

Sarah E. Polo

**Example 2- rhetorical analysis of a recipe  
in Elizabeth Dyke's manuscript**

**Manuscript PDF page 53, right side. Transcript:**

Jan To make A precious water for any sore eyes

Take 3 drams of tuttifinell powder as much alloe heuited in powder 2 drams of fine whit suger whit rose water and whit wine of each 6 ounces mix all together in a new glass stope it close and put it in to the sunne the most part of the heat of sumer shaking it twice or thrice a day and it is finished it may be used with great benifet to the eyes that be dime sighted though they be not sore and it clears the sight 3 or 4 drops at a time is enough lye one the back till it have dune smarting

**Analysis:**

In this passage from the early modern manuscript *Booke of recaits*, the writer presents a recipe whose title indicates it is for the creation of a liquid (a “precious water”) to be used for “sore eyes” (Dyke 53). This passage is structured into three distinct rhetorical moves: first, the writer lists the ingredients needed and the manner in which they must initially be assembled; second, the writer gives instructions for the lengthy sun and motion-based process needed to complete the liquid’s successful transformation into a healing remedy for the eyes; finally, the writer explains how this “completed” liquid is to be administered to the eyes (Dyke 53).

Although details in the passage suggest the writer believes this “precious” remedy is an effective one, and one which the writer has either used on herself or on others, other features of the recipe call its validity into question (Dyke 53). In particular, the writer leaves out information in the second phase of the recipe that might be vital to the successful creation of this liquid. Further, the writer provides what appears to be an outright contradiction in the final section in explaining what sort of eye ailment the liquid will cure.

In the first section of the recipe, the writer lists the ingredients needed to create this liquid. Using units of measure such as “drams” and “ounces,” the writer lists ingredients such as aloe (“alloe”), sugar (“suger”), white wine, rose water, and some sort of powder I believe to be

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spelled “tuttifinell,” though this ingredient does not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or in any other early modern glossaries or dictionaries I have consulted (Dyke 53). These ingredients are to be combined and placed within a “new glass,” which is then closed with a stopper (Dyke 53). The next phase of the writer’s instructions require three crucial elements: the summer sun, motion, and time. The stoppered glass containing the ingredients above is to be placed in the sun during “the most part of the heat of sumer” (Dyke 53). During this time, it must also be shaken “twice or thrice a day” (Dyke 53). Though it seems that that these elements are crucial to the process of completing this liquid, in this phase the writer is vague about specifics. For instance, it is unclear how long this process is to continue—it must last for “the most part of the heat of sumer” until “it is finished,” but how many days or weeks is this, precisely (Dyke 53)? Is this directive specific to just those practicing the recipe in a particular region of England during particular months? The omission of these details seems somewhat at odds with how necessary they are to the process (as well as how different these steps are from other recipes I’ve examined). In the third and final phase of the recipe, the writer explains how to administer the liquid once “it is finished” (Dyke 53). Here, however, uncertainty is raised about the liquid’s true utility. The recipe’s title indicates it is for “sore eyes,” yet the next phrase in the recipe says “it may be used with great benifet to the eyes that be dime sighted though they be *not* sore” (emphasis mine) (Dyke 53). To “[clear] the sight,” the user of the drops is to use “3 or 4 drops at a time” (Dyke 53). The entire final section of the recipe on application (as well as the entire recipe body as a whole) makes no mention of helping with *sore* eyes, and specifically speaks here of clearing the sight of *dim* eyes, expressly ones that do *not* hurt. Is the recipe’s title regarding “sore eyes” an unintentional contradiction? Or is the reader expected to read the clearing of dim sight as a secondary benefit or use of the recipe? The recipe closes with an

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instruction that the user of the liquid should “lye on the back” until “it have dune smarting” (Dyke 53). Here “it” may refer to either the drops of liquid themselves causing pain or to the user’s previous pain indicated by the title’s reference to “sore eyes.” Again, this is unclear.

Uncertainty about the process for completing the creation of the liquid in the summer sun, as well as lack of clarity regarding whether the recipe helps with sore eyes or dim ones (or both) results in a recipe that seems less straightforward than other medicinal recipes I have encountered in this manuscript. However, this particular recipe does provide an indication in its title (particularly its description as “precious”) that the writer views it as an effective medicine. This is perhaps comparable to other textual evidence of experimentation we have seen in other recipes, such as the use of “proved.” Finally, this recipe provides two things I have not seen in other recipes: First, it provides evidence that the writer may herself have used the remedy, which is indicated by the final line, in which she is aware that the liquid (or the condition it is meant to help with) will hurt briefly. Second, it includes time-based instructions.

**Critical Research Question(s):**

This recipe appears inconsistent in its simultaneous evidence of the writer’s faith in the remedy and the final indication that she has used the liquid herself, which stand in contrast with lack of clarity about the sun/shaking phase of the recipe and the uncertainty about what condition the liquid cures. Are there other ways in which the manuscript demonstrates contradictions about the utility of its recipes? Are there other recipes which rely heavily on a seasonal or kairotic component (such as this recipe’s summer sun), and do these other recipes provide more specificity about these components? Or are the manuscript time-based recipes always vague?