Plants in peacetime: European herbaceous and natural borders
HHRN June 2022

The presentation steps through the following stages:

- Botanising and herbal medicine in north & central America
- Formal training in Britain in Anglophone tradition
- Anglophone to Francophone: a hybrid therapeutic life
- *Les Cahiers* changed the course of my practice to adopt a French approach to herbal medicine called at the time: *the neuroendocrine theory of terrain*
- The formative characteristics of the terrain of each individual are imprinted in utero between the 6th & 13th weeks of gestation
- Recognition of my own terrain formed in wartime
- Peacetime and plants in postwar England, and in Germany aged 9
- Experience of culinary and medicinal plants in France aged 14 & 16
- Experience of culinary and medicinal plants in southern France aged 22:
  a story I have told in Herbal Exchanges published in 2014 by NIMH and co–edited by Frances Watkins, a member of this Herbal History Research network
- Encounter with a herboriste during a commercial expedition to Milly-la-Forêt:
  the legacy of Vichy legislation
- Studying and working with Duraffourd and Lapraz
- Conclusion: Visit to Montpellier in 2022

The choice of slides favours physical evidence over fallible memory. Cultures and individuals edit their memories, allowing favourable narratives to emerge but also enabling stereotypes. Variation within populations is greater than between them so tropisms express relative bias, not essentialist distinctions as I hope to affirm in this impressionistic and subjective account. Cultures are readily recalled by aroma and their touch to the palate. Food before medicine; but we also recall how we were treated. As for food, Violette Leduc gives a telling account in her memoir *La Bâtarde* (1964) of rural France managing to return to eat quite well off the land as soon as hostilities ended in 1945. Geography and climate create vegetation; food in turn surely dominates culture. Of the major pan-cultural markers—food, language and music—food depends upon plants. Culture after all alludes to the primacy of cultivation: horticulture and agriculture

Working in France in the 1960s, the dominant experience was LUNCH: Entre midi et deux heures, La France *Mange*. I took to it with great enthusiasm and found that it made work in the afternoon more effective. Teaching at a Secondary Modern school in England, you were lucky to get a half-hour and then went on playground duty. In France, teachers worked only in the classroom. The 5-course lunch teachers and students enjoyed was not served on Sundays. My students took it in turn to invite me to their homes. At one such Sunday lunch, the main dish was local hare. the father had driven 40 miles that morning to ferry in the lady in the family who specialises in this tricky cooking. She would be summoned to cook whenever it was on the menu; no-one else would think of doing it themselves. I think this may count as a paradigmatic cultural trope. It might be said that such a culture takes its pleasures seriously.

When teaching a foreign language in school, you try to characterise the culture that uses such speech. In the Lycée we used an essay by George Orwell entitled the *privacy* of the English which I thought pointed to a distinguishing characteristic. With some ingenuity you could connect it with lunch. Working in a pub, I was told to "get my lunch in" at an improbable and inconvenient hour as if eating were an inconvenient necessity (as if we were at war). So perhaps culture can be illustrated by how a population takes its pleasure or at least its attitude to sensory pleasure.

Working in the 1970s in Paris in the company of American executives, it was amusing to note their deep frustration not only at this abundance of time at the table but that people wanted to talk about other things than work, like literature or sex or their families. When I worked on location in Scotland for Bavaria TV, the producer made it quite clear that my most important duty was to make sure that the crew had the best lunch available (preferably with plenty of Mc Ewan's Export). An English crew would typically start much earlier in the day (with bacon rolls) and might work through lunch to finish earlier.[1] Cultures respond to the

[1] It might also be pointed out that at the time, they were the highest paid film crews in the world.

necessities of eating and meeting with different styles. How these differences translate into health is too soon to tell. Epidemiology may not be a short term business but medicine cannot be otherwise.

Although medical practice may be international, medical cultures derive their characteristic flavour from their country of origin. Even within the standardised norms of modern[2] science —medicine exhibits different styles of operation and elicits different kinds of expectation in the population served.[3] The Herbal Medical texts from the 19th and 20th centuries of Britain, France and Germany are of course constrained by their respective political histories.

In Britain (at least in herbalist conception), herbal medicine is defined by the teachings of practitioners from America, spread largely (along with their franchises) in the industrialised cities of the English midlands. Few of their therapeutic plants were indigenous.

In France, the medical doctor François–Joseph Cazin (1788–1864) was moved by the poverty of his rural patients to promulgate botanic medicine as an accessible and low-cost alternative to costly pharmaceutical preparations. In the 1858 edition which I show, he gives the botanical circumscription, description of the dried plant, physiological actions, indications for use, and instructions for the pharmacist. There are 40 plates illustrating 200 plants as well as a therapeutic index. He was celebrated and honoured in his lifetime (Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur) for his medical and botanical work and is considered in France as a founder of phytotherapy alongside Henri Leclerc (1870–1955) who was the first to use the term in 1913. Leclerc, whose *Précis de phytothérapie* went through several editions from 1922, founded *La revue de phytothérapie* in 1937. He was a country doctor but also a historian of simples and phytotherapy, honoured with Chevalier then Officier de la Légion d'honneur. His materia medica was indigenous but he also wrote on tropical spices.[4]

Other authors referred to in slides:

Jean Valnet (1920–1995) was, like Galen, an army surgeon. With Dr Maurice Girault he developed the aromatogramme as a way of matching the antibiotic properties of essential oils to the individual patient by biological means. This was a physical application of the concept of terrain in line with Pasteur's original concept. Valnet developed and popularised aromatherapy, a term coined by the industrial chemist and perfumer René-Maurice Gattefossé (1881–1950). Ludo Chardenon born 1915 in the Gard where I taught English. Collecting his own plants in the wild, he sold them in local markets. He effectively used plants to modify the terrain.[5] The life and works of Maurice Mességué, herbalist and local politician, (1921–2017) made him famous, and rich. Marie-Antoinette Mulot (1919–1999), born and died in the Camargues, trained at the Faculty of Pharmacy at Montpellier and was in the last cohort of *herboristes diplomées*.

In 1960 German herbalist and physician Rudolf Fritz Weiss (1895–1991) published *Lehrbuch der Phytotherapie* (English: *Herbal Medicine*), which became the definitive German textbook on the topic. Both Leclerc's and Weiss's approaches shared a strong focus on clinical evidence.[6]

Good to finish a discussion on different cultural contributions to Western Herbal Medicine with a quote from Louis Pasteur:

> Science knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity.[7]

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[2] When will our era cease to be called 'modern'?

[3] See Lynn Payer who studies English, French and German styles in Payer L *Medicine & Culture* London 1989

[4] Leclerc, H *Les Epices* Masson Paris 1929

[5] As put forward in NIMH *Herbal Exchanges* Brice-Ytsma & Watkins Eds 2014, pp 113–114

[6] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudolf-Fritz-Weiss

[7] quoted in Maurice B. Strauss Familiar Medical Quotations (1968) Pasteur's toast at banquet of the International Congress of Sericulture, Milan, 1876)