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Sir Thomas Elyot's

The Castel of Helth

as an Example of Popular

Renaissance Medical Literature

In Tudor England many people were interested in medicine. It would be possible to claim that by far the largest part of medicine was home medicine.¹ Laypeople possessed medical skills and they often treated themselves or were treated by their families.² Sim, when dealing with a women's role in Tudor medicine, writes "The housewife was responsible for the comfort and well-being of her family, which naturally included an understanding of how to look after them when they were ill."³ As long as women did not try to become professional

¹ On medicine in Renaissance Europe and England see Carlo Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession in the Renaissance*. Cambridge, 1976; Lawrence I. Conrad, Michael Neve, Vivian Nutton, Roy Porter, Andrew Wear, Eds., *The Western Medical Tradition*, Cambridge, 1995, esp. the chapter on "Medicine in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700," pp. 215–361; see also Allen G. Debus, *Science, Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*. New York, 1972; an interesting outline of the practice of medicine in early modern England can be found in: Roy Porter, *Disease, Medicine and Society in England, 1550–1860*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 11–16.

² In England, like all over Europe, the primary place where the sick were treated was the home. Because the lines between care and cure were blurred even by professional medicine, the treatment given by lay people resembled that prescribed by physicians. It consisted in opening and closing windows, burning aromatic substances, providing basic hygiene, preparing what was considered appropriate food and drink, and administering medicinal preparations. (Katharine Park, 'Medicine and the Renaissance', In Ed. Irvine Loudon, *Western Medicine*. Oxford, 1977, p. 68).

Andrew Wear, when writing about popularised medicine in early modern England, concludes: "In practice, distinctions were blurred in an open medical culture in which family members or patients themselves might treat the most serious medical, if not surgical, conditions and in which the patient, the family, neighbours, clergymen and their wives, wise men and women, midwives, uroscopists, herbalists, empirics, astrologers, tooth-drawers, lithotomists, as well as apothecaries, surgeons and physicians, were all able to provide care." (Andrew Wear, *Health and Healing in Early Modern England. Studies in Social and Intellectual History*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney, 1998, p. 19).

³ Alison Sim, *Tudor Housewife*. Sutton Publishing, 2001, p. 86.

healers, their medical skills were valued even by those in authority. An example can be found in a letter written from John Paston III to his wife, Margery (in *The Paston Letters*)

I recommend me to you. And I pray you in all haste possible to send me by the next sure messenger that you can get a large poultice of your flos unguentorum for the King's Attorney, James Hobart, for his disease is but an ache in the knee. He is the man who brought you and me together, and I would give £40 that you could with your plaster part him from his pain. But when you send me the poultice, you must send me writing how it should be laid to and taken from his knee, and how long it should abide on his knee without removal, and how long the plaster will last and whether or not he must wrap any more clothes about the plaster to keep it warm.⁴

Herbert Spencer points to the fact that the Tudors and the Stuarts all took an interest in medical matters. Henry VIII was an amateur apothecary and was associated with Dr Butts and others in the publication of a book on the subject. Henry himself devised an 'ointment to restraye'.⁵

The growing interest in medicine led to a growing demand for popular medical books. In the Tudor period, beside medical books in Latin⁶ addressed to the medical profession,⁷ there began to appear numerous, so-called popular books in the vernacular: recipe books, guides to the preservation of health and care of the sick, phlebotomies, herbals, or instructions on how to conduct a urinary analysis and diagnose a patient's illness from its colour and sediments.⁸ There were also almanacs⁹ which contained, among other matters, advice on bloodletting, indications of the days favourable or unfavourable for the medical treatment and also prognostications of the sickness most likely to prevail at particular seasons of the

⁴ Quoted after Roger Virgoe, Ed., *The Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family*, Guild Publishing, 1989, p. 278.

⁵ Herbert R. Spencer, *Medicine in the Days of Shakespeare*, London 1929, p. 5.

⁶ Latin remained the language of university discourse well into the early modern period and theoretical learning remained largely the property of this language. Cf. Marie Getz Faye. 'Charity, translation, and the language of medical learning in medieval England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1990, 64: 5.

⁷ On medical books, see Lewis S Pilcher, *A List of Books by Some of the Old Masters of Medicine and Surgery Together with Books on the History of Medicine and on Medical Biography in the Possession of Lewis Stephen Pilcher*, Brooklyn, New York 1918.

⁸ Gottfried claims that more uroscopies have survived than any other type of physic manual. He has counted twenty-three uroscopies among the Ashmolean manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. After 1400 they were usually written in English, many were covered with wood making them cheaper. They have numerous additions and scribbling of different physicians on the margins which proves their heavy use. Robert S. Gottfried, *Doctors and Medicine in Medieval England 1340–1530*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986, pp. 177–8.

