans defends his sincerity “With alle the thoghtes of myn herte;<sup>17</sup> in Book II (Envy) when asked whether he is envious of another man's health, Amans likens the burning of his heart to Mount Etna, “Whanne I have sen another blithe / Of love, and hadde a goodly chiere, / Ethna, which brenneth yer be yere / Was thanne nought so hot as I / Of thilke sor which prively / Min hertes thoght withinne brenneth.”<sup>18</sup> In the “Tale of Constantine and Sylvester” also in Book II the children slated for slaughter to remedy Constantine's leprosy, a condition thought to be cured by the blood of innocents, are mourned by their mothers “with many a sory hertes thoght”;<sup>19</sup> in Book V (Avarice) in the “Tale

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<sup>17</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, I, line 721.

<sup>18</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, II, lines 18–23.

<sup>19</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, II, line 3232.



of Hercules and Faunus,” Faunus calls on his “hertes thoght withinne”<sup>20</sup> to plot the theft of Hercules’ lover; in Book VII Genius explains that truth is discernible only with the help of “the hertes thoght which is withinne.”<sup>21</sup>

As the insertion of the “herte’s thoght” in these diverse narrative contexts suggests, the phrase applies to a range of situations in which “feeling” threatens to overrule “thinking” in both negative and positive ways. Yet even as the poet links the heart to the brain’s cognitive function in these exempla, there appears to be a perceptible tension between the two. While acknowledging the heart’s seeming dominance over reason, the brain’s cognitive functions play a role in regulating the body’s desires. When the “herte’s thoght” is understood to be “withinne,” the phrase indicates a physiological location integrally related to the soul in the humoral scheme of things. When the heart is taken to be the soul’s primary home, the effects of the passions on human behavior are rendered legible in these narrative moments. Both assertions accord with an understanding of the “herte’s thoght” as analogous to the larger community. When the king rules with a conscience, when he is empathetic as well as just, the kingdom is a peaceful place.

Perhaps most relevant of the many iterations of the phrase, “herte’s thoght,” especially as it relates to the poet’s analogy of Anger to heart disease in the *Mirour* and his scathing critique of the dis-ease of rebellion in the “Visio Anglie” of the *Vox Clamantis*, is demonstrated in Book III in the “Tale of Diogenes and Alexander.” Introduced by Genius in his description of the negative effects of Wrath and the internal conflict (Contek) such a volatile emotion engenders, this transgression manifests itself in the warlike imperialism for which the youthful king acquires a

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<sup>20</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, V, line 6846.

<sup>21</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, VII, line 1512.

lasting epithet (“the great”), a place among the Nine Worthies, and romances that glorify his name. In a tale designed to assuage Amans’s inner turmoil and thwarted desire to acquire his lady’s love, however, the story becomes a way to illustrate the presumptions of an insatiable conqueror and the devastating realities of imperial conquest.

The meeting of the two comes when, after a night of cosmic meditation, Diogenes is interrupted by the king and his troops. Perplexed at the sight of such an aged man sitting alone in a make-shift observatory, a revolving barrel he calls a “tonne,” Alexander directs one of his minions to provide reconnaissance on the identity of the old man as well as an explanation of his activities. When the servant to the king is unable to answer the questions demanded by his liege lord, the king himself approaches the wise man to learn more. A dialogue soon ensues and Diogenes, unphased by the imposing figure before him, offers a spontaneous and unsolicited diagnosis of Alexander’s condition, telling him in no uncertain terms that “thi will is thi principal, / And hath ben the lordschipe of thi witt, / So that thou cowthest nevere yit / Take o dai reste of thi labour;/ Bot for to ben a conquerour / Of worldes good, which mai nocht laste, / Thou hiest evere aliche faste, / Wher thou no reson hast to winne.”<sup>22</sup> Since no one has dared to speak the truth to such an imposing figure before this moment, at least in this tale, the sage’s response prompts Alexander to identify himself. When the king discovers that the destitute man sitting alone and nearly naked in a barrel is none other than the famed Diogenes, he proffers a gift, anything the sage might desire. Alexander’s feudal gesture, one prompted not by largesse but by the recipient’s fame, demonstrates the king’s economic superiority and monarchal authority rather than his heartfelt charity and compassion. As if to point out the philosopher’s recognition

