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"Unnatural natural history" in Lydgate

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"UNNATURAL NATURAL HISTORY"

IN LYDGE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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"Unnatural natural history" is an illustrative literary device usually associated with the euphuistic prose of the sixteenth century. Writers long before this century, however, used "unnatural natural history" not only in prose, but in poetry as well. Any attempt to estimate just how much the earlier writers used this device must begin with its usage by single writers.

This investigation is an attempt to see to what extent Lydgate used "unnatural natural history". Living and writing as he did in the fifteenth century, Lydgate occupies a particularly advantageous position for a study of the development of this literary motif before the sixteenth century. Not only is Lydgate a key figure in his century, but he has produced sufficient literature to afford a representative sample of the tendency of his era.

Lydgate (1373 - 1450) was a very voluminous writer. Those works of his that are available in acceptable editions total more than 131,000 lines, and this forms only a small part of what he wrote. All of the "long-winded prolixity" of Lydgate's works cannot be charged directly to the poet, for his writings are primarily translations. It is very doubtful whether he ever attempted any work of size that was not a direct translation or a paraphrase of the work of another author. Notwithstanding, Lydgate was the real founder of the school which dominated English letters from Chaucer to Spenser. Therefore, any study of literary tendencies in the fifteenth century does well to begin with Lydgate.

Until quite recently the study of Lydgate for any purpose was pursued only under almost prohibitive difficulty. Although many copies of his works

were issued by early printers from Caxton to Tottel, these editions were accessible only here and there in large libraries. Too, they presented, as a rule, texts that were not very good, a condition that may or may not be due to copyists and printers. Until almost the end of the nineteenth century nothing other than manuscripts and these early editions was available except Minor Poems, edited by Halliwell for the Percy Society in 1840, and the Story of Thebes, included in the older editions of Chaucer's works. During the last sixty years the Early English Text Society has had published The Temple of Glas, The Secrets of Old Philisoffres, Reson and Sensuallyte, Two Nightingale Poems, Troy Book, Fall of Princes and Siege of Thebes. These editions have been used in this study.

Each volume of Lydgate was carefully read, and each example of "unnatural natural history" found was recorded and traced to its source. H. N. Seager's Natural History in Shakespeare's Time and Philémon Holland's translation of Fliny's Natural Historie of the World have been used as source books.

The author is deeply indebted to the Atlanta University reference librarians for their kindness in mailing materials to me while I was out of residence. I also am grateful to Dr. N. P. Tillman for his assistance, and helpful suggestions which have enabled me to complete this work.

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1 Ibid., pp. 225 - 231.
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CHAPTER I
BACKGROUND

Since the beginning of time man has had a natural tendency to assert, and a craving to hear the sensational, the exaggerated, and the improbable. Because of this, it is no wonder that the writers of the decorative prose of the Sixteenth Century interspersed in their work similes and allusions drawn from everything the age knew or credited concerning natural history. It is difficult to determine just how early in the history of English literature the writers discovered that a storehouse of information lay within grasp, but it is known that the use of such scientific material reached its height in the prose literature of the sixteenth century.

A vast body of fact and fancy about natural history had been growing since the ancient magic of Egypt. Scientific interest in nature is built upon much of the foundation laid by the early magicians. Lynn Thorndyke supports this belief when he points out that the history of magic is bound up with the history of natural science.¹ This was probably Pliny's belief, too, for he wrote of the ancient magi not as sorcerers or enchanters, but as those who had gone farthest and in most detail into the study of nature.² Science was an evolutionary process growing out of the midst of magic, superstition and mental anarchy. The knowledge of natural phenomena that we have today did not come from above, and until the truth was known, explanations and causes were slowly emerging from seeming chaos.

The evidence of the evolutionary nature of man's quest for a knowledge of

²Ibid.
his natural world lies in the existence of a number of ancient treatises on nature. Early man sought to record all that he had seen or heard about nature in what we now call beastiaries, lapidaries, herbaria, or in the Physiologus.

One of the most popular of early man's recordings was the beastiary. They dealt principally with the wonders and facts of four-footed beasts. Not only were the beasts named and described, but many times there were pictures drawn of the marvelous unusual beasts that were to be seen at home and abroad.¹ So thoroughly did the beastiaries explain the habits, nature, and value of the beasts that the writers of the middle English period developed a fad for writing beast stories, the material for which was drawn almost exclusively from the beastiaries.²

In the same manner that the beastiaries dealt with beasts, the old Latin lapidary concerned itself with stones. Where the stones could be found, how they could be used to best advantage, and the values that they possessed, were all discussed in the lapidaries. The earliest medieval lapidary is the Liber lapidum seu de gemmis by Marbod, bishop of Rennes, who lived from 1035 to 1123.³ The origin or source of Marbod has not yet been determined; there is a belief, however, that in antiquity and the middle age there existed a sort of common fund of information and stock of beliefs concerning gems which naturally, is drawn upon and appears in every individual treatise concerning them.⁴

Unlike the beastiaries and lapidaries, which were treatises upon one phase

¹Lynn Thorndyke, op. cit., p. 672.
³Lynn Thorndyke, op. cit., p. 775.
⁴Ibid., p. 778.
of nature, Physiologus was a cyclopedia of what was known and imagined about
earth, sea, sky, birds, beasts, and fish. For a thousand years it was the
authoritative source of information on these matters, and was translated into
every European tongue. The Physiologus is thought to have originated in Alexandria
during the first half of the second century A.D. This work influenced the middle
ages more than any other book except the Bible.¹

The fourth treatise that was of great interest to the medieval natural
scientist was the herbarium. In this all of the known plants were listed and
described. Their virtues, especially their medicinal virtues, were stated and
explained. Usually the name for each herb was given in several languages.
Interesting are the powers that the herbaria gave to some plants over God and
nature. Medieval manuscripts of herbaria are often noteworthy for illuminations
of the herbs in vivid colors. The oldest manuscripts of herbaria are of the
sixth century.²

It was man's eternal desire to know the potentialities of nature that led
the Twelfth and Thirteenth century scholars to translate the old beastiaries,
lapidaries, physiologi, and herbaria. To the diligent scholar and scientist of
this time the world was still a vast area to be explored. Only a small part of
nature's secrets was revealed to them; of the rest, almost anything might be true.
Man still had a desire to know all things past and present. This thirst for
knowledge led him to translate also the things of value in Aristotle, Pliny,
Galen, and other early scientists and philosophers. As might be expected, all
of these translations proved most valuable to succeeding scientists and scholars;

¹Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 497-503.
²Ibid., pp. 596-600.
their effect on the English literature of the three succeeding centuries, how-
over, could hardly have been foreseen.

The early modern writers became thoroughly acquainted with these translations,
for most of them were codified, modernized, and rewritten as textbooks. Most
widely read among these were the physiologi, Bartholomeus de Granville's De
Pro prietatibus Rerum, translated in 1397 by Trevisa, and illustrated works like
Ortus Sanitatus, Gesner's Historia Animalium, Fenton's Certaine secret wonders
of Nature, The boke of secrets of Albertus Magnus of the virtues of Herbes, stones,
and certaine beasts etc., and Pliny's Naturall Historie of the World.1

Because we now know of information that he had at hand, it becomes apparent
to us how the adventures of an "arm-chair traveller" satisfied the Fourteenth
Century greed for entertainment.2 Story-telling unhampered by too strict
regard for fact became so popular that a book like Landeville's Travels could be
written and enjoy wide and immediate popularity. In addition to the wealth of
material that the writers drew from natural history, imagination and hearsay were
allowed free play. Not only this, but real travellers told all that they had
seen in strange new worlds, and were allowed the special privilege of a "travellour-
if his lyes are pleasant and harmless ones as lyes can bee, and in noe great
number considering the scope hee has for them."3 These travel tales gave facts
concerning the physical nature of strange lands, as well as interesting observa-
vations about the people that inhabit them. One writer said of such tales:

... bookes can tell the stories of monotelli, who lying upon
their backes shelter themselves from the sun with the shadow
of their one onely foot... We can tell of those cheape
dieted men, who live... without meat, without mouthes,


2 Kenneth Sisam, editor, Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose (Oxford, 1928),
"Introduction", p.xi.

Of singular value to the writers of sixteenth century prose were the
English translations of old philosophers and scientists, and the translations
of early treatises. Certainly after the appearance of "Euphues. The Anatomy of
Art, by John Lyly Master of Arte," the early translations and the fourteenth
century travel were most important. Here was a prose work with a great fineness
and precision of phrase, a work that displayed an immense amount of learning and
remote knowledge of all kinds. Lyly had made his contemporaries conscious of
a prose style that was to become widely and immediately popular.

As is usually the case with an innovator, Lyly had many imitators. Greene,
Hashe, Lodge, and scores of lesser writers seized and used this style so vigorously
and profusely that it has been immortalized as "euphuism". No matter how much
euphuism was heralded as a new style, scholars now know that Lyly had produced
nothing new, that he had merely "hatched the egges othores had laide". All of the
elements of euphuism had been used before Euphues or John Lyly existed.

R. W. Bond insists:

It has been repeatedly pointed out that the effort after
elaboration of which Euphues represents the culminating point,
is an outcome of the Renaissance; that all this attention to
fineness, eloquence and pomp of phrase is a general result of
the revived study of the balanced oratorical prose of Cicero
and Seneca in particular -- a reflection, in fact, of that
preoccupation with style which marked Fifteenth Century Humanists
in Italy . . . the travel which took Englishmen of rank and
affairs to Italy brought them in direct contact with Italian
culture.³

It was John Lyly, however, who popularized the style that was the first thorough

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1 J. L. Lowes, Road to Xanadu (Boston, 1927), p. 110, quoting Joseph Hall.
2 R. W. Bond, op. cit., p. 106.
3 Ibid., p. 135.
attempt in English literature to practice prose as an art; for such he is given credit.

The euphuistic style has two classes of characteristics. The first is that concerned with structure of sentences. It seeks emphasis by continual parallelism or antithesis, by use of the rhetorical question, by alliteration, and by repetition. The second concerns itself with methods of ornament and illustration which, though properly considered a part of style, are yet more related to the material than to the architecture of thought. This class occupies a midway position between the material and the manner of thought. Included in the second class of characteristics of euphuism are similies from and allusions to natural history. The greater number of these used by John Lyly are taken from Pliny, but some are "reported from observation or from popular beliefs, while others are manifest inventions of his [Lyly's] own." These allusions to natural history, and introductions of recondite knowledge regarding nature and natural objects, scholars have chosen to name "unnatural natural history."

Although the term "unnatural natural history" seems paradoxical, its meaning is exactly what it implies. Unnatural means "not in accord or conformity with physical nature or the usual course of nature". Natural history is the study of the properties of plants, animals, minerals, and other things in nature. "Unnatural natural history", then, is a literary device which uses allusions to natural objects, but the assertions are at variance with the facts of science. "Unnatural natural history" seems closely related to folklore, superstition and even mythology, but a thorough inspection of each shows that each

\[1\] Ibid., p. 120-135.

\[2\] Ibid., p. 129.
has its own sphere. Folklore denotes folk traditions, customs, superstitions, festivals and the like. It usually reveals the life and spirit of a people.¹ Superstition is that which fixes upon members of a society the positive solution in those inevitable conflicts which arise out of human impotence. It is generally found whenever man comes to an unbridgeable gap in his knowledge or in his powers of practical control. Man's fears of the uncontrollable drive him to some sort of vicarious activity, to aimless acts in the presence of ordeals; thus superstition arises.² Mythology is the name given to the body of legends by which a primitive people expresses and systematizes its fundamental notions of life and nature, and the sentiment attached to these notions. Mythology is a form of folklore which sets forth as an historic tale the processes of nature or beliefs concerning religion, customs, and the like.

These definitions reveal that "unnatural natural history" differs from folklore in that it does not embody the customs, traditions or superstitions of a people, but the beliefs of a number of natural scientists who, although they went astray on a few items, have made contributions upon which much of our modern scientific knowledge is based. "Unnatural natural history" differs from superstition, for it does not proceed from a fear of anything; nor is it the outgrowth of the recognition that the human mind and human skills are at times impotent;³ rather, it is the product of an inquisitive mind seeking to find out and to explain the secrets and ways of nature so as to enrich life and learning. "Unnatural natural history" is distinct from mythology for, while mythology seeks


³Ibid., p. 638.
to systemize a people's fundamental notions of life and nature, "unnatural natural history" seeks to find out the facts that guide, control and characterize nature and natural objects. "Unnatural history" may use material from folklore, superstition and mythology, but it is a literary device used consciously by an individual author to illustrate his work.
CHAPTER II

LYDGATE'S USE OF "UNNATURAL NATURAL HISTORY"

We have seen how man's interest in nature developed a literature which resulted in the beastiaries, lapidaries, herbaria, and physiologi. We have also seen how this natural history was used for illustrative purposes in Sixteenth Century prose. It is interesting to observe how literary and scientific fields of knowledge grew side by side. Such an observation strengthens the validity of the fact that the heritage of science and the heritage of literature proved barren by themselves. It was not until one fertilized the other that there was vital growth. Modern thought, modern science, modern art, and modern letters are offspring of that union.¹

In the present chapter an attempt has been made to list every use of "unnatural natural history" found in Lydgate under the following classifications: beasts, birds, insects, herbs and plants, stars, and stones. The general plan of the study is to cite first the Lydgate examples, and then a possible source for Lydgate's information. In some cases, references made by writers later than Lydgate to the same objects are given. This is designed to support the belief that the same information was available, and to chart the use of such material into later centuries. Wherever the sources do not make the references clear, an additional comment has been appended.

The two main sources used for this material were Herbert West Seager's Natural History in Shakespeare's Time (1896) and Secundus Pliny's Naturalis Historic of the World. Seager was chosen because his work represents a compilation of the references and the sources of the references used in the

sixteenth century. Since these sources were published before Lydgate's time, it is reasonable to assume that Lydgate knew these writings. Translations, reprints, abridgments, and references to Pliny, from the earliest use of natural history in literature to the modern period, prove conclusively that he was not only the most widely read non-ecclesiastical writer during the middle ages, but that for centuries he was the main conduit of ancient teachings and observations on natural history. Pliny provided the staple of such natural knowledge as was possessed by English scholars and writers.

BEASTS

Unicorn

The Unicorn is cauht with maydens song, . . .

Minor Poems II, p. 750, l. 9.

. . . Bore in his shelds an vnicourne,
Which in his forhed had an horne
Passing sharp and perilouse,
Which is a beste Surquedous,
Spock of in many strange landes.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p. 175.

Source

Herbert West Seager, Natural History in Shakespeare's Time (New York, 1896), p. 321:

An unicorn is a right cruel beast, and hath that name for he hath in the middle of the forehead an horn of four foot long; and that horn is so sharp and so strong, that he throweth down all, or thirleth (Pierceth) all that he reseth (rageth) on. And this beast fighteth oft with the elephant. And the Unicorn is so strob, that he is not taken with the might of hunters; but a maid is set there as he shall come; and she openeth her lap, and the unicorn layeth thereon his head, and leaveth all his fierceness, and sleepeth in that wise, and is taken as a beast without weapon and slain with darts of
hunters. The Unicorn frateth (rubs) and fileth his horn against stones, and sharpest it, and maketh it ready to fight in that wise. And his colour is bay.

Bartholomew (Berthelet), bk.xviii, p.30.

Thorndyke, p. 145:

The liver and skin of the unicorn have great medicinal virtues, but that animal can never be caught except by means of girls, for it flees from men but stops to gaze diligently at girls, because it marvels that they have human forms, yet no beards. And if there are two or three girls together, it marvels so much the more, and is more quickly captured while its eyes are fixed on them. Moreover, the girls should be of noble not peasant birth, and of the middle period of adolescence.

Hildegard, Subtleties VII, 5.

Reference in Later Writers

Topsell:

We are now come to the history of a beast, whereof divers people in every age of the world have made great question, because of the rare vertues thereof:... Now the vertues of the horne of which we will make a particular discussion by it selfe, that which doeth give the most evident testimony unto all men that have ever seen it, hath bred all the contention; and if there had not been disclosed in it a ny extraordinary powers and vertues, we should as easily believe that there was a Unicorne in the Worlde, as we do believe there is an Elephant although not bred in Europe... by the Unicorne wee doe understand a peculier beast, which hath naturally but one horne, and that a very rich one, that groweth out of the middle of the foreheade...

These beasts are very swift and they have no Articles. They keep for the most part in the desarts, and live solitary in the tops of the mountains. There was nothing more horrible than the voice or braying of it, for the voice is strained above measure. It fighteth both with mouth and with the heels, with the mouth biting like a Lyon, and with the heels kicking like a Horse. It is a beast of an untamable nature. Hee feareth not yron or any yron Instrument,
and that which is most strange of all other, it fighteth with his own kind... It is said that the Unicorn above all other creatures, doe reverence Virgines and young Maides, and many times at the sight of them they grow tame and come and sit beside them for there is in their nature certaine savour wherewithal the Unicorns are allured and delighted; for which occasion the Indian and Ethiopia hunters use this stratagem to take the beast. They take a goodly strong and beautiful young man, when they dress in apparrrell of a woman, besetting him with divers odiferous flowers and spices... the Unicorn deceived with the outward shape of a woman and sweet smells, cometh unto the young man without feare, and so suffreth his head to be covered and wrapp'd within his large sleeves, never stirring but lying still and asleeppe, as in his most acceptable repose... Then when the hunters by the sign of the young man perceaved him fast and secure, they come upon him and by force cut off his horne...

Comment

Topsell ends his discussion of the unicorn with a long discourse on the medicinal value of the unicorn's horne. In this discussion, too, Topsell lists a number of proofs designed to convince the reader that such an animal exists.

Mermaids

A mere maiden of the sea,
Thos songes ys most souereyne
To bryng(e) folkys in-to a treyne,
It is so ful of armony.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p. 176.

Hulfe bird and fissh the navele down,
And vpward of inspeccion,
Who that sryght beholde kan
Loke hath an hede of a woman,
And everyth hath a mayde face
Of sight lusty to embrace,

Reson and Sensuallyte, p. 96.
Soager, p.289:

The mermaiden hight Siren, and is a sea-beast wonderly shapen, and draweth shipmen therto peril by sweetnesse of song. And some men say that they are fisches of the sea in likenes of women. Sirens be great dragons flying with crests, as some men trow; And some men feign that there are three sirens some deal maidens and some deal fowls with claws and wings, but the sooth is, that they were strong whores, that drew men that passed by them to poverty and to mischief. And in Arabic be Sirens with wings, that run more swiftly than horses,

And Sirens be a beast of the sea, wonderly shapen as a maid from the navel upward and a fish from the navel downward, and this wonderfull beast is glad and merry in tempests, and sad and heavy in fair weather. Its face is horrible, its hair very long and filthy. And it appears with its young which it carries in its arms; and when sailors see it, they are much afeared, and throw it an empty bottle, with which it plays, until the ship has passed by.

Hortus Sanitatis, bk.iv, p.83.

Whelps

Bi smale whelpis; as summe clerkis write,
Chastised is the myghti fers looun.

Fall of Princes I; p.7.

Source

Seager, p.343:

Whelps be children of hounds. Hounds Whelps be whelped with sawing teeth though they be full small. And all beast that have teeth like a saw and departeth, be gluttonous and fight as the hound, the wolf, the lion, the panther and such other; and all such beasts gender imperfect broods, and the cause is gluttony, for if she should abide until the Whelps were complete and perfect, they should slay the mother with strong sucking, and therefore it needeth that kind be hasty and speedy in such beasts.
authors command to take Whelps wholesomely against venomous biting for such Whelps opened and laid hot to the biting of serpent draw out venom. And though they be melancholy beasts of quality and of complexion, yet they be quiver and swift by disposition of numbers, and be glad and merry and play much, and that is because of their age.

Minotaur

The minotaur for to sleep in Crete
Half man, half bole, yeft it be credible,
Which was a monstre hotful and odible,
Thilom brought forth, in bookis ye may see,
Et linoes wiff callid Posiphe.

Fall of Princes I, p.24.

Comment

The minotaur is not mentioned in Seager or Pliny.

Chymere

Upon the beoster monstrous and savage,
Which callid is the Chymere off Licio —
Speciali when he is in his rage
Which monstre hadde to his susuage
Rod of a booun, as bookis detersyne
Wombe off goot, tail serpentyne.

Fall of Princes I, p.24.

She may be lynked to Chymere
Whiche ye a best(e) Monstruous,
Ryght wonderfull and mervelous
Leddy as a strange lyon
And even) lych a scorpion);
Hir tayl ys werry serpentyne,
And hir bely eke capryne, . . .

Reson and Sensuallyte, p.39.

Comment

Our source-books do not list any reference to this animal.

BIRDS

Eagle

The royall cgle with his ffetherys dunne,
Of nature so hih takith his flyght,
The royall egle with his fetherys sunne,
Whose eye doth so cleer and so bryght,
Off naturhe may perce the sunne,

Minor Poems II, p.615, ll.61-63.

Whoom the egle lyst to difende,
Be power absolute moost imperial,
To hym vengeance wyll not astende,
Other foolys in powyr not egal,

Minor Poems II, p.646, ll.73-76.

Source
Seager, p.95:

Among all manner of divers fouls, the egle is
the more liveral and free of heart. . . . And there-
fore oft other fouls follow the Eagle for hope and
trust to have some part of her prey. But, when the
prey that is taken is not sufficient to her self,
then as a King that taketh heed of a commont (common
people), he taketh the bird that is next to him, and
giveth it among the others, and serveth them there-
with. . . . And among all fouls, in the Eagle virtue
of sight is most myghty and strong; for in the Eagle
the spirit of sight is most temperate, and most
sharp in act and deed of seeing; and beholding the
sun in the roundness of his circle, without any
blemish of eyes: and the sharpness of her sight is
not rebounded again with clearness of light of the
sun, neither disperked (dispersed). Also there
is one manner Eagle that is full sharp of sight,
and she taketh her own birds in her claws and
maketh them all walk as on the sun, and that ere
his wings be full grown, except that they look
stiffly and steadfastly on the sun, she beateth
them and setteth them even before the sun; and
if any eye of any of her birds watereth in looking
on the sun, she slayeth him, as though he went
out of kind; or else driveth him out of the nest,
and despiseth him.

Bartholomew (Berthelet), bk.xvii, p.1.

Pliny, bk.x, ch.iii, p.271:

Of all the birds which we know, the Eagles
carry the price both for honor and strength. . . .
The Eagle hath the quickest and clearest eye of
all others, . . . she onely before her little
ones be feathered, will beat and strike them
with her wings, and thereby force them to look
full against the Sunne beames. Now if shee see
any of them to winke, or their eics to water at the railes of the Sunne, shee turns it with the head forward out of her nest, as a bastard and not right, nor not of hers, but bringeth up and cherisheth whose eie will abide the light of the Sunne as she locketh directly upon him. . . . The quils or feathers of Aëgles laid among those of other foules, will devour and consume them. Hen say that of all flying foules the Aëgle onely is not smitten nor killed with lightning; whereupon folke are want to say, that shee servith Jupiter in place of his squire or armour-bearer.

Nightingale

It is seyd that the nyghtyngale of hure nature hath a knowleche of hure deth. And lyke as the swan symgeth afore his deth, so sche, in the day of hure deth Ascyndyth in-to the top of the tre and symgeth in hora matutina a lame(n) table note; and so aftyre by mene degrees avelynge lowere, horn prima, hora tercia, hora sexta, et hora nona, tyll sche cam down in-to the myddys of the tre. And there, in hora nona, sche dyeth.

Two Nightingale Poems, p.1.

Comment

Seager carries no reference to the nightingale.

Pliny has a long discourse upon this bird. He gives no unusual properties of it except his record of two nightingales owned by Germanuis and Drusus that were taught to make long speeches and debate in Latin and Greek.1

Crow

The tother rake had a calaundre
Vpon) his shelde him self to assure,
A bridde of merveylous nature,
The whiche kan) as clerkys seye,
Shere a man) yif he shal deye;
Yif he with drawe and tourne away,
Of deth ther ys no more delay,
And yif he look vpon) hys face

---

1 Pliny, op. cit., bk.x, ch.xxix, p.286.
O lyf he shal have lenger space.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p.176.

Source

Pliny, bk.x, ch.xii, p.276:

Ravens of all foules, seeme to have a knowledge of their owne significations in presage and fore-tokens: for when the mercenarie hired scoulders of Media were all massacred under a coulour of entertainment and hospitality the Ravens flew all away out of the Peloponnesus and the region of Attica. The worst token of ill luck that they give, is when in their crying they seeme to swallow in their voices as though they were choked.

Bat

No bakke of kynde may lake ageyn the sume
Of frowardness yit wyle he fflée be nyght,
And quenche laumpys, though they breen bright.

Minor Poems II, p.814, ll.43-45.

The owly bakke wyl gladly fflée be nyght
Dirk cressetys and laumpys that been lyght,

Minor Poems II, p.815, ll.34-35.

Source

Seager, p.27:

The reremouse (i.e. Bat) hating light flyeth in the eventide with breaking and bleaching and swift moving, with small skin of her wings and is a beast like to a mouse in sounding with the voice, in piping and crying. And he is like to a bird and also a four-footed beast: Reremice be blind as moles and lick powder (dust) and suck oil out of lamps, and be most cold of kind; therefore the blood of a reremouse(a) anointed upon the eye-lids suffreth not the hair to grow again.

Bartholomew (Berthelet), bk.xii, p.38.

If you wish to see anything submerged and deep in the night, and that it may not be more hidden from thee than in the day, and that you may read books in the dark night -- anoint your face with the blood of

---

1 Pliny uses crow, raven, and rooke interchangeably.
a bat, and that will happen which I say.

Albert Magnus, "Of the Wonders of the World".

Fliny, bk.xx, ch.lxi, p.301.

The Peregrine or Bat alone of all creatures that fly, bringeth forth young alive and none but she of that kind hath wings made of pennicles or thin skin. She is the onely bird that sucketh her little ones with her paps, and giveth them milk: and those she will care about her two at once, embracing them as she flieth. It is said also that she hath no more but one joint of the haunch, without any in the knee or feet: and that they take greatest delight to feed upon gnats.

FISH

Stock-fish

A stockfyssh boon in darknesse yenith a light.


Comment

In no sources used was this characteristic of the stock-fish discussed. Pliny says of it:

About the Isle Ebusus, the Stock-fish is much called for; whereas in other places it is counted but a base, muddie, and filthy fish and no where els they know how to feeth perfectly unless it be first well beaten with cudgels.1

INSECTS

Glowworm

A fowle glowworm in darknesse shewith lyght; . . .

Minor Poems II, p.914, l.47.

Source

Seager, p.127:

The Glow-worm is a little beast, with feet and

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1 S. C. Pliny, op. cit., bk.ix, ch.xvii, p.246.
wings, and is therefore sometimes accounted among volatiles, and he shineth in the darkness as a candle, and namely about the hinder parts, and is foul and dark in full light. And infecteth and smiteth his hand that him toucheth. And though he be unseen in light, and hateth it and goeth only by night.

Bertholomew (Berthelet) bk.xviii, p.77.

Reference in Later Writers

Certain worms that shine in night called Glow-worms, being well stopped in a glass, and covered within hot horse dung standing there a certain time will be resolved into a liquor, which being mixed with like proportion of quick silver, first cleansed and purged, which will be within half-a-dozen times washing and rubbing in pure vinegar, mixed with bay-salt, must be cast away and then hot water put to the quicksilver and therewith washed and then put and closed in a fair, bright and pure glass and so hanged up in the midst of a house, or other place or room; will give such a light in the dark, as the moon doth when she shineth in a bright night.


To make a light that never shall fail, take the worms that shine in the night called Glow-worms, stamp them and let them stand till the shining matter be above, then with a feather take the same shining matter and mingle it with quicksilver, and so put it into a vial, and hang the same in a dark place, and it will give light. Thus, I had out of an old book.


Where the Glow-worm creepeth in the night, no adder will go in the day.

Lilly, "Carpeaspe", Epilogue

Snail

... the snayle goth love down Darteth in his shelle, yit may bee see no sight.

Minor Poems II, p.616, 11.87-88.
Snail is a worm of slime and broodeth in slime, and is therefore always foul and unclean; and is a manner snake, and is an horned worm. And such worms be gendered principally in corrupt air and rain.

A bee yenith honey and styngeth with the tayl.

Secrets of Philisofres, p. 22.

Comment

Pliny gives a long discussion on the bee and its use to mankind, but he says nothing of this property which Lydgate gives it. It is possible that this may have been a result of Lydgate's observation, or it may have been a popular superstition of his century.

Reference in Later Writers

A bee sting pricketh deepest when it is fullest of honey.

Lilly "Sappo and Phaon" (Prologue).

This Balm groweth in no place, but only there (Cairo). And though that men bring the plants for to plant in other countries, they grow well and fair, but they bring forth no fructuous thing. And men cut the branches with a sharp flintstone or with a sharp bone, when men will go to cut them: for whose cut them with iron, it would destroy his virtue and his nature. And men make that Balm be tilled
of the Christian men or else it will not fruitify, as the Saracens say themselves: for it hath been often times proved.

Sir John Mandeville, ch.5.

Balm drunk in wine is good against the bitings of venomous beasts, comforts the heart, and driveth away all melancholy and sadness. The juice thereof glueth together green wounds, being put into oil, unguent or Balm for that purpose, and maketh it of greater efficacy.

Gerard's "Herbal".

Musk

And tho y felt so gret sweetnesse
Through my chamber, out of Doute,

Lych as hyt had (de) ben) at al
Full of amber oriental
Of alloe, and of muske newe,
And ful of Roses fresh of hewe.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p.7.

Source

Seager, p.210:

In the mountains of Ind be some Caprioli (deer) that eateth herbes with good smell and savor, and in their feet be certain hollowness, in the which certain humours be gathered, and breedeth posthumes (abscesses), the which posthume and broken with moving and with froting (rubbing) and thrown out of the body with small hairy leaves. And the substance that is contained within the skin, is best of smelling, and most precious among spicery, and most profitable and virtuous in medicine, and that we call commonly Musk.

Bartholomew (Berthelet), bk.xviii, p.23.

In the flank of the Musk-cat grows an imposthume from collected humours, and when this is ripe, the beast bruises and rubs it against a tree, and so it is broken, and the matter runs out, and thickens and hardens there, and the substance of the humour is called Musk.

Hortus Sanitatis, bk.ii, p.100.
Reference in Later Writers

Musk is made of the stomach of a beast somewhat greater than a cat. Our greatest sweet we see is but rottenness and putrefaction.

Purchas' "Pilgrim", p.302.

Amber

And the ye felt so great sweetness Through my chamber, out of Dante,

.......

Lych as hyt had (de) ben) at al Full of amber oriental Of alloe, and of muske newe, And ful of Roses fresh of hewe.

Reson and Sensuallys, p.7.

Source

Seager, p.6:

Electrum is a metal, and is more than other metals. And hereof be three manner of kinds -- one is such, that when it rummeth first out of the tree, it is fleeting and thin gum, but afterwords with heat or with cold it is made hard as a clear stone, as it were crystal. That other manner kind is called metal, and is found in the earth, and is had in price. The third manner is made of the three parts of gold, and of the fourth of silver.1

Bartholomew (Berthele). bk.xvi, p.28.

PLANTS

Rose

And as the rose in sweetness and odoure Surmounteth floures... .

Temple of Glas, p.10.

Source

Seager, p.261:

Among all flowers of the world, the flower of the rose is chief, and beareth the price. And therefore oft the chief part of man, the head, is crowned with Roses. Of the green Rose aqua rosacea (rose

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1 Electrum is the Latin word for amber.
water) is made by seething of fire, or of the sun, and this water is good in ointment for ladies, for it cleanseth away webs and foul specks of the face, and maketh the skin thin and subtle. Powder of dry roses comforteth wagging teeth that be in point to fall.

Bartholomew (Berthelet) bk.xvii, p.136.

Take the seed of a Rose, and the seed of a mustard, and the foot of a weasel, and hang these on a tree, and from thenceforth it will bear no fruit. And if the aforesaid be put upon a net, the fish will collect there. And if the said dust be put in a lamp, and then be lighted, all men will seem to be as black as the devil. And if the said powder be mixed with olive-oil and quicksulphur and a house be smeared with this while the sun is shining, it will appear to be all on fire.

Albertus Magnus, "Of Virtues of Herbes", p.15.

Pliny, bk.xxi, ch.iv, p.261

But before I enter into this Treatise, I an to advise the Reader that wee Romane are acquainted with very few gardens flowers for Guirlands, and know in manner none but Violets and Roses... As touching oile Rose it was in request before the destruction of Troy, as may appear by the Poet Homer. Moreover, Roses enter into the composition of sweet ointments and perfumes. Over and besides the Rose of itself alone as it is, hath medicinable vertues, and servith to many purposes in Physick. It goeth into emplasters and collyries or eye-salves, by reason of a certaine subtile mor-dacitie and penetrative qualitie that it hath. Furthermore, many delicates and dainty dished are served unto the table either covered and bestrewed with Rose leaves, or bedewed and smeared all over with their juice; which doth no harm to such viands, but give a commendable taste thereto.

Mulberry

As whilom) did the Holberye,
Whos fruit was turned to blacknesse
From his colour of whitenesse

Reson and Sensuallyte, p.103.
Comment

Neither Seager nor Pliny refers to this property of the mulberry. Seager records of it:

Leaves thereof slayeth serpents if they be thrown or laid upon them. The leaves and in rain water maketh black hair, and healeth biting of ettercaps and easeth toothache. Of mulberries is noble drink made; elephants drink thereof and be more bold and hardy.

Bartholomew (Berthelet) bk.xvii, p.100.

Iacyncte

The best iacyncte in Ethiope ys founde
And ys of colour lyke the saphyre Ynde,
Comforth men, that ly in prison bounde,
Madeth men strong and hardy of lys kynde
Contract synewes the iacyncte doth unbounde:


Source

Pliny, bk.xxi, ch.xxvi, p.100:

The hyacinth loveth Fraunce very well, and prospereth there exceedingly. The French use therewith to die their light-reds or lustie-gallants, for default of graine to colour their scarlet. The root is bulbous and onion-like, well-known to these, slave-courser, who buy them at best-hand; and after, tricking and trimming and pampering them up for sale, make gain of them; for being reduced to a liniment, they use it with wine to anoint as well as the share of youths, as the chin and the cheeks: to keep them from ever being under grome, or having-hair on their face that they may appear young still and smooth. It is a good defensative against the prick of venomous spiders; and besides allieth the gripping torments of the belly. The feed of this herb with abrotomum is a preservative against the venome of serpents and scorpions; and cureth the jaundice.

Tree

Ther ben) other trees mo
Which or cause of myche wo;
For ther shade, this is no lye,
Wyl make a man) vmwarly dye.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p.154.
STARS

Planets

Naturel philisoffres/assentyd alle in Cun,
Seyn that a man/is naed of iiij humours,
And they assentyn/in wrtyng everychoon
After the wedyr/Reynes, haylles, and shoure,
Planetys a lffe/and the hevenly tours.

Secrets of Old Philisoffres, p.40.

He knew the Cours/of planetys & disposicioun,
Of mayst and drye/both heedte & coold,
Chaung of the yeer/And Revolucyoun.

Secrets of Old Philisoffres, p.38.

Comment

Seager does not mention astrology at all in his
book. Pliny has no reference to the stars and planets
that would throw any light on the lines here quoted
from Lydgate. Thorndyke, however, has recorded the
following in his discussion of Ptolemy:

Taking up first the properties of the seven
planets, Ptolemy associates with each one or more
of the four elemental qualities, hot cold, dry and
moist. Thus sun warms and to some extent, dries,
for the nearer it comes to our pole the more
heat and drought it produces. The moon is moist,
since it is close to the earth and is affected
by the vapors from the latter, while its in-
fluence renders other bodies soft and causes
putrefication. But it also warms a little
owing to the rays it receives from the sun.
Saturn chills and to some extent dries, for
it is remote from the sun's heat and earth's
damp vapors. Mars emits a parching heat, as its
color and proximity to the sun indicate. Jupiter,
situated between cold Saturn and burning Mars,
is of a rather lukewarm nature but tends more to
warmth and moisture than to their opposites. So
does Venus, but conversely for it warms less than
Jupiter does but moistens more, its large surface
catching many vapors from the neighboring earth.
In Mercury, situated near the earth, moon, sun
and moon alike, neither drought nor dampness
predominates, but the velocity of that planet
makes it potent cause of sudden changes. In
general, the planets exert a good or evil in-
fluence as they abound in two rich and vivifying qualities, heat and moisture, or in detrimental ones, cold and dry. . . .

He treats of the influence of the four seasons of the year and four cardinal points, each of which he relates to one of the four qualities, hot, cold, dry, and moist. . . . By the stars he predicts wars, pestilence, famines, earthquakes, winds, drought, and weather. . . . He also predicts events in the lives of individuals from stars.1

STONES

Ruby

... as the rubie bright
Of al stones in beautie & in sight,
As it is known, hath the regalie: . . .

Temple of Glas, p.10.

For this royal stone) famous
Was a Ruby vertuous
Which hath by kynde the dignite
Of stony and the soueraynte
Most of vertu and most of pris, . . .

Reson and Sensuallyte, pp.173.

Of hevenly rubyes bilt is that dongsen. . .

Minor Poems II, p.749, l.115.

And as the ruby hath the soueraynte
Of ryche stones and the regalye, . . .

Minor Poems II, p.414, l.120-121.

Ryche attyres of stony and perre
Charbonclys, rubyes of the most excellence
Shew in dirkness lyght where so they be
By ther natural hevenly influence. . . .

Minor Poems II, p.662, l.9-12.

... Your noblesse to delyte,
As a charbaunchle agayn dirknesse of nyght;
O Rychest Rubyes/or clearest margaryte
Of philisoffres/and pleynly for to wryte, . . .


Source

Seager, p. 264:

Among these red gems the Rubies otherwise
called carbuncles challenge the principal place.

Holland's Pliny, bk. xxxvii, ch. 7.

Pliny, bk. xxxvii, ch. vii, p. 616:

Among the red gems, the Rubies, otherwise
called carbuncles, challenge the principal
place and are esteemed the richest: they have
their name in Greek of the likeness unto
fire, and yet fire hath no power of them, which
is the reason that some call them appyroti.

In all sorts of Rubies those are taken
for the male which show a quicke red more
fire-like than the rest; and contrariwise
female, such as shine not so bright but after
a faint manner.

Eliotropia

Eliotropia was the name,
A sten) of passing gret rychesse,
The lapydary bereth witnesse,
Which yiveth a man) hap and grace
To be welkame in every place,
And also, yif yt be credible
Maketh a man) Invisible.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p. 177.

Source

Pliny, bk. xxxvii, ch. x, p. 627:

The pretious stone Heliotrapium, is found
in AEthopia, Affricke, and Cyprus: the ground
thereof is aedepe greene in manner of a lecke,
but the same is garnished with veins of blane:
the reason of the name Heliotrapum is this,
For that it be thrown into a pail of water,
it changeth the rays of the Sun by way of
reverberation into a bloudie colour, especially
that which cometh out of AEtheopis: the same
being without the water doth represent the
bodie of the sun, like unto a mirroir: And
if there bee an eclipse of the Sun, a man
may perceive easily in this stone how the
moon it, and obscureth the light: but most
impudent and palpable is the vanitie of
magicians in their reports of this stone;
for they let not to say that if a man carrie
it about him, together with the hearbe Heliotropum, and besides mumbel certaine charmes or
prayers, he shall goe invisible.

Diamond

For stydfast as a dyenmount,
That broketh not but with goatys blood,

Reason and Sensuallyte, p.160.

(Iren is the drawer) of thademantes stone,
The gootis blade dissolvethe it of nature,


Source

Seager, p.2:

Adamas is a little stone of Ind, and is
 coloured as it were iron, and shineth as crystal,
but it passeth never the quantity of a walnut.
No thing overcometh it, neither iron nor fire.
And also it heateth never. But though it may
not be overcome, and though it despise fire and
iron, yet it is broke with new hot blood (of a
he-goat (Bertholomew,)) This stone is contrary of
Hagnes, for if an Adamas be set by iron, it
suffreth not the iron come to the Hagnes, so
that though the Hagnes draweth iron to itself,
the Adamas draweth it away from the Hagnes.

Bertholomew (Bertholet), bk.xvi. 9.

Fliny, bk.xxxvii, ch.iv, pp.610-611:

The Diamant carrieth the greatest price,
not only among precious stones, but also above
all things else in the world: neither was it
known for a long time what a Diamant was, un-
less it were by some kings and princes, and
and those but very few. The only stone it is that
wee find in mines of metal. . . .The triall of
Diamants is upon a smiths Anvill: for strike as
hard as you will with an hammer upon the point
of a Diamant, you will see how it scorneth all
blowses, and rather than it will seem to relent,
first flieeth the hammer thatsmitheth it in
pieces, and the very anvill it selfe under-
neath cleaveth in twain. Wonderfull and in-
enarrable is the hardnesse of a Diamant:
besides it hath the nature to conquer the furie
of fire, nay you shall never make it hate, doe
what you can: for this untamable vertu that it
hath, the Greekes have given it the name Adcmas. . . . This invincible mineral against which (against which neither fire nor Steele, the two most violent and puissant creatures of Natures making have any power, but that it checketh and despiseth both the one and the other) is forced to yield the gauntlet and give place unto the bland of a Goat, this only is the means to break it in sunder, bowbeit care must be had, that the Diamant be steeped therein whiles it is fresh drawn from the beast before it be cold: and yet when you have made all the steeping you can, you must have many a blow at the Diamant with hammer upon the anvill; for even then also, unless they be of excellent prove & good indeed, it will put them to it and break both the one and the other. But I would gladly know whose invention this might be to soake the Diamant in Goats bland, whose head devised it first, or rather by what chance was it found out and knowne? What conjecture should lead a man to make an experiment of such a singular and admirable secret, especially in a goat, the filthiest beast one of them in the whole world? Cortes I must ascribe both this invention and all such like to the might and beneficence together of the divine powers. Neither are we to argue how and why nature hath done this or that. Sufficient it is that her will was so and thus she would have it. But to come again to the Diamant, when this proof taketh effect to our mind, so that the Diamant once crack, you shall see it break and crumble into so small pieces, that hardly the eye can discerne one from the other. Well, lapidaries are very desirous of Diamants & seek much after them: they fet them into handles of yron & by their means they will with facilitie cut into anything, be it never so hard. Moreover, there is such a natural emulite between Diamants and Leadstones, that if it be laid neer to a peacee of yron, it will not suffer it to be drawn away by the leadstone: nay, if the said leadstone be brought so near a peacee of yron, that it have caught hold thereof, the Diamant, if it came in place, will cause it to leave the hold and let it go.

Marguerite (Pearl)

. . . your noblesse to delyte,
As a charbouncele ageyn darknesse of nyght;
O Rycest Rubyes/or clearest Margaryte
Of philisoffres/and pleymly for to vlyte, ...  


Source
Seager, p.238:

Marguerite is chiefe of all white precious stones, it breedeth in flesh of shell-fish, and in sometimes of heaven, the which dew shell-fish receive in certain times of the year. Of the which margueretes same be called Unions, and have a convenable name, for only one is found and never two or more together. And those that be conceived of the morrow (morning) dew be made dim with the air of even-tide. And some be found kindly (naturally) pierced and these be better than others: and some be pierced by craft. And they have virtue comfortative, either of all the whole kind, or else because they are besprung with certain specialty, they comfort the limbs: for by constraining and coercing they cleanse them of superfluous humours. And the more of dew and air that is drunk in, the more and the greater they be, but no marguerite groweth passing half a foot. Also if that lightning or thunder fall, when the marguerite should breed of the dew, that is drunk in, the shell closeth by sudden fear, and so the gathering faileth, and is cast out.

Iasgounce (Iacinct)

Ther is a ston which callid is iagounce,
Off old engendrill withyme my entreyle,
Which of fine gold peiseth a gret vnce,
Citryme of colour, lik garnetes of entaile,
Which maketh men victorious in bataile
And who-so-ever bere on him this stoen
Is ful assured of his mortal foon.

Who hath this stoen in possessioun,
Shal safre no povert, nor non indigence
But of all tresour have plente & foisoun
And every man shal doan hym reverence,
And noon enyme shal hym doon offense;...

Minor Poems II, p.478, 11.232-243

Source

Pliny, bk.xxxvii, ch.ix, p.621:
The Iacint also at first sight is pleasant
and acceptable, but the lovely beautie thereof
vanisheth away before it hath given a man ymough.
And so farre it is off from contenting the eye
fully and satisfying the pleasure thereof, that
it fadeth sooner then the dainty flower of that
name, Hyacenthus, so quickly doth the lustre
pass away, in manner before it come to the eye.

Stone of Ynde

And ful of stony preciusse,
Fed out of ferther Ynde
Whiche by vertue of ther lynde
Made every man in nis estate
Ryght everene and ryght fortunat.

Reson and Sensuallyte, p.139.

Albiston

That may be likenyd to a ston,
Whiche is I-calld albiston,
That onys when it hath caught, feer,
There may no man the flambe steer,
That it we brende aftyr euer,
And neuer from the fer disseuere,
So they accordyn of nature
And for this ston may longe endure,
In fer to brende fyr & bryght
As sterres in the wyntyr nyght,
I fynde, in Venus oratorye
In her worshop & memoyre
Was mad a lamppe of this ston.

"Compleynt", Temple of Glas, p.66.

Philisoffres Stone

Touchyng the ston of philisoffres Old,
Of whiche they make/most soueryn nencioun,
But ther is Con/as Aristotle toold,
Which alle excellith/in comparyscoun,
Toon of stoenys/most soueryn of Renoun,
Touchyng the vertu/of this Ryche thyng,
Thus he wroot/to the most soueryn kyng:

Secrets of Philisoffres, p.31.

Comment

Neither Seager nor Fliny mentions the philosophier's
stone, but Thorndyke gives a little information about it
Alchemy is that substance which joins the more precious bodies which are compounded from one original matter and by this same natural union converts them to the higher type. In other words, it is the philosopher's stone—by which metals may be transmuted. . . . In the philosopher's stone are contained the four elements and it is like unto the universe and the composition of the universe. In process of obtaining it decay must come first then, the purification.

Achate

The mighty Achate suctours seyne eche one,
Of heos enemys dothe victory recure
Thus of lynde here every creature
Reloysethe him, sothely it is no fable
His owen place of nature halth most sure
And causeth the him to drawl to his semblable.


Source

Seager, pp.5-6:

The first manner thereof helpeth witchcraft. For therewith tempest is changed; and stinteth rivers and streams. And the manner kind of Crete changeth perils and maketh gracious and pleasing and fair showing and speaking, and giveth nyght and strength. The third manner stone, that is of Ind, comforteth the sight, and helpeth against thirst and venom, and smelleth sweet if it be nigh. The burning of it is odiferous. The virtue of this stone maketh a man sober, and augmenteth and increaseth riches, and so it doth love, and helpeth greatly to obtain and conquer victory and favor. If there be any man suspected of fraud of poisoning, if he be guilty, this stone put under his meat will not suffer him to swallow his meat, and if the stone be withdrawn, he shall not tarry to swallow his meat.

Bartholomew (Berthelet) bk.xvi, p.11.

1

WATER

There ys a welle wonderful,  
That who drynketh his belyful  
And is bathed therein oonys,  
Among the colde crystal stonyes,  
The nature shal hin enclyne  
To become Femynyne,

Rescon and Sensuallyte, p.102.

Comment

Neither Seager nor Pliny gives any wonderful
properties of water.
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY

Early man's interest in his physical world was the result of a need for practical explanations and applications of natural phenomena. From this interest a system of magic was produced. The wonders of nature were known only to a few chosen people -- sorcerers, enchanters, magicians -- who acted as intermediaries between the common man and his natural environment.

Superstition, folklore, and mythology, however, soon followed on the heels of this magic. When man found a situation over which he had to admit that he had no control, in his effort to excuse his inadequacy and to quiet his fears, he concocted causes for the effects in question. This gave rise to superstition. When such causes became known to the extent that they were identified with the culture of a people, superstition passed into the folklore of that people.

Mythology, too, arose as an explanatory device for uncontrollable situations. If man had no power over causes, man reasoned, there must be some supernatural being interested in the welfare or downfall of human individuals; hence, in all the cultures of early peoples there is a mythology that seeks to systematize that people's fundamental beliefs concerning nature and natural phenomena.

Human curiosity, however, did not allow superstitious or mythological explanations to suffice very long. As civilization advanced, man began to recognize the absence of any logical unimpassioned reasons for "things as they are". The whole problem of the natural world presented such a challenge to man's intellect that he knew only a cool painstaking approach to this problem would result in an adequate solution. It was then that man developed a scientific attitude toward the properties of his physical world; it was then that man began to see the possibilities for self-advancement through a scientific
The early attempts of man to explain and classify his knowledge of nature have given us the beastiaries, lapidaries, herbaria, and physiologi of ancient and medieval times. The survival of these treatises has made it possible for modern scholars to see the growth of science and to observe how scientific progress and literary development depended one upon the other. It is true that the scientists were not particularly interested in literature; nor did the literary men exhibit a great deal of sympathy for science, but the heritage of both science and literature proved barren by themselves, and it was not until one fertilized the other that there was real vital growth. Modern culture is an offspring of that union.

Because of the unusual nature of the early beastiaries, lapidaries, herbaria and physiologi, men of letters found them valuable to illustrate and adorn their work. The scientific implications of the treatises were of little importance to the writer; his was a search for examples with which to enhance the interest of his work. Science for proved and established fact was material for the scientist; science for illustration and unique expression was useful to the poet. This is the reason that the literary artist sometimes lagged behind scientific knowledge and adorned his work with information that was no longer considered valid. No discredit is due the artist, however, for his main purpose, exemplification, was attained whether or not his matter met the latest requirements of a field outside of his sphere. During the sixteenth century the literary use of scientific fact from natural history was at its height. So widely popular did the practice become that later scholars in an effort to identify it as a specific

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literary device, called it "unnatural natural history".

In the "unnatural natural history" used by Lydgate, we can view, first hand, science as material for the poet. In most instances Lydgate follows the usual procedure in employing the conventional properties assigned to natural objects by Pliny and by other early scientists cited by Seager. For example, he says that the unicorn is caught not by a hunter's skill, but by the beauty of a maiden; that a diamond can not be broken except that it be first soaked in goat's blood; and that the heliotrope is a stone that will not only make a man welcome everywhere, but if he wishes this stone will make him invisible. Such examples are safely traced to the work of ancient writers. Only in a few cases did Lydgate assign properties to objects to which our source-books gave no reference. Of those few, one of three things may be true. It is possible that Lydgate had access to books of which we have no knowledge; or such properties may have been assigned to certain objects by popular fifteenth century superstition; or Lydgate may have "invented" a fact to illustrate his thought, as Lyly1, Greene, and Nashe2 did in the sixteenth century.

Lydgate, viewed in comparison with sixteenth century writers, seems to have used very little "unnatural natural history". The writers of that era used allusions to ancient scientists so profusely that even their more conservative contemporaries were forced to comment on it. Such allusions in the body of Robert Greene's prose romances total almost a thousand.3 Bond wrote of John Lyly and Thomas Nashe that their only fault in using allusions to natural history was that they used them in "gross excess".4 If we consider that Lydgate's works

1 R. W. Bond, op. cit., p.131.


3 Ibid., p.1007.

are primarily translations, and the "unnatural natural history" found in them might be the adornments of the translator, then, Lydgate is seen as a worthy predecessor to the tendency of the sixteenth century to fill literature with this device, for Lydgate, too, uses allusions to beasts, birds, insects, plants, stars, and stones from the common stock of medieval lore.

Until a few more studies of this type have been made of literature prior to the sixteenth century, Lydgate's place in the whole movement of "unnatural natural history" cannot be determined. The investigation of the use of "unnatural natural history" in the work of one man can serve as no absolute criterion for the tendency of an age as rich in literature as was the fifteenth century. This study is valuable as a starting point for further research into the development of the whole use of "unnatural natural history" in the period.
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