



This past summer, I spent some time in the British Library paging through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical recipe books. My primary interest was finding remedies relating to appetite and the stomach. As someone who is interested in the history of animal-human interactions, however, I could not help noticing that some of these manuscripts contained remedies for animals as well as humans. This did not really surprise me: early modern people had a vested interest in the health of the working and companion animals around them. There was a

whole genre of printed texts instructing readers how to care for animals such as cows, sheep, and horses (Curth).

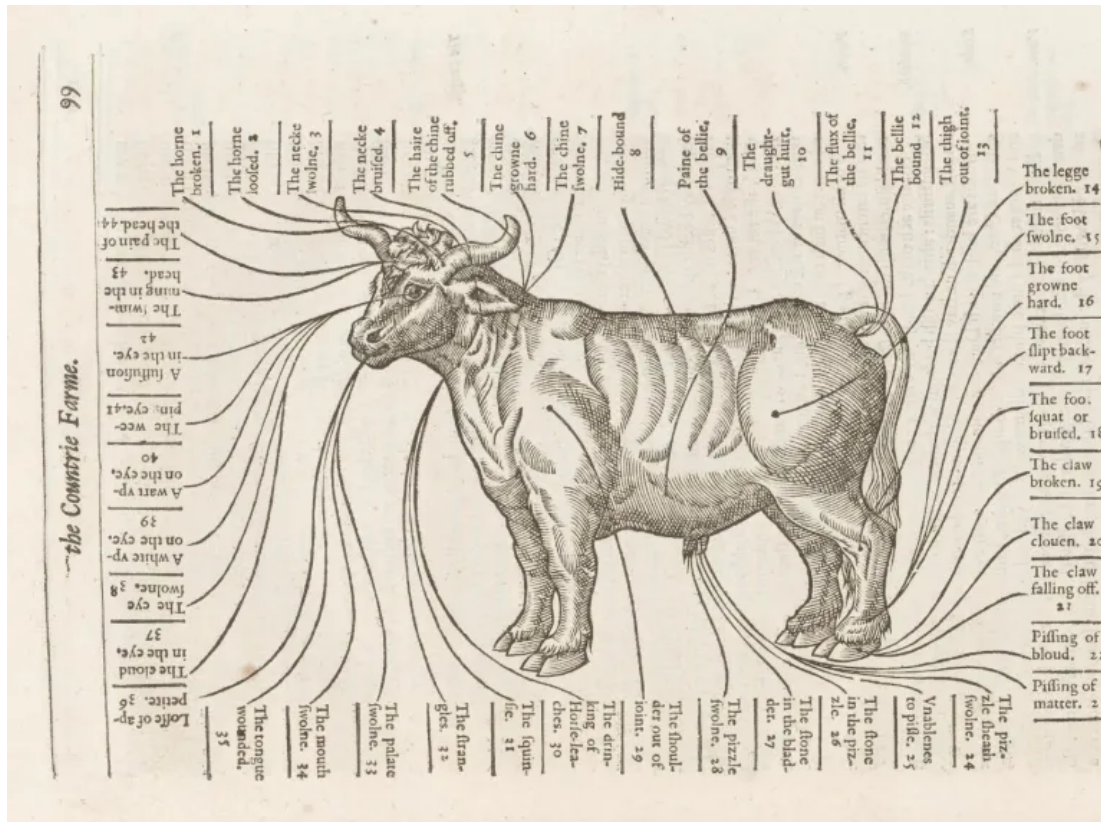


Diagram indicating where in the text to find discussions of various cattle ailments. From Charles Estienne, *Maison Rustique* (London, 1616). Via Wellcome Collection (Public Domain).

But in the case of the medical recipe books that I was perusing, I was struck by how integrated these animal remedies were with those intended for humans. The same people who had recorded recipes to heal themselves, their families, and their friends had recorded remedies for horses, cows, and other animals whose care they were likely charged with. In some cases, the treatment could even be given to humans and animals interchangeably—as, for example, a remedy “for a man or beast that is bitten with a mad dog” (Sloane MS 3203, fol. 62v) or one “for a prick of a joint of man or horse” (Sloane MS 1020, fol. 166r). Another recipe book contained advice for treating a cold that relied on an analogy between humans and horses: “A horse is not cured of a cold by standing in the stable, but he must have moderate exercise: so a man” (Sloane MS 566, fol. 47r).

The overlap of human and animal remedies in these recipe books speaks to links between premodern human and animal medicine more broadly. In a study of English veterinary medicine, historian Louise Hill Curth argues that “early modern veterinary medicine had a hierarchy of healers and was linked to the same principles and practices found in contemporary human medicine” (Curth 4). Humoral theory—which held that bodies were composed of different humors whose balance or lack thereof influenced health—could be applied to both humans and animals (36-38). A proper diet was considered crucial for maintaining animal health, as it was for human health (109-10). And remedies for both humans and animals often relied on similar practices, such as purges designed to cleanse the body of extraneous or corrupt substances (132-38).

Connections between human and animal health in premodern Europe can also be seen in responses to infectious diseases. As several scholars have noted, many of the responses to cattle plague in eighteenth-century Europe paralleled responses to human plague epidemics. Human and cattle plague produced similar policy responses in England, such as quarantining affected

individuals. One Englishman even recommended a pest house for cattle (Broad 110-11). In eighteenth-century Venice, epizootics (outbreaks of diseases among animals) were managed by the *provveditori alla sanità*, who were also in charge of responding to plague and other infectious human diseases. The *provveditori* took very similar measures in response to epizootics as they did during outbreaks of human diseases: quarantining affected individuals and farms; closing borders; burying the bodies of deceased cattle in graves covered with lime; digging out and covering stalls exposed to the disease in lime and fresh dirt; and restricting the use of exposed pastures (Appuhn 279). In Northern Germany as well, quarantine measures that “mirrored what happened during outbreaks of the bubonic plague” were implemented during cattle plague epizootics (Hünniger 82). And, as in Venice, authorities in Northern Germany also ordered that the bodies of animals who had died from cattle plague be buried and covered with lime (83-84).

As Jane Desmond argued in a *Synopsis* article several years ago, the medical humanities can benefit from expanding their focus to the more-than-human world (Desmond). The health of humans and other animals is intimately related. Infectious diseases can spread between animal and human populations (Brown 549-50; Nading). Epizootics affecting animals who provide labor and food have drastic consequences like economic hardship and food shortages (Slavin). Animals have long served as substitutes and models for human bodies in medicine and science (Guerrini; Nading 69-70). And, as I have suggested here, approaches to animal and human health have historically had significant connections.

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**Featured Image:** Title-page of Gervase Markham, *Markhams Maister-Peece* (5th ed.; London, 1636). Via Wellcome Collection (Public Domain).

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