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<sup>22</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, III, lines 1282–89.

of the shallowness of such an offer, in one of the most humorous retorts in the entire poem, Diogenes shouts: “Thanne hove out of mi sonne, / And let it schyne into mi tonne.”<sup>23</sup> The philosopher’s lesson has thus been delivered: the larger-than-life king is told to stop blocking the sun that shines light on a poor man’s humble abode. When we read the story symbolically what becomes clear is that Alexander neither recognizes the order of the universe set in motion by the Prime Mover in Aristotelian thought nor the lessons taught to him previously by the illustrious Philosopher himself. While Diogenes’ directive clearly makes a mockery of the feudal presumptions of the fearsome king “whom every contré dredeth,” Genius’s explication customizes the tale’s ethical lesson to aid Amans in the settling of his inner conflicts:

This king [Alexander], whom every contré dredeth,  
 Lo, thus he was enformed there.  
 Whereof, my sone, thou miht lere  
 How that thi will schal nocht be [be]lieved,  
 Where it is nocht of wit relieved.  
 And thou has seid thiself er this  
 How that thi will thi maister is:  
 Thurgh which thin hertes thoght withinne  
 Is evere of Contek to beginne,  
 So that it is gretli to drede  
 That it non homicide brede.<sup>24</sup>

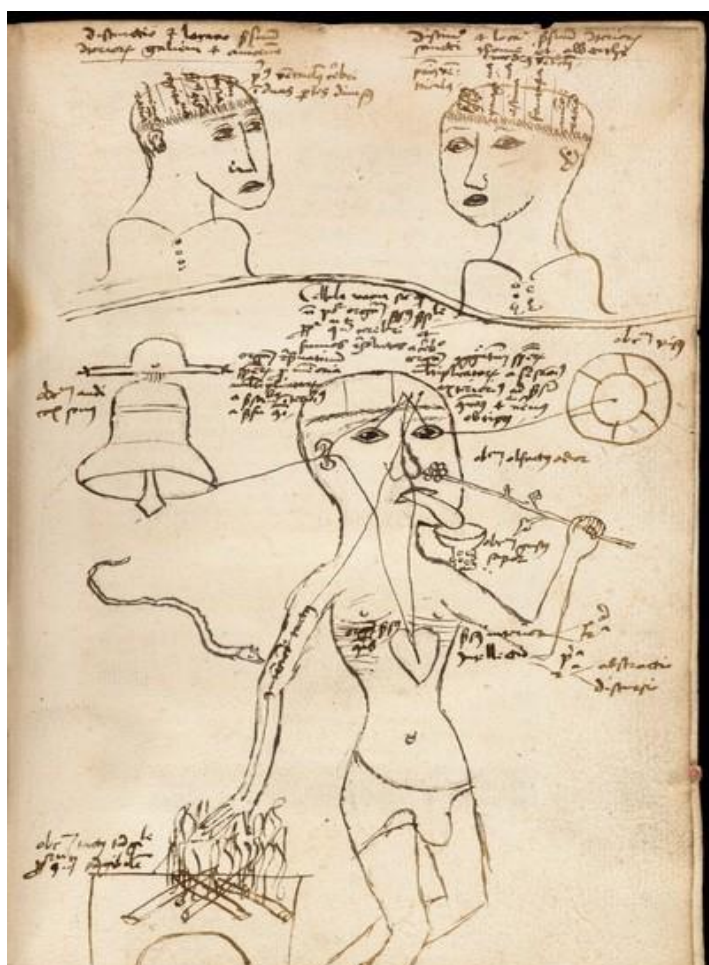
The lesson Genius offers is intended to help Amans find equilibrium between unregulated desire and its negative outcomes, the kinds of violence associated with both love and war. And while

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<sup>23</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, III, lines 1307–08.

<sup>24</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, III, lines 1312–22.

Genius's notion of the "herte's thoght" appears to privilege wit (reason), cognition and the brain, if we understand the soul to reside in the heart as Aristotelian theory would have it, then this is the site of the body wherein the will to conquer may be tempered by more tender-hearted passions. This is one reason, in my view, that Alexander's gift-giving gesture is not valued by the philosopher, the reason he says the will needs regulation. The story of Diogenes and Alexander may be understood to apply not only to the actions of a conflicted lover whose humors lack balance, but rather to the duties and obligations of a compassionate ruler whose authority emanates from the heart of the body politic.



Courtesy of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library of

### Visualizing Thinking and Feeling: A Useful Diagram

One of the most distinctive anatomical illustrations of the heart-brain connection and applicable to a reading of Gower's "herte's thoght" appears in a 1496 book on the senses by Geraldus de Hardywyck entitled *Epitomata seu Reparationes totius philosophiae naturalis Aristotelis*. In this compendious reconsideration of Aristotle's work there are two examples of the construction of the brain and its various cells. As described in Clarke and Dewhurst's *An Illustrated History of Brain Function*, the upper panels show two

separate models of the brain's structure each of which represents a side of the debate about

which of the principal organs housed the soul: on the left is the model said to represent the views of Galen and Avicenna, the famed physician-writer who argued for shared occupancy, while on the right are those ascribed to Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas both of whom endorsed the heart as the soul's principal residence.<sup>25</sup> Read from the top down, the head on the upper left contains four compartments labeled respectively as the *sensus communis* (common sense), *phantasia* (image formation), *cogitativa* (thought), and *memorativa* (memory), while the head on the right adds an additional cell for *estimativa* (judgment). These are the faculties of mind that process the body's sensations, making it possible to distinguish between deliberate transgression and more normative human behaviors.<sup>26</sup>

The "crude" drawing of the human body at the center of the illustration shows the compartments of the brain and its connections to a disproportionately enlarged heart vis-à-vis intersecting lines, creating the impression of that organ's dominance. Especially significant in this drawing in relation to Gower's notion of the "herte's thoght" is that the senses—hearing, eyesight, touch, smell, and taste—are connected by lines that lead back to the heart. For Clarke and Dewhurst, the diagram "illustrates the Aristotelian concept that the heart, not the brain, is the chief organ of the body and seat of the soul."<sup>27</sup> For readers of Gower this is a drawing that renders visible the correspondence between these two principal organs and their symbiotic collaboration.

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<sup>25</sup> Edwin Clarke and Kenneth Dewhurst, *An Illustrated History of Brain Function* (Oxford: Sandford Publications, 1972), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Langum, "Sacred and Secular Wrath in Medieval English Sources," in *The Sacred and the Secular in Medieval Healing: Sites, Objects and Texts*, ed. Barbara S. Bowers and Linda Migl Keyser (New York: Routledge, 2016), 13–25.

<sup>27</sup> Clarke and Dewhurst, *An Illustrated History of Brain Function*, 17.

## Anger as Heart Disease

Such an understanding of the function of the heart and its relation to the brain's various faculties is useful for diagnosing the Lover's malady in the *Confessio Amantis*, to be sure, but as noted earlier it is also applicable to readings of the *Mirour de l'Omme* and the *Vox Clamantis*, especially since one of the poet's driving concerns is to bring the body politic into a state of communal harmony. Just as the diseased human body requires medical attention to restore its humoral balance, the body politic requires a form of healing to ameliorate the dis-ease brought about by social and political conflict. As Kara McShane notes in her explication of the "Visio Angliae," of the *Vox Clamantis*, the poet's recounting of the Rising of 1381 provides therapeutic medication for its Latin readers: "As a healing narrative, the *Visio* is meant as a public, political text that can begin healing at both personal and communal levels."<sup>28</sup> The lack of common profit and disproportionate privilege that Gower envisions in these works reminds those in positions of authority of the need to diagnose the dis-ease growing within the collective body and to implement a treatment plan aimed at restoring its health.

