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Spectacles of Erudition: Physicians and Vernacular Medical Writing in Early Modern Spain

Michael R. Solomon

University of Pennsylvania, solomonm@sas.upenn.edu

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Abstract

This electronic presentation explores the curious typography in the sixteenth-century Brocar edition of Luis Lobera de Avila's vernacular hygienic treatise *The Garden of Health or Otherwise Called The Knights' Banquette with a Regimen for Living in Times of Health as Well as in Times of Disease* [Vergel de sanidad que por otro nombre se llamava Banquete de cavalleros, y orden de Bivir: ansi en tiempo de sanidad como de enfermedad] (Alcalá de Henares 1542). Whereas sixteenth-century vernacular medical treatises written for laymen avoided the extensive use of Latin, which vernacular medical authors believed impeded the usefulness of their treatises, the Brocar edition surrounds the Spanish text with abundant commentary and gloss in Latin that often overwhelms the vernacular. I argue that the widespread presence of Latin in this layman-oriented treatise was designed as an indexical device that helped the reader image the physician. Rather than distract or discourage the patient, as many vernacular authors believed, the Latin commentary created a visual residue of the physician/author and an uncanny sense of his lingering presence. This textual presencing of the physician was designed to comfort and reassure non-professional readers, confirming for them that the medical information in the vernacular was grounded in the knowledge of a competent and learned medical professional.

Keywords

Early Modern Spanish medical literature, early printed books, Luis Lobera de Avila, vernacular literature

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Link to presentation: