

Advice Concerning Pregnancy and Health in Late Medieval Europe: Peasant Women's Wisdom in *The Distaff Gospels*

KATHLEEN GARAY

MADELEINE JEAY

Abstract. This paper explores an area which has proven difficult for scholars to penetrate: women's popular wisdom concerning medical matters in the later medieval period. Contextualized within an examination of medieval medical texts both by and about women, our discussion focuses on a later 15th-century French work, *The Distaff Gospels*. This text, published recently in English for the first time since 1510, consists of more than 200 pieces of advice or "gospels," ostensibly conveyed to one another by a group of women who met together during the long winter evenings to spin. A significant portion of the advice might be considered "medical" in nature; it is grouped into two broad categories: pregnancy and health. We conclude that although our text is male mediated, it provides a reliable and valuable guide to peasant women's medical lore during this period.

Résumé. Cet article aborde un domaine qui reste encore peu accessible aux chercheurs, celui des connaissances médicales des femmes du peuple au Moyen Age, notamment à la campagne. Placée dans le contexte des traités médiévaux sur la santé des femmes, éventuellement composés par des femmes, notre présentation est centrée sur un texte français de la fin du Moyen Age, les *Évangiles des Quenouilles*. Cette oeuvre rassemble une collection de plus de 200 « évangiles », exemples de leur savoir traditionnel, échangés par un groupe de villageoises qui se rencontraient pour filer durant les longues soirées d'hiver. Une portion significative de ce savoir est de nature médicale. Il peut se répartir en deux catégories. La première concerne les questions reliées à la grossesse et à la santé des enfants ; la seconde traite de la santé en général, avec des façons

Kathleen Garay, Arts and Science Programme, McMaster University.

Madeleine Jeay, Department of French, McMaster University.

de guérir de certaines maladies, mais surtout de les éviter. Notre conclusion est que, bien que rédigé par une plume masculine, ce texte constitue une source précieuse et fiable pour la connaissance des traditions médicales des femmes du peuple à la fin du Moyen Âge.

"To be cured of continuous fever, you must write the first three words of the *Our Father* on a sage leaf, locally grown, and eat it in the morning. Do this for three days and then you will be cured" (VI:7).¹ "Young women should never be given hare's heads to eat for fear they might think about it later, once they are married, especially while they are pregnant; in that case, for sure, their children would have split lips" (I:8). Of the more than 200 pieces of advice contained in *The Distaff Gospels*, a mid-15th-century Old French collection of women's lore recently available for the first time in modern English, almost half concern aspects of health: pregnancy, predicting the sex of the foetus and ensuring the future wellbeing of the child, as well as practices to avoid sickness and cures for various ailments. The main text² is framed as a series of storytelling evenings in which women accompany their work of spinning by taking turns to serve as the main conveyor of the sessions' "gospels." The names of three male authors are associated with the shorter Chantilly manuscript, the earliest compilation, while in the more developed and anonymous Paris version the six evenings are introduced and linked by the persona of a male secretary who records the oral discourse of the spinsters' meetings.³ However, despite these male associations, both literal and literary, it is clear that the wisdom conveyed in the *Distaff Gospels* springs, at least in part, from popular beliefs and practices which have a predominantly female origin and a primarily female focus, and the texts provide a rare glimpse into the beliefs of peasant women in the later Middle Ages.

While this work is familiar to French scholars, it has received only occasional notice from scholars working in English⁴ and there has been no attention paid in either language to its role as a compendium of popular wisdom as it relates to aspects of pregnancy and health. As we will demonstrate, *The Distaff Gospels* presents a series of conjunctions, points of contact and connection between elite and popular learning, medical practices based on both theoretical and empirical traditions, and healing practices based on both spiritual and secular beliefs. Before exploring the text further, we will consider something of the wider context of medical knowledge in the medieval period.

The formal or elite learning of the Middle Ages was still firmly anchored in the legacy of the ancient world: Hippocrates, active in Greece during the fifth-century BC, and Galen of Pergamon who established his career in second-century Rome. Around the year 1100 a basic curriculum of medical texts appears to have been developed in Salerno⁵

in southern Italy which added Arab learning to the Greek and Roman sources; many of the Arabic works were translated by Constantine the African during the 11th century, both in Salerno and at the monastery of Monte Cassino.⁶ However, as Monica Green observes, there was also a readiness on the part of at least some medical writers “to take seriously the empirical practices and knowledge of local women”⁷ and women certainly figured as subjects in male-authored medical texts. Our examination of women’s medical wisdom in *The Distaff Gospels* will consider both of these elements—women as healers and women as the subjects of medical theory and practice.

While their gender usually denied them access to advanced education, the province of the male clerical class, the “medical marketplace”⁸ was still relatively open in the 11th and 12th centuries; the professionalization and licensing of medical practitioners was only to emerge towards the end of the medieval period. Clearly some women were engaged in medical practice in 12th-century Italy, particularly in the town of Salerno. The best known of these was Trota, the presumed female author of the work which forms the core of the so-called *Trotula* texts. While the two companion texts show the influence of Greco-Roman theory and practice, *The Book on the Diseases of Women according to Trotula* takes a more practical and pragmatic approach, and focuses in a very businesslike way on “the causes of their diseases, their symptoms and their cures.”⁹ The theoretical foundation, a cosmology inherited from Hippocrates and Galen, was based on the need to balance the body’s four humours—choler or yellow bile, blood, phlegm, and melancholy or black bile. The humours corresponded to the earth’s four elements, fire, air, water, and earth, and the resulting conditions governed both the earth and humanity: hot, dry, moist, and cold. The inherent coldness of women contrasts with the heat of the male and this difference explains, for example, menstruation in women:

because there is not enough heat in women to dry up the bad and superfluous humours which are in them, nor is their weakness able to tolerate sufficient labour so that Nature might expel [the excess] to the outside through sweat as [it does] in men, Nature established a certain purgation especially for women, that is the menses, to temper their poverty of heat. The common people call the menses “the flowers,” because just as trees do not bring forth fruit without flowers, so women without their flowers are cheated of the ability to conceive. This purgation happens in women just as nocturnal emission happens to men.¹⁰

Like most male medical authorities, the 13th-century writer Bartholomeus Anglicus included female ailments in his encyclopaedic compilation, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. Citing the seventh-century authority Isidore of Seville, as well as Galen, Anglicus presents less positive aspects of menstruation in his discussion “Of bad and corrupted blood.” He pronounces that the *sanguis menstrualis*, if it stays in the body longer than usual:

because of an excess of humidity and lack of heat...is the cause of serious diseases such as paralysis of the spiritual members, mental disorders and other illnesses, since that corrupt blood, if held for too long, is spilled in different parts of the body, as Galen says in his *libro passionarum*. The best cure is to evacuate the corrupted blood that greatly harms the body and changes and infects other bodies. In his *Book 10, chapter 2*, Isidore says that if crops are touched by menstrual blood, they do not grow but dry and shrivel, herbs die, trees lose their fruit, iron gets rusty, bronze and other metals turn black. If a dog eats some of it, he goes mad. Also a thing called *glutinum asfalti* [cement] which is so hard that neither water nor iron nor anything else can damage it, crumbles easily if it is touched by this matter. Isidore says this blood is produced in women's bodies because of an excess of moisture and a lack of heat. In order to protect her health, this matter is collected in the womb, like fish in a water channel.¹¹

However, Anglicus agrees with Trota on menstruation's purgative function: "When it evacuates itself normally, the body stays healthy and light, which disposes the womb for conception."¹²

In works of the best-known female author of medical texts from the medieval period, the *Physica* and *Causae et curae* attributed to the 12th-century abbess Hildegard of Bingen,¹³ the same theoretical foundation of classical wisdom is evident, blended with Hildegard's own expertise in other areas such as the healing qualities of herbs, women's physiognomy, the spiritual—based on biblical, patristic, and medieval theology¹⁴—and even the magical. The *Physica* consists of nine books or sections, the first and most extensive of which is a collection of over 200 short chapters on plants, followed by books devoted to three of the four elements (earth, water and air), trees, jewels and precious stones, fish, birds, animals, reptiles, and metals. In all of the areas of investigation there is a focus on the medical uses of the topic under consideration, and their categorization as either hot or cold.¹⁵ While her sources are unknown,¹⁶ the influences of Pliny, Isidore of Seville and Galen, as well as elements of Arab learning, can all be seen in this work, as can the fusion of the "scientific" with the spiritual. Isidore's influence is evident, for example, in Hildegard's discussion of jewel therapy. She asserts that precious stones have their origins in the east, where the heat of the sun is greatest and while all are a combination of fire and water, they have different powers.¹⁷ Isidore had described the bitterness of the emerald which he ascribed to its excessive greenness; for Hildegard this *viriditas* was its chief virtue. "It is a specific for pain in the heart, stomach or side, epilepsy, headache, colds, and sores. The cure is effected by external application in most cases, although sometimes just looking at the jewel while repeating a religious charm will produce the desired effect."¹⁸

Hildegard's *Causae et curae*, while it also concerns itself with diseases and their cures, devotes more attention to the theoretical aspects of medicine and physiology.¹⁹ This work consists of five sections: the first starts with the creation of the world and includes both cosmology and cos-

mography, the second establishes humankind within this context and introduces a series of illnesses and disorders, using both German and Greek terminology, the following two sections present remedies or cures, mostly of a herbal nature, and the fifth is a general section containing advice on signs of life and death and a long list of astrological prognostications.²⁰ Hildegard develops the notion of the humours and their interactions, examines the physiological differences between the sexes as well as the role of sexuality in overall health. She makes reference to the female body along with the male wherever she considers human physiognomy and examines menstruation, conception, and pregnancy in some detail.²¹ The largest part of the work is devoted to brief descriptions of diseases and illnesses, "including migraine (called *emigranea* in the text), asthma, urinary incontinence, and recurrent fevers.... She also covers laughter and tears, sneezing and nosebleeds, and a variety of rashes and infestations including lice and several different kinds of intestinal worms."²² Most of the cures derive from plants and are designed to counteract the qualities which are causing the illness; there are several which reflect "more magical and superstitious practices."²³ In Book Four Hildegard "outlines an elaborate procedure against poison, involving plantain, geranium, and mallow plants, to be picked in the middle of April and kept alive by sprinkling with water at certain specified times of the day or night, placed in a high window, and then made into a sort of potpourri to be smelled every day. The mixture can also serve as an aphrodisiac, tied in a cloth around the loins of a man, or the woman's waist."²⁴ Such remedies clearly demonstrate that much of medieval medicine, even that produced in the scholarly religious environment, was a combination of ancient wisdom and contemporary observation combined with ritual and lore which could stem from Christian or even pre-Christian observances.

With the Hildegard and Trota texts as notable exceptions, gaining direct access to women's medical learning and practice in the medieval period is an almost impossible task. However, we can obtain an oblique glimpse of the healing activities of some women through the charitable support the Church provided for the sick. Indeed, the fundamental link between the medical and the religious world in the medieval period makes it difficult to separate spiritual healing from what the modern mind would consider a medical cure. A great number of biographies of saints written between the 13th and the 15th century describe their healing miracles in great detail as proof of their holiness; they performed miraculous cures, both before and after death. The *vitae* of many of the saintly women, such as the beguine Douceline de Digne, also reveal that service to the sick was part of their devotional practice, and, as a physical expression of charity, the primary theological virtue, it was almost a requirement for sainthood. Douceline's biographer records cases such

as that of the woman with paralysis in her legs: the "art of medicine could not heal her. Nothing that the doctors advised her to do was of any use or benefit to her." After Douceline had touched the woman's legs "within three days she was completely cured, without taking any medicine."²⁵ This was clearly a miraculous cure, but on a more prosaic level, the *vita* also demonstrates that Douceline had been trained from her youth in basic medical care. Her father "brought home the sick and the suffering that he found in the streets and by the roads" and Douceline nursed them: "Many times, for the love of the Lord, she washed their feet, picked the vermin from their legs and their heads, and cared for their wounds...she would carry them when they were not able to walk."²⁶

Like Douceline de Digne, Berthe de Corne, the last of the women to preside over the nightly gatherings in *The Distaff Gospels*, is presented as having learned her medical skills from her father who was a trained doctor. As we have seen, women were normally excluded from advanced formal training and university education, which meant that their only way of obtaining access to the corpus of theoretical treatises was private instruction within the family, either from their husbands or fathers. By the late Middle Ages, the organization of the medical profession had evolved to such an extent that women practitioners faced increasing restrictions for practising openly and belonging to guilds which favoured university trained physicians, male practitioners and barbers. We are told that Berthe had to practise "secretly" and this probably reflects the situation of most female practitioners. Like Salerno in Italy where Trota composed her text, Montpellier in France was famous for its specialization in medicine. It was here that Renaud de Corne, the fictional father of the spinster Berthe, had been educated (VI, introduction).