That Anger is personified in the *Mirour de l'Omme* is perhaps not surprising in this regard, especially when understood not simply as a moral transgression but rather as a disease in and of itself: "Anger is completely described in the swelling that inflames her, for she does not consider herself and pays no attention to anyone else. Her malady is comparable to heart disease, for it results in a sad life and soon dries up the heart so that no one is capable of curing it. Not

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<sup>28</sup> Kara L. McShane, "Social Healing in Gower's *Visio Angliae*," *South Atlantic Review* 79, nos. 3–4 (2014): npa.

only does she kill the body, but she also harshly perverts the soul to her will.”<sup>29</sup> In what Virginia Langum considers to be “a medical understanding of wrath,”<sup>30</sup> Gower’s personification addresses the life-threatening effects of actual heart disease indicated by symptoms such as a swelling sensation and increased heat. Like a heart attack or “cardiacle,” as the term appears in Middle English, anger is not a mere allegorical figure in this context, but rather a literal description of a disease with the potential to kill the body and damage the soul. If we extend the analogy offered by Henri de Mondeville in his surgical treatise cited earlier, these symptoms are as applicable to the body politic as surely as they are to individual human bodies.<sup>31</sup> The poet’s “remedy” for anger and the means to thwart heart disease in the *Mirour* is Patience, the “right medicine” for facing adversity.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, one of her daughters—Pity—described as “the treacle or remedy” also “cures the heart of poisonous swelling so that there may be no abscess of old rancor, from which Anger drinks.”<sup>33</sup> These are the prophylactic medications born of virtuous

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<sup>29</sup> In his acknowledgment of the four temperaments in the *Mirour* the poet equates melancholy with Envy, “If I am melancholic, then I will be stung by Envy in sadness and in evil” See John Gower, *Mirour de l’Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), 201.

<sup>30</sup> Virginia Langum, *Medicine and the Seven Deadly Sins* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 121. See also “Sacred and Secular Wrath in Medieval English Sources,” 13–25.

<sup>31</sup> See Paul Freedman, “Peasant Anger and the Late Middle Ages,” in *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 171–88. Freedman describes public anger as follows: “Anger is not so much a primary motivation as the product of a collective malady, a mass epidemic” (177).

<sup>32</sup> John Gower, *Mirour de l’Omme*, 190.

<sup>33</sup> John Gower, *Mirour de l’Omme*, 191.

behavior and quotidian regimens of health designed to combat disease for every individual. As the heart of the kingdom the king is required to do likewise for the health of the body politic.

While there is no evidence to suggest that Gower engaged in either public debates or private conversations with contemporary surgeons or physicians<sup>34</sup> about the bodily organ most likely to house the soul, he was certainly conversant in Aristotelian natural philosophy and the harmful effects of unmitigated passion. As the previous diagram illustrates and Gower's notion of the "herte's thocht" expresses, the two organs—the heart and the brain—with their powers of thinking and feeling have the capacity to work together to alleviate suffering. Whether that symbiosis is directed toward the healing of a sick lover or a society in a state of dis-ease depends upon the ways in which readers of Gower interpret his work. Like diagnosticians we are left to decide how medical knowledge factors into conceptualizations of disease and how symbolic language brings poetry into conversation with medicine. If we consider Gower's "herte's thocht" to be more than just a clever phrase, the poet seems to have discovered a balance between the faculties of cognition and the most heartfelt of human emotions, offering hope and healing for the future.

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<sup>34</sup> Gower's disdain for physicians is comparable to his disdain for lawyers: "Physicians are glad of sickness and surgeons of hurt people, when they can thus earn something. . . . And very often, just as the physician cunningly delays the restoration of his patient's health, and sometimes (in order to earn more money from the patient) even aggravates and makes the malady worse than it was at the beginning, likewise (to the good observer), the men of law obtain their delays and put their client in fear, in order to get more of his money" (*Mirour*, 318).



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