⁹ Before 1600 more than 600 almanacs were published. H.S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1558–1603*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 204–5; for an extensive list of almanacs, see E.F. Bosanquet, *English Printed Almanacs and Prognostication: A Bibliographical History to the Year 1600*, London 1917.

year. There were calendars with prognostications¹⁰ that appeared year after year, some of which were written even by surgeons and physicians.¹¹ Since they were based on astral medicine and were used primarily for diagnosis and prognosis, they were perfectly suited to medical practitioners.

The vernacular medical tradition in England is probably the oldest in Western Europe. A relatively large number of medical writings survive from the Anglo-Saxon period.¹² As an exemplar of such early writings let us recall the 'Leechbook' of Bald, a famous medical handbook written in about the early tenth century.¹³ It is the oldest known Saxon herbal preserved in the British Library. A few recipes for remedies in Middle English from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries also survive. A survey of Middle English vernacular medical texts done by Getz also shows that these texts are often translations of important and widely circulated medical writings in Latin.¹⁴

After 1066, the English language was over-run by Norman French to be revived again in the fourteenth century.¹⁵ Anglo-Norman medical writings of that period consist of fifteenth-century translation or adaptation of medical textbooks from Latin into English.¹⁶ Despite the limitations of readership, of which the greatest was literacy, health-advice books were very popular in the fifteenth century.¹⁷ Linda

¹⁰ As an example may serve calendar by the English Carmelite Nicholas of Lynn, a copy of which is a fifteenth century English language version (a new edition is Sigmund Eisner, Ed., *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, Athens, Ga., 1980).

¹¹ Andrew Boorde, author of the *Breviary of Helthe* and *A dyetary of Health*, was also the first English author of almanacs. On almanacs of that period see Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500–1800: Astrology and the Popular Press*. New York 1979.

¹² M.I. Cameron. 'The sources of medical knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England,' *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1983, 11: 135–55.

¹³ It dates from about AD 900–950 and was written by Cild under the direction of Bald. Facsimile edition of *Leech Book of Bald* was published in 1955 with an introduction by C.E. Wright.

On old English herbals, see Eleanour Sinclair Rohde, *The Old English herbals, [etc.]*, London, 1922. See also Wilfrid Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: a study in history, psychology and folklore*. London, 1963.

¹⁴ Marie Getz Faye. (1990) 'Charity, translation, and the language of medical learning in medieval England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 64: 1–17. The author also points to the fact that a few early examples of Middle English medical texts 'were prepared by Dominican friars, expressly for the purpose of bringing the benefits of learned medicine to "the people"'. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁵ Cf. Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-Century England: Introduction and Texts*, Cambridge, 1989.

¹⁶ See Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, Chicago Il. 1990, pp. 52–53.

¹⁷ According to Bennet "the growth of vernacular literature is perhaps nowhere more notable than in the multiplication of medical manuscripts in the fifteenth century [...] It is clear that English homes and English readers (professional or lay) were making use of vernacular instruction on what hitherto had been very largely written in Latin only, and were doing so to a considerable extent." (Henry S. Bennet. 'Science and information in English writings of the fifteenth century', *Modern Language Review*, 1944, 39:3).

Voigts has pointed out a well-established tradition of producing works in English in medical and other sciences. She claims that English was felt to be comparable with Latin by the sixteenth century, having been in use for over a century for such purposes

after 1475 we can find a full range of sophisticated university treatises – mostly on medicine and astronomy – in English-language manuscripts where Latin plays little or no role [...] we find the earliest significant use of English in scientific and medical writing in the last quarter of the fourteenth century [...] and that a century later the language had achieved a status equivalent to that of Latin for exclusive use in such texts.¹⁸

The number of vernacular medical manuscripts in English multiplied six fold from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries¹⁹ and the advent of printing press only served to accelerate the existing demand.²⁰ With a turn of the press, books became plentiful and much cheaper, and printers were especially interested in producing and selling as many popular books as possible.²¹ William Caxton, the first printer in England, was a businessman rather than a scholar,²² and other printers, who came after him, also saw money in publishing.²³ Printing diffused scholarly editions of the classic, and with them, the interests and ideas that they reflected. It also broadened the intellectual outreach of humanistic scholarship. But as demand for popular books dealing with health problems was great, more and more such books were published, almost all of them were in the vernacular.²⁴

¹⁸ Linda E. Voigts, 'What's the word? Bilingualism in late-medieval England,' *Speculum*, 1996, 71: 814.

¹⁹ Rossell Hope Robbins. 'Medical manuscripts in Middle English', *Speculum*, 1970, 45: 393–415.

²⁰ For the influence of print revolution on the development of popular books see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Abridged ed. New York, 1983. There is a general tendency to associate the spread of the new learning with the introduction of printing. In fact, according to Marie Hall the first half-century of printing largely perpetuated the standard authorities and books of the Middle Ages (Marie Hall, *The Scientific Renaissance, 1450–1630*, London, 1962, pp. 23–30).

²¹ It has been estimated that the output of the presses in the fifteenth century amounted to 20,000,000 copies. (Chance Burton, 'Early Printing of Medical Books and Some of the Printers who Printed Them.' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1948, 22: 653).

²² see Gerry Knowles. *A Cultural History of the English Language*, London 1997, pp. 60–61.

²³ After Caxton's death in 1491, his press had been taken over by his chief assistant, the Alsatian Wynkyn de Worde, who moved the press to Fleet Street, and until his death in 1535 produced many important books. He earned himself the title 'King's Printer'. Among his successors to both title and press was the renowned Thomas Berthelet, who printed all Thomas Elyot's books during his lifetime. On the history of printing in England, see H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1475–1557*, Cambridge, 1952.

²⁴ Physicians were writing mostly in English although, taking into account the nature of their training, one would expect many of them to have written rather in Latin, like Thomas Linacre or John Case. However, the evidence suggests that "the average physician in England was loath to publish at all, and most of those who did saw the need for vernacular writing." (R.W. McConchie, *Lexicography and Physicke: The Record of Sixteenth-Century English Medical Terminology*. *Oxford Studies in Lexicography and Lexicology*. Oxford, 1997, p. 53). Also surgeons were writing mostly in English. As they were not required to be university graduates, they were not always fluent in Latin. In consequence they were cut off from all the scholarly work of their time except in translation. (On barber-surgeons and surgeons, see

Paul Slack using his own definition of 'medical literature'²⁵ was able to identify 153 medical titles published before 1605, the first one being the *Little Book*, a plague tract attributed to Canutus.²⁶ Several of the 153 titles were reprinted many a time and if all known editions were counted there would be 392 editions of medical works between 1486 and 1604.²⁷ Medical works represent however only a small proportion of English publishing, probably about 3 per cent of the total output of books.²⁸ One third of all titles were translations of either prestigious authorities such as Galen or modern writers.²⁹

Russell categorises medical books of the Tudor period in the following way:

- a) Popular health recipes collected from various authors, translated and issued for the use of the non-medical public;
- b) Books on the plague;
- c) Translations of an author's work so that it might be more widely read both by the medical profession and the public.³⁰

Slack is more specific. He presents a table³¹ which divides the totals of 153 titles and 392 editions (see above) into eight distinct categories. The medical books cover following subject-matter:

Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, Chicago Il, 1990, pp. 153–186; Lawrence Ghislaine, 'Surgery (Traditional)', in Ed., W.F. Bynum, and Roy Porter. *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*. 2 vols., London 1993, II: 968–972; T. Clifford Allbutt, *The Historical Relations of Medicine and Surgery to the End of the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1905; Daniel De Moulin, *A History of Surgery*, Dordrecht; Boston: Nijhoff 1988, p. 245).

²⁵ Slack defines medical literature as "all books and pamphlets deliberately and largely devoted to the description, analysis or treatment of human health and disease." He included herbals and works on anatomy but not books on the care of animals. (Paul Slack, 'Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England.' in Ed. Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 238).

²⁶ [Canutus], *Here begynneth a litil boke the whiche traytied and rehersed many gode thinges necessarie for the pestilence* [c. 1486].

²⁷ Paul Slack, 'Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England.' In Ed. Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 239.

²⁸ Cf. H.S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1475–1557*, Cambridge, 1970, 20; Bennett, H.S. *English Books and Readers 1558–1603*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 269.

²⁹ Cf. Paul Slack, 'Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England.' in Ed. Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 242.

³⁰ K.F. Russell, 'A Check List of Medical Books Published in England Before 1600', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1947, 21: 923.

³¹ For the table see Paul Slack, 'Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England.' In Ed. Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 243.

1. anatomy and surgery³²
2. reflections on theory and practice³³
3. herbals³⁴
4. plague tracts³⁵
5. other specific diseases³⁶
6. single or specialised remedies³⁷
7. explanatory textbooks and regimens³⁸
8. collections of remedies.³⁹

The Castel of Helth by Sir Thomas Elyot belongs to regimina,⁴⁰ a class of writings on medicine and health dealing with prescribed courses of diet, exercise, way of life, and other activities for the promotion or restoration of one's health; they

³² Examples of anatomical books are found in K.F. Russell, 'A Bibliography of Anatomical Books Published In English Before 1800', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1949, 23: 268–304. On both anatomical and surgical books published before 1600, see K.F. Russell, 'A Check List of Medical Books Published in England Before 1600', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1947, 21: 922–958.

³³ As an example of this category may serve Timothie Bright's *A Treatise Wherein is Declared the Sufficiency of English Medicines* (1585).

³⁴ For collection of the titles of herbals, see Ruth B. and Max H Fisch, 'The Marshall Collection of Herbals in the Cleveland Medical Library', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1947, 21: 224–261.

³⁵ The titles of the treatises on plague are found in K.F. Russell, 'A Check List of Medical Books Published in England Before 1600', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1947, 21: 922–958; see also below in the text of this chapter.

³⁶ This category involves works which concentrate on such complaints as syphilis, sweating disease, diseases of the eye or melancholy, e.g. William Clowes, *A short and profitable treatise touching the cure of the morbus gallicus...*, London, 1579; John Caius, *A boke or counseill against the disease commonly called the sweate or sweating sicknesse*, London, 1552; Wiliam Bullein, *A comfortable regimen and very wholesome order against the most perilous pleurisie...*, London, 1562.

³⁷ For example, Walter Bayley, *A briefe discours of certain bathes or medicinall waters in the counties of Warwicke* (1587) or [Anon.], *A briefe and short discourse of the vertue of balsame* (1585).

³⁸ This category was the largest in terms of titles and the number of editions, in other words it was the most popular category of medical books. One of the reasons, apart from demand for that kind of literature, was their price, e.g. the price of *The Castel of Helth* was 6d. (For information on prices, see H.R. Plomer, 'Some Elizabethan book sales,' *The Library*, 3rd ser., 1916, VII: 328).

³⁹ This category, although similar to (7), lists only remedies for named complains whereas category (7) contains explanations of the origins and symptoms of diseases and provides useful information how to cure them and preserve health. Moulton's *Mirror or Glass of Health*, 1546, may serve as an example of category (8).

⁴⁰ The term was defined by George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, 3 vols., Baltimore, 1948, II: 244. According to Wear, early modern regimens were intended for the literate and the well-to-do "extending their advice from individual princes and nobles [of later antiquity and the Middle Ages] to a print audience." (Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine 1590–1680*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 159) The regimens were thus aimed at a relatively narrow section of society and they are "another pointer to the fact that classical Greek medical tradition and early modern learned medicine hoped for well-off, socially respectable clients, and were not concerned with the health of the whole population." (ibidem. p. 165).

were intended to maintain health and prevent disease.⁴¹ The ancients divided medicine into three parts: dietetics (diaitetike), pharmacology (pharmaceutike) and surgery (cheirurgia) but it was dietetics, or regimen, which superseded the remaining two.⁴² The core of regimina was a set of rules for the maintaining of health based on the six non-naturals and that means that they did not deal with only food and drink. In order to preserve good health it was essential to breathe good air, sleep well in a proper position,⁴³ lead an active life by having plenty of exercise⁴⁴ and eat and drink with moderation.⁴⁵ But central to the conservation of health was food and drink.⁴⁶ The primary aim of regimens was to provide information and advice on a long list of different types of food. The regimens often modified or contrasted the classical tradition or continental writings with English tradition. Elyot, in *The Castel of Helth*, when writing on the times of meals says: "I wyl not recyte the sentences of authors, whyche had neuer experience of Englysshe mens natures, or of the iuste temperature of this realme of Englande."⁴⁷ In another place he explains that he will not write of the ointments used in ancient times since they were never used in England: "I wyl not here speke of oyntementes vsed_in olde tyme amonge the Romayns and Grekes, in fricasies or rubbynges, for I suppose, y they were neuer here vsed."⁴⁸

The Castel of Helth, the earliest important manual of health originally written in English, makes Elyot a pioneer of this kind of literature in the vernacular. Before him only two writers wrote independent treatises on regimen in English. In c. 1491 William Caxton printed his *Gouernayle of Helthe*⁴⁹ and in 1530 Thomas Paynell published a translation of a prose commentary on the *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*,⁵⁰

⁴¹ The work corresponds to the first category in Russell's classification and to the seventh in Slack's.

⁴² A detailed description of Greek dietetics is given in I.M. Lonie, 'A Structural Pattern in Greek Dietetics and the Early History of Greek Medicine', *Medical History*, 1997, 21: 235–260, see also Erwin Ackerknecht, 'The End of Greek Diet', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. XLV, 1971, pp. 242–249.

⁴³ Cf. Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth*, London, 1541, sig. M iii^r – M iv^r

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, sig. N iv^r – P^r

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, sig. E ii^v – E iv^v; X ii^r

⁴⁶ Food in general had a dual significance in medicine: it was part of everyday life, but it was also the basis from which knowledge about medicines was developed. (Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine 1590–1680*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 169).

⁴⁷ Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth*, London, 1541, sig. M iii^r

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, sigs. O^v – O ii^r

⁴⁹ Caxton's source was Latin treatise by a fourteenth-century writer, John of Bordeaux, from which Caxton translated only eight chapters, which constitute the regimen.