While *The Distaff Gospels* takes us very far away from the context of the saintly *vita*, the six old women who preside over the assembly during the course of six evenings from Monday to Saturday, sharing their wisdom with their neighbours, their "gospels" and commentaries mimicking the scholarly form of text and gloss, also correspond to real life women healers in the Middle Ages. Among the group who chair the sessions, one is a midwife and another is said to have learned the magical arts. All of them are also characterized as sexually deviant: prostitutes when they were young, they now act as procuresses. This stereotype of the old woman in satiric literature is also revealing of the perception of women practitioners in the later Middle Ages. They belonged to the bottom of the medieval medical hierarchy, marginal females who were soon to be seen as real threats and burned at the stake as witches.²⁷ As with the pilgrims presented in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the reader needs to look beyond the parodic aspect of the work and its comic bias. The portrait which *The Distaff Gospels* gives of these old women cannot be dismissed as pure caricature. They are sisters of the Wife of Bath who had five husbands and knew how to cure diseases, and of Pertelote, Chanticleer's wife in the

"Nun's Priest's Tale," who was an expert in herbal remedies. Our matrons belong to a secular tradition which ascribes to women—especially older ones—both the knowledge of the human body and of the practices and ingredients that keep it healthy or cure its ailments. Women learnt the virtues of plants through food preparation and cooking; they tended bruises, burns, cuts, problems of digestion, and skin rashes. Some of them specialized in delivering babies and taking care of the dead.

The health-related lore of *The Distaff Gospels* falls into two primary categories: the first consists of advice concerned with pregnancy, including practices to be avoided during pregnancy, methods to determine the sex of the foetus, how to ensure a favourable outcome of the pregnancy and how to care for the newborn. The second category comprises advice more generally concerned with health, including ways to avoid illness, cures for various ailments, and a more tangential category of spells and prognostications.

As might be expected in a collection of women's wisdom, particularly one rooted in peasant life, pregnancy is a central preoccupation in *The Distaff Gospels*. Advice as to what must be avoided by the pregnant woman is plentiful: sharp objects, especially an unsheathed sword, must never be handled in her presence "unless you gently touch her head first with the flat blade of the sword so that she remains calm and that her son will be brave for the rest of his life" (I:15). As we have seen, her diet must not include hare's heads, which are certain to cause the child to be born with a split lip (I:8)²⁸ nor should pregnant women be given fish heads to eat "for fear that, as a result of their imagination, their children will be born with mouths more turned up and pointed than normal" (I:22). The gloss to this chapter contains a bawdy pun on the male anatomy: "Perrette Faytos, a midwife, said that she had delivered several children who had their tip much longer than the others" (I:22, gloss).²⁹ Cheese must also be avoided because of its effect on the reproductive organs: "if a woman thinks that she is pregnant, she must not eat soft cheese because, if she carries a boy, he will have a short small member, and if it is a girl, her crack will be wide, deep and lean" (CIV: [23]).³⁰

While a pregnant woman today is unlikely to encounter such dietary restrictions, we do find a belief which is still current—a pregnant woman's cravings must be indulged:

I tell you also that God and reason forbid talking with any pregnant woman, or even any married woman of childbearing age, about any food which cannot be immediately obtained if needed, so that her baby will not have a mark on its body. (I:17)³¹

Unsatisfied cravings can be even more serious if the foetus is female:

As true as the gospel, when a woman has conceived, she can easily know if it is a boy or a girl by the cravings she has, because if she is carrying a girl and

craves for something she cannot get, she is at risk of endangering her life and losing her child, which does not happen with a boy. I say that this is proof that the female sex would have more burning desires and cravings than the male sex, if fear did not moderate their constitution. (CII:82)³²

Marks on the body can also result "if cherries, strawberries or red wine are thrown in the face of a pregnant woman" (I:17). The violence implied in this last gospel is greatly amplified in another piece of advice: "If it happens that a man beats his pregnant wife or tramples her with his feet, she will deliver with great difficulty, and often she is at risk of losing her life." The gloss provides only a ritual of submission as the "cure" in this case: "Lady Hermofrode said that there is no remedy except that she must get one of the shoes with which the husband trampled on her and drink from that shoe. If she does that, be sure that she will deliver easily" (I:23 and gloss).³³

Late medieval women, like most of their modern counterparts, were eager to learn the sex of their unborn children and many of the old matrons' strategies for determining this are rooted in the ancient association of the female with the left or sinister side and the male with the right: "Laurette la Serie said that if a pregnant woman walks with her right foot first and not the left, she certainly carries a boy—if she does the opposite, she will have a girl" (IV:10, gloss).³⁴ As we have seen, the Galenic theory of humours associated the qualities of cold and humid with females, while hot and dry qualities pertain to males; the heart, considered as a source of heat, is located on the right side and therefore this is the side associated with the male foetus. Aristotelian philosophy pronounced that the female was just a *mas occasionatus*, a defective male, and while Galenic medicine developed the theory of the existence of a female sperm as active as the male sperm in the work of conception, Aristotle denied any active principle to her fluid secretion. She is just a vessel providing the matter. Hildegard also agreed that the strength of the man's semen determines the sex of the child, with strong semen producing boys while the woman's menstrual blood provides nourishment: "For woman is now like soil that is ploughed with a plough. She receives man's semen, encases it in her blood and warms it with her warmth."³⁵ The temperament of the child depends on the amount of love the man and woman feel for one another at the time of conception: where the man's semen is strong and both he and the woman feel "proper affectionate love" then "a male is conceived because it was so ordained by God."³⁶ However, "if a man's semen is thin and if at that hour neither feels affectionate love for the other, a female of bitter disposition is born."³⁷

Determining the sex of the unborn child could also be assisted by what might appear to the modern observer as gender stereotyping: "When a pregnant woman carries her child more on her right side, and she likes eating venison and poultry, and enjoys hearing about tourna-

ments and jousts, you should know for certain that she will have a son."³⁸ Contributing the gloss to this wisdom, Mabelie, who had been a midwife, said that when the woman carries on the left side and enjoys dances and music, she will have a girl (IV:9 and gloss). Like many of the ancient texts, these gospels show a clear association of the male gender with the strength and light of the east and the morning sun and associate the female with the weakness implied by the end of the day and darkness. In a gloss to one of the Thursday gospels "Martine Tost Preste said that if you have your husband turn his face towards the east during intercourse, if you conceive a child, it will be a son" (IV:15, gloss). In response to the advice that a woman who wants a boy should "clench her fists while her husband does nature's work, then for sure she will have a son" the gloss observes that "some experienced midwives maintain that to have a son, one should have intercourse in the morning, and, to have a daughter, in the evening and at night" (V:18 and gloss). Many authors elaborated on the best conditions for coitus, especially the most favourable time for performing the act.³⁹ According to Galenic principles, the morning, especially if you have not yet eaten, would be a good time to conceive a boy, since the proper level of heat comes from food which has been completely "cooked" or digested. Such gynaecological preoccupations illustrate the fact that the medical arts and popular lore shared common ground, even if their interpretations could sometimes differ.

Although the idea of the subconscious was, of course, unknown during this period, the old matrons twice suggest that the pregnant woman may inadvertently reveal her future offspring's sex herself. The first mention comes in the Monday session: "When a woman is carrying a child and she wishes to know whether she is carrying a boy or a girl, you should sprinkle salt on her head while she is sleeping, so gently that she is unaware of it. When she wakes, note what name she says first. If she says a man's name it will be a boy and if she says a woman's name it will be a girl" (I:7).⁴⁰ A further reference follows on the Thursday evening: "If a pregnant woman wants to know the gender of the child she is bearing, listen to her and she will reveal it herself. When she asks: 'What do you think I am carrying?', if you say: 'A lovely boy', and she does not blush, you should know for sure that she will have a girl" (IV:10).⁴¹ And it is not only the woman who may have some deep rooted instinct concerning the offspring's sex; even her male partner may be able to predict it: "When a man has fathered a child according to nature, if he could remember the circumstances and recall how he felt afterwards, he would need no other judge than himself, because when a man fathers a son, he is not much affected because he fathers his own kind. But if he fathers a daughter, who has a different constitution from his, he feels unwell for at least two or three days afterwards" (IV:11).

According to the old spinsters there are also physiological signs which can assist in sex prediction: "Perrote Galoise said that as soon as the woman has conceived a boy, she is well for the first three months, but during the next three months, she suffers great pain, more than for a girl. However, a girl causes her more suffering during the first three months" (IV:11, gloss).

A third type of pregnancy-related advice concerns behaviours by the couple concerned which were believed to influence the child's future. Activities with negative implications included the male having intercourse with dirty feet, a clear indication that only the father had an active role in procreation:

It is certainly as true as the gospel that when a man sleeps with his wife or his mistress with dirty and smelly feet, if he fathers a boy, the child will have smelly and unpleasant breath. If he fathers a girl, she will have a stinky rear end.

Gloss. Maroie Ployarde said, concerning this chapter, that this happened to her first cousin. No matter where she went, she produced such a bad smell from her rear end that those around her held their noses, without realizing what had caused the smell." (I:11)⁴²

There are also negative prospects for children born from marriages where "a man who does something without informing his wife" (I:4) as well as for those born from intercourse between a nun and a priest or friar (IV:4) and between a priest and his mistress (IV:5).

Despite the Church's promotion of sexual abstinence before marriage, the women also see negative outcomes in the marriage of two virgins:

I tell you as the gospel truth that when a sexually inexperienced young man marries a young virgin, their first child is bound to be simple.

Gloss. Berthe l'Estroite said on this chapter that, a short time ago, it happened to one of her daughters who was married to the pig keeper of the estate. The first night, as it happened, she had to teach them what to do, and, as a result, their first son is simple and innocent." (I:12)

However, the gospels also contain more practical and less gloomy advice for ensuring good outcomes, once the child has been born:

My neighbours and friends, it is the gospel truth that, when a child is just born, if he is given a cooked apple to eat before being suckled, he will never in his whole life be greedy nor gluttonous in his eating and drinking, and he will be most courteous with women, in both words and deeds.

Gloss. Maroie Morele said on this text that if you touch the head of a newborn child with the umbilical cord, he will have a long life, sweet breath, a good voice, and pleasing and eloquent speech. (I:13)

Curly hair was another very desirable attribute:

I assure you as true as the gospel that if you want your newborn children to have curly hair, as soon as you have removed their baptismal garments, you should wash their hair with white wine and put white vine roots in their bath.⁴³

Gloss. Lady Hermofrode corroborated this text, saying that if two young and good-looking children put the baby's baptismal bonnet out to dry on the tip of a sharp and shiny sword, the newborn will always be handsome and bold, and welcome amongst the nobility. (I:14 and gloss)

In our Old French text the child is always referred to using the masculine form of the word unless a girl is specifically mentioned and it is clear that the qualities just described are intended as male attributes, as is the following:

If you don't want your son to be a coward, as soon as he is baptized, his father must have the child touch his sword or his dagger with his right hand, then he will be brave throughout his life.

Gloss. Lady Alix des Mares, her sister, said if a priest reads the Gospel of the Three Kings or the Prayer of Saint Charlemagne over the child, he will be brave and victorious. (IV:1 and gloss)⁴⁴

However, both sexes are referred to in this Gospel:

When a child is just born, if it is a boy, he must be brought to his father and his feet placed on his father's chest, then for sure the child will never have a bad death.

Gloss. Fremine Fauvelle said on this matter that when a woman has just given birth to a girl, she must be seated on her mother's chest with these words: "May God make you an honourable woman," and then her body will never disgrace her." (V:17 and gloss)

Two final pieces of advice in this category are concerned with influencing future physical rather than moral attributes: "When a child is born, be careful not to hold or carry it on your left arm first before the baptism or, for certain, the child will be left-handed all his life" (IV:15)⁴⁵ and "If it happens that someone steps over a small child, that child's growth will be stunted if the same person does not step back the way they came" (CI:28).

In all such recipes, attempting to determine what stems from ancient or medieval authorities, what springs from popular superstition and what relates to empirical observation is a vain quest, especially since learned medicine had itself been influenced by popular practices and beliefs. We leave this extensive category of pregnancy-related lore with a final gospel which provides a quasi-scientific procedure for determining pregnancy: "My friends, if you want to know if a woman is pregnant, you must ask her to pee in a basin and then put a latch or a key in it, but it is better to use a latch—leave this latch in the basin with the urine for three or four hours. Then throw the urine away and remove the latch. If you see the impression of the latch on the basin, be sure that the woman is pregnant. If not, she is not pregnant" (Paris additions: [1]).

In gospels related to more general aspects of health in our text, strategies for avoiding illness or injury are much more prominent than those designed for curing ailments. There is a sexual implication in the following stricture which echoes the advice given to pregnant women:

You must also avoid giving young women mutton's heads or cock's combs or eels so that they don't fall over backwards with Saint Loup's disease.⁴⁶

Gloss. "Certainly," said Belotte la Cornue, "this is very dangerous, because my mother ate them, I developed three afflictions which I think I will never get rid of. One of them makes me fall backwards, the second makes me bump into things and the third is that I have something like a cock's comb on the most private part of my body, which causes me great shame." (I:9 and gloss)

Other "avoidance" strategies are also specifically directed at parts of the body, as can be seen in the following prescriptions for avoiding back pain, headache and lupus: "If you avoid wiping your rear end with grass, leaves or other greenery, you will never have back pain in the upper or lower back." Gloss. Pyatine le Verte said to these words that those who abide by this teaching will never have a headache but their shirt will often be brown in this place" (II:12); "My friends and neighbours, when you go to relieve yourselves, avoid wiping your rear end with leaves, and as true as the gospel, you will never be sick with the Saint Loup of Feuilloy disease" (IV:14). They also provide strategies against toothache as well as facial and back paralysis: "If you do not throw the bones into the fire after eating meat, or do not allow it to be done, you will never suffer from toothache, thanks to Saint Lawrence" (II: 13);⁴⁷ "In order to avoid the palsy in your face or your lower back, you must never eat the head or flesh of a cat or a bear" (III:2).⁴⁸ Riding a bear could provide valuable immunization:

If a person can ride a bear the distance of nine paces without faltering, he or she will be immunized against nine kinds of sicknesses.

Gloss. An old matron who was sitting behind the others said: "I think that it is true for curing these nine sicknesses, but not those that make us fall backwards. (II:21)

The Chantilly version of the manuscript is even more specific: "If you can ride a bear the distance of nine steps without faltering, you will recover from the sickness called *esteseure*⁴⁹ and even be cured of epilepsy" (CII:28). This was one of the beliefs related to health, once so common in European popular culture that they became popular sayings, which have now totally disappeared, along with the animals they feature, the bear and the wolf. However, "having seen the wolf," a still current French expression for hoarseness, relates to the widespread conviction already found in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (first century), that if a wolf looks directly at your face it "will make you so hoarse that you will not be able to shout" (CII:38).

Protection from attacking dogs and violent husbands is also prescribed, the former with a mixture of food offerings and religious incantations and the latter, in a combination of religion and magic, by placing the husband's shirts on the altar during Friday mass (V:5 and gloss, V:2). Although the women are reluctant to provide advice which men can

use “to their advantage,” the gospels also provide some avoidance strategies for men:

My friends and neighbours, I tell you in truth that if a man, wears on his body or brings with him into battle, a piece of the caul he bore from his mother’s womb, he will not be wounded nor have any injury to his body.⁵⁰

Gloss. Then one of the old matrons named Jehanne Tost Vestue interrupted and she said, with everyone listening to her, that when he is ready to go into battle, if a man wears on him the holy names which are:

Late you go

Far you stay

If they fight

You can come back right

Then he will never be wounded in war. (VI:12)

More prosaically, the text also provides remedies so that men can avoid drunkenness:

I also tell you for sure that if a man wants to drink any kind of wine without getting drunk, he should just eat a sour apple in the morning, then drink fresh water, and without fail, he will not get drunk that day.⁵¹

Gloss. About that, Marion Joly Treu said that her father, Mouscaille, had never been drunk, whatever the quantity of wine he had soaked up. But it was because he would always invoke Saint Nicholas before and after drinking” (VI:15).⁵²

The old matrons acknowledge that women’s lax behaviour could also cause illness: gathering or trimming vegetables on Saturday, the day of Our Lady, could result in a disease called the “Jewel of Our Lady” (III:19)⁵³ and failing to properly clean the table after a meal, leaving the cloth spread on the table during the night, could have serious consequences: “if mice come and eat the breadcrumbs which have been left on it, the teeth of all the people who eat on this cloth the following day will turn black and rotten soon after” (V:16).

We will return to fevers in our discussion of cures, but note here that the women advise that white fever can be avoided by not treading bare-foot on a four-leaf clover (II:15). Venereal disease and leprosy were frequently confused during this period, hence the association of leprosy with urination:⁵⁴ “If you don’t want to become a leper, you should never greet any leper on an empty stomach, or pee on an empty stomach against a wall where a leper has urinated that same day” (CII:5). Procedures concerning the appropriate place and posture during urination figure prominently in the avoidance strategies of *The Distaff Gospels*: “If someone pees against the wall of a monastery or in a graveyard, it would not be surprising if they are stricken by an apoplectic seizure before their death, or at least an attack of gallstones” (III:3); “I assure you that if you pee between two houses or against the sun, you will catch an eye disease known as styne” (III:1).⁵⁵ The gloss of this chapter explicitly links

urination with sexual activity and venereal disease: "Some call it the pox," said Beatrix Flabaude, "but I think that this affliction actually comes from drinking too much from the Fountain of Love" (III:1, gloss). There is also a strong sexual connotation in the gloss of another urination-related gospel: "'A person who pees towards the sun will suffer from gallstones in mid life and will also often pass stones.'⁵⁶ Gloss. 'I think', said Agnechon la Pelee, 'that the gravel comes from drinking cloudy wine or any other cloudy beverage, and especially from riding without a saddle'" (II:21). A woman's method of urination could even have the potential to cause impotence: "When a woman steps over her husband to pee during the night, if it is before the cock crows for the third time, she must step over at the same place when she comes back so that he does not lose flexibility in his arm, his leg or in any other of his members. And if it is after the third time the cock crows, she can come back whenever she wants" (CIII:40).

As we have indicated, actual remedies for sickness are far less evident in *The Distaff Gospels* than strategies for avoiding illness, no doubt a reflection of the real practical difficulty of effecting a cure once a malady had taken hold. However, each of the two versions of the text contains remedies for curing warts. According to the Paris manuscript: "'If you rub a wart with an elder leaf on Midsummer's night, then you bury that leaf deep in the earth, the wart will dry as the leaf decomposes.'⁵⁷ Gloss. Isabelle de la Doutre said that she had done that long ago, but she had discovered that if the wart is rubbed with dandelion milk, it dries faster" (II:17 and gloss) while according to Chantilly: "To get rid of warts, you must take a thread that a woman has spun after her lying-in and tie it around the warts: they will all fall off instantly without difficulty" (CIV: [24]).⁵⁸ Cures for other common and non-life threatening ailments also appear: a woman who is sick with the measles "must take water which has been blessed on Sunday, prepare a broth with it and drink it, and she will be cured without fail" (VI:5). A remedy for sore breasts has the now-familiar sexual connotation:

When a woman has sore breasts, the only thing she needs is for her husband to make three circles around them with his member, and without any doubt, she will be cured.⁵⁹

Gloss. Saintine Tempremeure said that it must be understood that these three circles should be done at the end of the stomach, a little below the waist. (I:26)

More complicated afflictions, such as sprains and small pox, require more complex remedies: "If a woman stumbles and twists and sprains her foot, her husband must go on a pilgrimage to my lord Saint Martin for her health and bring back water which has been used to wash the feet of Saint Martin's horse.⁶⁰ If she washes her foot with it, she will be healed at once" (VI:8). The prescription for curing smallpox also requires

that the husband go off on a pilgrimage: "If a woman is sick with small-pox, her husband must buy a black lamb born that year, have his wife lay down and wrap her in its still warm fleece, then he must go on a pilgrimage and make his offering to Saint Radegund—she will be cured without fail" (VI:9).⁶¹

It is hardly surprising that fevers of various types are the ailments most discussed in *The Distaff Gospels*. Fever was one of the distinguishing marks of the most feared illness of the later medieval period, the plague or Black Death, caused by the bacterium *yersinia pestis*. Both the most common bubonic and the rarer septicaemic forms were usually accompanied by high fever and the disease became endemic in Europe after its first appearance in the mid-14th century. Some 200 years earlier, Hildegard of Bingen observed that "various fevers exist in humans due to the various qualities of air and other elements" and she devoted considerable attention to the various types, both acute and intermittent, the latter encompassing quotidian, tertian, and quartan fevers.⁶² Our text offers a dietary solution which seems like a variation on our modern nostrum "feed a cold and starve a fever": "I tell you that a person who has a fever must fast the first Sunday after being struck, and it will disappear for sure" (VI:1) as well as a remedy involving use of the lucky four leaf clover: "A person who has quartan⁶³ fever must find a four-leaf clover and break their fast with it for four days, and the fever will disappear for sure" (VI:4).⁶⁴ As we have seen, continuous and tertian fevers call for spiritual assistance: "To be cured of continuous fever, you must write the first three words of the "Our Father" on a sage leaf, locally grown, and eat it in the morning."⁶⁵ Do this for three days and then you will be cured" (VI:7) and "If you have tertian fever, you must carry the holy names, wrapped in a piece of silk, around your neck, and you will recover without fail" (VI:2).⁶⁶

However, white fever was another term for lovesickness and this affliction required a special remedy: "Some people talk about white fever without knowing what it is. It is worse than double or quartan" (VI:6). Here the parodic solution to effect a cure was "a soup made in Saint George's vessel" (VI:6).⁶⁷ Preoccupied with retaining love and maintaining the sexual energy of their partners, the women provide a variety of prescriptions: "when a woman wants to be well loved by her husband or her lover, she must give him catnip to eat: he will be so much in love with her that he will not rest unless she is close to him" (II:1)⁶⁸ and "if a woman wants her husband or lover to love her passionately, she must put a walnut-tree leaf, picked just before dawn on Midsummer's night in his left shoe, and for sure, he will love her amazingly" (IV:23).⁶⁹ Lady Gomberde, who has been married seven times and would not refuse an eighth husband announces that "to make him love me, I would have him eat soup made with herbs picked just before dawn on Mid-

summer's night, and, truly, he would not be able to leave me for a younger woman" (V:I).

Somewhat surprisingly, in this female-centred text, there is no direct mention of menstruation. *The Distaff Gospels* contains only an enigmatic allusion to a fever that will be cured if the woman rubs "all her orifices with honey the first Thursday after she gets it" (VI:13). This may well be an oblique reference to performing intercourse during the woman's periods, prohibited because it was believed that the poison coming from impure matter would be passed on the child.⁷⁰ Our speculation here is based on the assertion that this cure will be to the man's advantage and that the use of honey, so common in popular medicine that it almost constitutes a panacea, purifies bad humours. Nor are there any references to prohibited conduct such as abortion in these gospels which, as we have seen, are mainly concerned with the sex and well-being of the offspring as well as general health. We can, however, find an allusion to contraception in a series of beliefs dealing with evil spirits such as incubi and goblins. One of the women tells the story of a couple who lost their way because they were misled by goblins. Another spinster comments that they did that because "they had loved one another illicitly." She specifies what makes this love "illicit" when she adds that the goblins will "mislead them until the woman gives birth to a child, a boy or a girl, from her husband" (CIV:1).

With the exception of lovesickness, a perennial affliction, both the illnesses and the cures presented by the spinsters seem rather far from those which preoccupy the modern world. There is one prescription, however, which sounds quite contemporary:

If you want to prepare a bed for sleeping in a chamber, put its back towards the south so that if a sick person lays down on it, he or she will always benefit from the light without facing the sun, and also, in the evening and the morning, this person will breath the air of the setting and the rising sun, which is the scent of mountains and fountains.⁷¹ In this way the patient will completely recover, at little cost. (CIII:35)

Since there appear to have been relatively few practical solutions available once serious illness had taken hold, the old women instead provide mechanisms for predicting its outcome:

When the lord or the lady of the house is sick and a raven croaks on the chimney or the roof where the patient is lying, it is a sure sign that the invalid will die of this disease.