⁵⁰ *The Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* is one of the most popular poems in the history of both medicine and literature. Written sometime during the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, there have been over 100 manuscript versions and approximately 300 printed editions. Although the work claims to be the product of the famous medical school of Salerno in Italy, and written for an anonymous English king, the true author is entirely unknown. Arnold of Villanova (1235–1315) produced the first version of the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum*. This was printed for the first time in 1480 and had 362 verses, though they increased with time. (Roberto Margotta, *History of Medicine*, London, 1996, p. 54).

a medieval poem on health.⁵¹ Those two works lack however originality, being almost pure translations and Elyot's *Castel* is different. Most of the content of Elyot's work reflects the influence of medical humanism, which involved a return to original medical texts of ancient Greece and Rome. Elyot draws on numerous sources; his medical authorities range from the earliest physicians up to his own time. Throughout the work he names, either in the discussion or in the margin, outstanding authorities from Greek period (Hippocrates, Galen, Diocles, Dioscorides), the Latin period (Celsus, Pliny, Soranus, Serenus), the Byzantine period (Oribasius, Celsus Aurelianus, Aetius, Alexander Trallianus, Paulus Aegineta, Joannes Actuarius), the Arabic period (Johannitius, Mesuë the Older, Rhazes, Haly Abbas, Avicenna, Avenzoar, Averroes), the late Medieval period (Arnold of Villanova), and a few contemporaries (Marsilio Ficino and Thomas Linacre).

The Castel of Helth which draws on numerous sources and has a distinctly humanist flavour may be said to possess a certain originality. The treatise built on Galenic, Salernitan and humanist foundations differs from medieval texts on medicine in its clear organisation, careful translation of the most respected authorities in medicine, a motive of public service, and also a respect for the physician's task. It incorporates humoral theory, dietary advice and a few practical remedies and combines moral philosophy with physic.

The treatise is divided into four books: in the first book Elyot explains the theory of humours⁵² and writes on complexions or temperaments;⁵³ in the second book he comments on diet in general, i.e. which foods are suitable for which complexion,⁵⁴ there are also a few chapters devoted to various forms of exercise. In

On the School of Salerno see Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The School of Salerno: Its Development and Its Contribution to the History of Learning." *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Rome, 1956, pp. 495–551.

⁵¹ For brief accounts of early Salernitan writings, see C.H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England*, London, 1967, Chapter 3; H.E. Sigerist, *Landmarks in the History of Hygiene*, Oxford, 1956, Chapter 2.

⁵² Humoral theory held that the health of the body is controlled by the balance of its liquid elements. The body of man has in itself blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile; these make up the nature of his body, and through these he feels pain or enjoys health. He enjoys the most perfect health when these elements are duly proportioned to one another in respect of compounding power and bulk, and when they are perfectly mingled. Pain is felt when one of these elements is in defect or excess, or is isolated in the body without being compounded in the body with all the others. Humoral balance, then, is a delicate thing. Humours have not only an ideal ratio to each other based on "bulk", but an ideal relation based on "power" and location within the body. Furthermore, these elements can become "corrupted of themselves". The body can create its own poison. If the delicate balance of the body's humoral system is somehow thrown off, illnesses, both physical and mental, will result.

⁵³ The first book is based on *Isagoge* of Johannitius and corresponds to his divisions of the subject matter into 'naturals', 'non-naturals', and 'contra-naturals'.

⁵⁴ The term 'complexion' (Latin 'complexio') means physiological personality types governed by the dominance of one or another of the humours (see the Table).

temperament	sanguine	phlegmatic	choleric	melancholic
humour	blood	phlegm	yellow bile	black bile

the third book Elyot advises on how to purge an excess of any humour as well as writes about 'affectes' of the mind, such as 'ire, dolour and joye'. The fourth book starts with the comments on 'cruditie', then he writes about 'destillations', 'lassitude', 'tokens', or symptoms of diseases, and urinoscopy. The fourth book ends with recommendations of diet for the time of pestilence.

The Castel of Helth was written in 1536 and went through seventeen editions by 1610.⁵⁵ There was, however, some confusion about the date of its first publication. Not until 1960 was the knowledge of the existence of the first edition made public by Lehmborg.⁵⁶ *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides the year 1533 as the year of the first edition, and according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, *The Castel of Helth* was first published in 1534. Tannenbaum writes about a copy of the book which bore the date 1534 on the title-page and which was dedicated to Thomas Cromwell.⁵⁷ The mystery of the 1534 edition can easily be solved. Thomas Berthelet, who printed all Sir Thomas Elyot's books, used at least thirteen borders. One of these borders which was in use for a number of years had the date 1534 engraved on it.⁵⁸ Lehmborg also writes of Berthelet's irritating habit of re-using borders without correcting the date.⁵⁹ This has provided a trap for unwary bibliographers and has probably led to this confusion about pre-1539 editions of *The Castel of Helth*. According to Hogrefe the first edition came from the press some time between 1536 and 1539. Since Elyot addresses Cromwell as lord privy seal, 1536 is the earliest possible date.⁶⁰ Taking into consideration the Cromwell's feigned illness in April 1536⁶¹, we may conclude that Elyot could have published his treatise in the second half of this year.

Among human beings, each person was endowed with his or her own innate complexion. Complexion was a fundamental organising principle of each individual human organism considered as a whole. The complexion of human beings varied according to conditions of life and external circumstances. It was affected by the passage of time, heat and moisture; it differed according to age, gender, or geographical region. (Nancy Siraisi. *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, Chicago Il., 1990, p. 102).

⁵⁵ See A.W. Pollard, and G.R. Redgrave, eds. *A Short-title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640*, London, 1926, 1946, 1986.

The consecutive editions were as follows: 1536? (8°) STC 7642.5; 1539 (4°) STC 7642.7, (8°) STC 7643; 1541 (4°) STC 7644, (8°) STC 7645, (8°) STC 7646; 1547 (8°) STC 7646.5; 1550? (8°) STC 7647; 1557? (8°) STC 7649; 1560? (8°) STC 7650; 1561 (8°) STC 7651; 1572 (8°) STC 7652; 1576 (8°) STC 7652.5; 1580 (8°) STC 7653; 1587 (8°) STC 7655; 1595 (4°) STC 7656; 1610 (4°) STC 7657.

⁵⁶ Stanford E. Lehmborg, *Sir Thomas Elyot Tudor Humanist*, Austin, 1960, p. 132. Yale Medical Library possesses a copy which is the first edition of the book.

⁵⁷ Thomas, Elyot. *The Castel of Helthe*. London, 1541. Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, New York, 1937 with an Introduction by Samuel A. Tannenbaum, p. iv.

⁵⁸ See Colin Clair, *A History of Printing in Britain*, London, 1965, p. 58.

⁵⁹ Stanford E. Lehmborg, *Sir Thomas Elyot Tudor Humanist*, Austin 1960, p. 132.

⁶⁰ Pearl Hogrefe, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Elyot Englishman*. Ames, 1967, p. 244.

⁶¹ On Cromwell's illness, see See Alison Weir, *Henry VIII. King and Court*, London 2001, pp. 373-374.

Elyot wrote his medical treatise with two purposes in mind. Firstly, he was concerned with Thomas Cromwell's health, and secondly, he wished to reach the general reader as well. In the preface of the first edition Elyot explains that two months earlier, when he went to Cromwell's house to pay him a visit⁶² "where it was shewed to me by your partes, that y^e were at that tyme discreded, with the whiche wordes, although, at the fyrste I felte my hart greued, as true frendshyp required."⁶³ He realised that a man who carries great responsibilities must sometimes experience a failure of his bodily powers. Distressed to learn of his patron's illness he gathered from the ancient authors the necessary information on medicine

expediēt for hym to know, whose helthe shoulde be profitable to all theym that loue vertue: and to dedicate and giue it vnto youre good lordeshyp, as vnto the persone, which for the causes about mēcioned, is worthy to haue it, takynge the receyuyng therof by your lordshyp, for a syngular benefice.⁶⁴

He names Cromwell "the principall and fyrst occasion, that moued me to take in hande this honest enterprise."⁶⁵ Elyot's concern about Cromwell's health arises from his being a humanist. He refers probably to Celsus who in *De re medica*⁶⁶ expressed concern with the citizen engaged in public affairs and bearing the burden of office. Elyot clearly states that it is necessary for the good of the state that a prominent "consaylours, attendynge on the person of the chiefe gouernour" attend to his health.⁶⁷

In the same preface Elyot explains in what way his treatise may become useful to the general reader:

who so dothe diligently reade it, and discretely doth practise the counsayles therin contained, he shal perfectly knowe the state of his body, beinge in the latitude of helthe, or declynation to syckenes, ingendred by distēperaunce of the foure naturall humours. And knowynge so moche, if the distemperance be not very great, he shall also fynde there, the meane to reduce eftsones the body to his fyrst temperance. Also therby he

⁶² It must have been in or shortly after April, 1536 because in that time Cromwell feigned illness.

⁶³ Thomas Elyot. *Castel of Helth*, London, 1536, A2^r

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, A3^r

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, A4^r

⁶⁶ *De re medica* is the first comprehensive, well-organised medical text in history, embracing the three recognised fields of dietetics, pharmacology and surgery. It lay untouched during the Middle Ages and it was not until 1443 that Tomaso da Sarzana (Pope Nicholas V) discovered Celsus's *De re medica* from obscurity in a church at Milan. It soon became a favourite book of the new era and Celsus was one of the first medical classics to be put into print. The Graeco-Latino-Arabic terminology of Arabic compilers began to be replaced by the vocabulary of Celsus.

⁶⁷ "what commoditie, strength, and consolation it is to a realme, to haue honourable, wyse, and circumspect consaylours, attendynge on the person of the chiefe gouernour: contrarywise in the lacke of them, what incommodytie, debilitie, and desolation, happeneth to the realme, where the prynce lacketh suche consaylours, whom Aristotle calle, his eies, his ears, his handes, and his fete." (Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth*, London, 1536, A2^v)

shall lerne howe his body beinge attached with sycknes, he may per fitely instructe his phisition, soo that by coniectute of extrementes, he be not deceyued, whiche by wyse phisitions consydered, they wyl not dysdayne that I write in this matter, their estimation, (where fewe men doo petyshe) being therby incread.⁶⁸

From further editions of *The Castel of Helth* one can derive information on the difficulties Elyot had to face in his effort to popularise medical knowledge. In the preface of the 1539 edition Elyot expresses his concern that haste in which he was preparing his treatise for Cromwell led to imperfections:

the grieffe, whiche I had for your lordeshypes disease, with the desire that ye mought lyue longe, without sycknesse, caused suche spede in buyldinge the Castell of helth, that therein lacked some parte of perfection.⁶⁹

He makes clear that he is issuing a revised version,

And yet perchance some thinges mought happen to escape, which were as nedefull to be corrected: myne attendance on the parlyament, I being a member of the lower house, withdrawyng from me leysure conuenyente, to fynde in this warke all the faultes, whiche moughte be amended.⁷⁰

Although the 1539 version had been extended with several passages, Elyot was not completely satisfied and he introduced further modifications in 1541.⁷¹

In the preface of the 1541 edition he explains that his motives of writing his treatise were not glory, reward, or promotion, and that it was based on “the moste princypall wrytars in phisicke, which beinge thoroughly studied and well remembrid, shalbe profitable (I doubt not) vnto the reder, and nothyng nouse to honeste physytyons.”⁷² Elyot saw his task as the provision of background knowledge so that the patient might “instructe his phisition, whervnto he maye adapt his counsaile and remedies.”⁷³ For the upper classes, to whom the work was addressed, some basic knowledge of medical theory was essential if they were to judge doctor’s expertise or choose among different practitioners or get involved in discussion on medical matters with their practitioner, who very often was their employee.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Thomas Elyot, *Castel of Helth*, London, 1536, A3^{r-v}

⁶⁹ Thomas Elyot. *Castel of Helth*, London, 1539, A2^r

⁷⁰ Ibidem, A2^{r-v} Cf. Chapter II

⁷¹ Elyot expanded the fourth book by the addition of a whole new chapter on “rewmes”.

⁷² Thomas Elyot. *The Castel of Helth*, London, 1541, sig. A 4^v

⁷³ Ibidem, sig. a^r

⁷⁴ On doctor-patient relationships, see F. N. L. Poynter, ‘Patients and Their Ills in Vicary’s Time’, *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons*, 1975, LVI: 145–9; Cf. Paul Slack, ‘Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England.’ In Ed. Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 260.

Facing accusations of being ignorant and having no medical education to be able to write on medical matters, Elyot did his best to convince his readers that he did know something about medicine. In the preface of the 1541 edition he explains

whan I wrate fyrste this boke, I was not all ingnorante in phisycke. for before that I was. xx. yeres olde, a worshipfull phisition,⁷⁵ and one of the moste renoumed at that tyme in England, perceuyng me by nature inclined to knowledge, rad vnto me the workes of Galene of temperaments, natural faculties, the Introduction of Johãnicus, with some of y^e Aphorismes of Hippocrates. And afterwarde by mine owne study, I radde ouer in order the more parte of the warkes of Hippocrates, Galen, Oribasius, Paulus Celius, Alexander Trallianus, Celsus, Plinius y^e one and the other, with Dioscorides. Nor I dyd ommit to reade the longe Canones of Auicena, y^e Commentaries of Auerrois, y^e practisis of Isake, Halyabbas, Rasys, Mesue, and also of the more part of them which were their aggregatours and followers.⁷⁶ And all though I haue neuer ben at MôtPELLIER, Padua, nor Salern, yet haue I foïd some thyng in phisycke, whereby I haue taken no little profyete concernynge myne owne helthe.⁷⁷

Elyot presented an opinion that universities are not essential for a knowledge of medicine. The learning of the physicians was not out of reach since the literature of medicine was accessible to those who were not trained in medicine. He denied the claims that only the medically educated could understand medical books.⁷⁸

He was also annoyed by the charge by his peers that writing on medicine was not proper for a gentleman “A worthy matter, sayth one, syr Thomas Elyot is become a Phisition, and wrytethe in phisik, which besemeth not a knyght, he mought haue ben moch better occupied.”⁷⁹ In reply Elyot pleaded concern for his country and showed that members of his own class – emperors, kings, knights, princes and senators – had studied and practised the medical arts. Then follow examples of

⁷⁵ Elyot's biographers have agreed that the worshipful physician was Thomas Linacre, who served Henry VIII as personal physician and founded Royal College of Physicians (Pearl Hogrefe, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Elyot Englishman*, Iowa State University Press, 1967, p. 52; DNB under 'Elyot'; Stanford E. Lehmborg, *Sir Thomas Elyot Tudor Humanist*, Austin, 1960, p. 14, 20; Donald W. Rude, *A Critical Edition of Sir Thomas Elyot's the Boke Named the Governour. The Renaissance Imagination*, 1992, p. xv).

⁷⁶ It is probably not a complete list of medical writers known to Elyot but these names appear on reading lists assigned to medical students. His strategy was certainly to impress the professional physicians of his time with his medical qualifications to suggest that he had the equivalent of a university education in medicine.

⁷⁷ Thomas Elyot, *Castel of Helth*, London 1541, The Preface, sig. A iv^r

⁷⁸ Cf. Andrew Wear, *Health and Healing in Early Modern England. Studies in Social and Intellectual History*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney, 1998, p. 20. Wear suggests that although Galenic medicine was based on a mixture of experience and book learning, the learned physicians could not base their claims to a monopoly of expertise upon experience alone, because that pointed in the direction of the empirics and quacks, their hated enemies. That is why they could only point to Sir Thomas Elyot's errors in transmitting the knowledge he had gained from books, and these were his scholarly errors.

⁷⁹ Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth*, London 1541, A ii

“Juba the kyng of Maurytania and Lybia,” who found out the “vertouse qualities of the herbe called *Euforbium*,” Gentius, king of Illyria, who found the virtues of gentian. The herb lysimachia, took its name “of kyng Lysimachus.” Mithridates the Great, king of Ponthus, “founde fyrste the virtues of Scordion,” and also invented mithridate, the famous medicine against poison. “Arthemisia queene of Caria,” found the virtues of “motherworte [wormwood], which in latyne bearith her name, whereby her noble renome hath lengar continued, than by the makyng of the famouse monument ouer her dead husbond, callyd Mausoleum.”⁸⁰

The Castel of Helth was this kind of popular medical books which met general public's demand. Elyot provides in it counselling on how to prevent and treat illnesses in the light of the theory of humours. A man living in sixteenth-century England could read in his native tongue about matters concerning him much. He could learn what foods he should eat and which of them ought to be avoided. In the book one could find necessary information on how to dress, what exercises to take and what to do in time of pestilence.

Although physicians attacked Elyot for revealing the secrets of their trade, numerous writers throughout the sixteenth century, among them many physicians, praised highly his pioneer effort in the field and held up him as a model publicist. Elyot can be claimed to be “both the originator and chief representative of this genre of publication, the main characteristic of which was the provision of simple rules for a healthy diet and course of life.”⁸¹

***The Castel of Helth* Sir Thomasa Elyota jak o przykt ad renesansowego poradnika medycznego**

Streszczenie

W Anglii w okresie Tudorów rosło medyczne większość społeczeństwa leczyła się sama lub była leczona przez swoich najbliższych. Rosnące zainteresowanie medycyną prowadziło do zapotrzebowania na książki medyczne.

Artykuł opisuje jeden z najwcześniejszych oryginalnych poradników medycznych, wydanych w Anglii w 1536 roku – *The Castel of Helth* Sir Thomasa Elyota. Poradnik ten, oparty całkowicie na teorii humoralnej, należy do gatunku *regimina*. Zajmuje się zaleceniami dotyczącymi zdrowego trybu życia. Zawiera wskazówki na temat, jak żyć, aby zachować zdrowie, oraz jak postępować w przypadku choroby. Dzieło Elyota pozostaje pod wpływem humanizmu, szczególnie humanizmu medycznego, którego przedstawiciele wprowadzali w czyn humanistyczne hasło *ad fontes* szukając poprawy stanu wiedzy medycznej w poprawnym tłumaczeniu dzieł greckich i rzymskich autorzytetów medycznych.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, A ii v- Aiii f

⁸¹ Paul Slack, ‘Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England.’ In Ed. Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 250.

Elyot napisał swój poradnik mając na uwadze dwa zasadnicze cele. Po pierwsze, chciał on pomóc Thomasowi Cromwellowi w jego chorobie, a po drugie, pragnął przekazać dorobek starożytności w zakresie wiedzy medycznej swoim rodakom.

Sir Thomas Elyot spotkał się z atakami ze strony przedstawicieli świata lekarskiego, którzy zarzucali mu dyletanctwo i ignorancję oraz brak wykształcenia medycznego. Autor *The Castel of Helth* bronił się skutecznie, wykazując, że więksi od niego (królowie, książęta czy senatorowie) pisali na tematy medyczne, a studia uniwersyteckie nie są konieczne dla zdobycia wiedzy medycznej.

Po opublikowaniu *The Castel of Helth* zaczęły pojawiać się coraz liczniejsze książki wzorowane na modelu Elyota.