Gloss. Concerning this, Mehault Tost Preste said that when a magpie chatters, it is a good sign, and that the patient will heal. (III:5)

While the women who chair the six sessions which comprise the main text of *The Distaff Gospels* concern themselves with many aspects of daily

life that have no connection with health or medicine, our examination of their discussions of pregnancy, and healthcare has demonstrated that these “medical” issues constituted one of their primary areas of concern. However, given the probable male authorship of both manuscripts and the prominent role of the scribe in the Paris version, we cannot claim that the work provides an unmediated representation of women’s beliefs and practices. As we have indicated, the writings of the ancient authorities, such as Galen and Hippocrates, augmented by Arab learning, were clearly of significant influence on the works of such female authorities as Trota of Salerno and Hildegard of Bingen. Vernacular versions of scholarly Latin texts began to appear during the late medieval period: the 15th-century translation by Jean Corbechon of the 13th-century Latin text, *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomeus Anglicus, for example, presents many statements similar to those made in *The Distaff Gospels*. In addition, from the 11th century onward, there were many medical manuals written not in the Latin of the learned class, but in the vernacular of the lay person, such as herbals, bestiaries and lapidaries listing plants, animals and minerals along with their healing virtues. Two of the most popular of these treatises were the *Tacuinum sanitatis*, a sumptuously illuminated manuscript and the *Treasury of the Poor*, the latter aimed at the ordinary practitioner, suggesting everyday ingredients such as oil, wine, wax or grease for making ointments. These works, Latin and learned, vernacular and empirical, must surely have reflected, as well as themselves influenced, medical practices and preconceptions.

Clearly more research into this fertile area of medieval medical literature is necessary and we hope that the availability of an English edition of *The Distaff Gospels* may stimulate it. However, despite the number and variety of possible influences on our text, we have discovered no similar compilation of peasant nostrums, precepts, and remedies which have, in some cases, survived to the present day. We may therefore be justified in concluding from the variety, tone and content of the segments of *The Distaff Gospels* concerned with pregnancy and health, that a principal source utilized by the texts’ authors may well have been traditional wisdom, passed orally from one woman to another. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that many of these pieces of advice were old wives’ tales in the literal as well as the figurative sense of that term.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Our numbering provides the day of the week, starting with Monday, and the chapter for each of the “gospels”; in this case the reference is to day VI (Saturday), chapter 7.
- 2 The two *Distaff Gospels* manuscripts are from the late 15th century. The Paris manuscript, housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (fr. 2151), is derived from an earlier version held in the Musée Condé in Chantilly (Musée Condé 654).

- While the Chantilly version is attributed to "three wise people, Master Fouquart de Cambray, Master Anthoine du Val and Jehan d'Arras called Caron," names which are not otherwise known; the Paris version is anonymous. The standard scholarly edition of the original text is by Madeleine Jeay, *Les Évangiles des Quenouilles* (Paris and Montréal: Vrin/ Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1983). The first English translation of the *Distaff Gospels* since that by Wynkyn de Worde in 1510, which was edited by Madeleine Jeay and Kathleen Garay, appeared in 2006 (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions). All quotations are from this edition.
- 3 For a full discussion of the genesis and early editions, see Jeay and Garay, *The Distaff Gospels*, p. 22-27.
 - 4 See, for example, Marina Warner's references to the *Évangiles des Quenouilles* in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 26-27, 36-39 ff.
 - 5 Around 1075 the writer Alfano reminisced that in his youth "Salerno then flourished to such an extent in the art of medicine that no illness was able to settle there." Cited in Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 9.
 - 6 Green, *The Trotula*, p. 10-11.
 - 7 Green, *The Trotula*, p. 14.
 - 8 Green, *The Trotula*, p. 13.
 - 9 Green, *The Trotula*, p. 71.
 - 10 Green, *The Trotula*, p. 73.
 - 11 Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things. John Trevisa's Translation of De Proprietatibus Rerum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 153-54. Translation from the Middle English by Jeay and Garay.
 - 12 Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, p. 154.
 - 13 See the summary of the manuscript tradition and the scholarly debate concerning Hildegard's natural-philosophical texts in Margret Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen: On Natural Philosophy and Medicine, Selections from Causae et cure* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), p. ix-xi.
 - 14 Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 12.
 - 15 Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 82-83.
 - 16 See the discussion of *Causae et curae* by Victoria Sweet, "Hildegard of Bingen and the Greening of Medieval Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73, 3 (Fall 1999): 381-403.
 - 17 Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 86-87.
 - 18 Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 87.
 - 19 Sweet surmises that Hildegard's sources "probably included oral and vernacular as well as Latin material," *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 387.
 - 20 Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 93-94.
 - 21 Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 79-85.
 - 22 Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 102.
 - 23 Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 104.
 - 24 Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 104. In the Latin edition by Laurence Moulinier and Rainer Berndt, *Beate Hildegardis: Causae et cure* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), see chapter 16, p. 236-37.
 - 25 Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay, *The Life of Saint Douceline, a Beguine of Provence* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 10:23, p. 87.
 - 26 Garay and Jeay, *Saint Douceline*, I:5, p. 26. Another significant spiritual route to physical healing was by making pilgrimages to holy sites; Douceline's tomb, like the tombs of most medieval saints, became an important locus for the sick in search of cures.
 - 27 According to Shulamith Shahar, "some of the women accused of witchcraft practiced magic healing and were skilled in the use of medical herbs; some were failed midwives and healers....Some were prostitutes or old procuresses." *The Fourth*

- Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, rpr. 1990), p. 275. See also Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 113-15.
- 28 Mary Chamberlain records the superstition that a hare lip can be caused by simply seeing a hare: *Old Wives' Tales: Their History, Remedies and Spells* (London: Virago, 1981), p. 240-41.
- 29 This tip ("debout" in the text) has a double meaning.
- 30 References containing C are to the shorter Chantilly manuscript which follows the longer Paris version in the English edition: p.196 forward. Chapter numbers (eg. [29]) have been assigned by the editors.
- 31 On pregnant women's cravings, see Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (translated Rosemary Morris. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), p. 14, 56-58. He mentions that birthmarks mean that the child was conceived during menstruation (see also note 70 below). Chamberlain records the belief that if a pregnant woman's food cravings are not satisfied, her baby could be born without some vital organ and that a woman who eats strawberries while pregnant will have a baby with a strawberry birthmark: Chamberlain, *Old Wives' Tales*, p. 241.
- 32 The commonplace that women are physically and morally inferior because they are more "biologically" dependent on their bodily needs and desires can be found in authorities such as Albertus Magnus (*Questiones super de animalibus*, in *Opera Omnia* (ed. Ephrem Filthaut, Münster: Aschendorff, 1955, Vol. 12. book V, Questions 4 and 6) and in encyclopaedic works such as that of Bartholomeus Anglicus, book, VI, chap. VI, v.1, p. 302. Anglicus's influential work was translated into Middle English in the 14th century and into French in the 15th century.
- 33 We might have expected to find a prayer to Saint Margaret to ensure a safe delivery; recourse to her was common because she had been miraculously expelled from the dragon which had swallowed her. Relics of this saint were often placed on the woman in labour.
- 34 There are examples of the same belief in Bartholomeus Anglicus, book V, chap. LIV, v.1, p. 270.
- 35 Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 81.
- 36 Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 51.
- 37 Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 52. In *The Distaff Gospels* this principle is applied to animals: when calves don't want to suckle or even to take milk when fed by hand it is a sign that "the bull that fathered that calf did not have any love for the mother" (III:17).
- 38 The notion that males are conceived in the right side of the uterus and female in the left side was—and still is—an almost universal belief: see Bartholomeus Anglicus, book VI, chap. III, v. 1, p. 294-95; and Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 49-52. On a yearning for sweet foods indicating a girl and sour foods a boy, see Chamberlain, *Old Wives' Tales*, p. 241.
- 39 Hildegard, for example; see Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 50.
- 40 On predicting the sex of a child, see Chamberlain, *Old Wives' Tales*, p. 240-41.
- 41 Scholarly medicine as well as popular lore associated the redness of the mother with the conception of a male, see Bartholomeus Anglicus, book VI, chap. VII, v.1, p. 303.
- 42 Sexual transgressions committed by the parents were commonly believed to be the cause of shortcomings in the children; there were negative consequences for the child's health if intercourse took place during the mother's periods. See also note 70 below.
- 43 Aldebrandin of Siena says that those with straight hair are slow and fearful, while curly hair denotes boldness: Louis Landouzy and Roger Pépin, eds., *Le Régime du corps* (Paris: Champion, 1911), p. 194; see his recipes for hair care, p. 86-89, p. 200.
- 44 On Charlemagne see Carl Lindhal, John McNamara and John Lindow, *Medieval Folklore. An Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs* (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC Clío, 2000), I, p. 62-165.

- 45 As is evident from this chapter and favourable mention of the right hand above (V:1), there were negative associations attached to the left side which is considered the side of evil. A left-handed person was considered to be deformed.
- 46 Many sicknesses were related to saints in the Middle Ages. Saint Loup (Saint Wolf) was supposed to cure epilepsy and possession. The reference to Saint Loup's disease contains a bawdy double entendre around the idea of a woman falling backwards. On the ambivalent nature of the wolf, see Lindhal et al, *Medieval Folklore*, II, 1057-1061: outlaws, crop diseases and noble children were all called wolf.
- 47 Hildegard recommended equal amounts of absinthe and verberna, cooked in wine with sugar added. See Sweet, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 392. If this did not cure the toothache, it must surely have helped the patient to feel better.
- 48 Pliny the Elder reports in his *Natural History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), Book VIII, chap. LICV, v. III, p. 91-93, that eating the head of a bear leads to "bear rabies," a belief borrowed by Bartholomeus Anglicus (book XVIII, chap. CXII, v.2, 1261) because "bears have a poisoned brain."
- 49 This word could be an hapax (a unique surviving use of a word).
- 50 The caul is a piece of placenta with which some fortunate children are born. On the power of the placenta and the powers attributed to the child born with a caul, see Gélis, *History of Childbirth*, p. 167-68 and 200-2.
- 51 Many medical recipes deal with ways of drinking without becoming intoxicated or provide help for those who are already drunk, see for example, Aldebrandin of Siena, *Le Régime du corps*, p. 20.
- 52 Saint Nicholas is the patron of drunkards as well as of coopers and wine merchants because of the legend in which he rescued three schoolboys from a barrel-shaped salting tub.
- 53 This disease is erysipelas.
- 54 According to Hildegard there were three types of leprosy: the type caused by gluttony, that caused by the liver and "[l]eprosy resulting from lust....The former two kinds are difficult to cure, whereas the third can be treated quite easily." See Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p.103. On the confusion in the Middle Ages between leprosy and syphilis, see Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 183-93.
- 55 Urinating against the sun and the moon was an ancient superstition, see Lindhal et al., *Medieval Folklore*, II, s.v. *scatology: urine*, p. 888.
- 56 Urinating and matters related to the kidneys have a sexual connotation.
- 57 In the fourth century, the physician Marcellus Empiricus claimed that if a leaf of verberna is thrown into the fire, a tumour dries: *De medicamentis liber* (Lipsia: Teubner, 1889), XV, p. 82.
- 58 The period while the new mother is recovering after childbirth.
- 59 The text refers to the male member as "son instrument naturel."
- 60 For more on Saint Martin, the most popular saint in France, see Duncan Robertson, *The Medieval Saints' Lives. Spiritual Renewal and Old French Literature* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1995), p. 131.
- 61 On Saint Radegund see Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, eds., *Sainted Women of the Middle Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 60-105. On rashes, lesions and venereal infections, see Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality & Medicine*, p. 177-83.
- 62 Berger, *Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 103-5.
- 63 The kind of fever which recurs every 40 hours.
- 64 On cures related to herbs, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 147-48.
- 65 The Our Father or Paternoster is one of the oldest and most important prayers of the Catholic Liturgy. The curative virtue of sage (*salvia officinalis*) is well known.
- 66 On amulets and talismans, see Lindhal et al., *Medieval Folklore*, I, p. 9-13.
- 67 The implication is that the fever can be cured by sexual intercourse. This remedy was prescribed in learned medicine; performing intercourse regularly was

- recommended to women in order to avoid a suffocation of the womb because of the retention of the sperm. See Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality of Medicine*, p. 176-77.
- 68 On medieval love magic, see Anton Gurevitch, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), p. 89.
- 69 Artemisia, the "mother of herbs," was especially important in gynecological matters. On rites performed with the herbs of Midsummer's night, see Lindhal et al., *Medieval Folklore*, II, p. 662-63. The time given by *The Distaff Gospels* for picking these herbs is none, just before dawn when their power is at its maximum.
- 70 "A child conceived during menstruation could turn out to be not only red-haired but also leprous." See Lindhal et al., *Medieval Folklore*, I, p. 107.
- 71 Aldebrandin of Siena devotes several chapters to good and corrupted air. See *Le Régime du corps*, p. 11-12, 59-61. He also mentions that mountain air is pure and good for one's health. See p. 67.