

Where the Wild Things are

by Gaynor Sanders MARH



Gaynor Sanders' first homeopathic experience was treatment for unexplained infertility. Three children later she began to study it at the College of Homeopathy and CHE and to practise in 2004. Her background is in education and her interests include theology, growing vegetables, bird watching and cycling – all pursued within earshot of the M25.

When I was a child, my parents had a rather bitter joke that you could always recognise one of my father's photographs by the trademark dustbin which crept into every would-be charming domestic shot – and that was in leafy Surrey.

When as an adult I moved to Essex, I seemed to have carried this rather disturbing internal viewfinder with me, and every heron fishing among tin cans and polystyrene waste, kingfishers perched on concrete and rusty metal, and nightingales singing in leafy bushes which winter nakedness revealed to be festooned with plastic bags of liquefying dog poo!

So I watched with interest 'Wild places of Essex' (in BBC2's *Natural World* series), Robert MacFarlane's photographic essay / poem / meditation on where the real 'wild' is to be found – with wry acknowledgement of the inevitable 'Try Basildon at chucking out time on a Friday night!' response – and gasped in recognition both at the actual locations shown and also at the ideas and connections explored in the commentary. In its non-judgemental yet sharply analytical observations it reminded me of the ideals of the philosophy and practice of homeopathy.

The human and wild nature juxtaposition

I once lamented to my friend, brought up in rural Suffolk, that every lovely and wild thing we saw as we explored our corner of Essex and beyond seemed to be interspersed, even intimately involved, with ugliness, dereliction and the detritus of industry, pollution and littering, and was somewhat shocked by her response: 'I rather like it'. I knew that she would never drop litter or deliberately cause pollution, but she wasted no energy on judging or deploring things she could

do nothing to change, and simply accepted the wild as she found it to be, deriving stimulation, even excitement from the juxtaposing of every kind of creativity and production (human or natural) that the modern world presented.

MacFarlane comments that the wild as he has found it in Essex is 'hard and makes you think'. He points out: the echoes between garish graffiti on the concrete sea wall and the lichens in 'spray paint orange' which also daub them; the similarities in the curves and spikes of coils of barbed wire and those of brambles; the turning, stretching flocks of migratory birds drifting like industrial smoke before the container ships and warehouses of the coast; the gorgeous russet colours of the seals deriving from the ferrous oxide (rust) of the London clay they wallow in. Words like 'echoes' and 'similarities' trigger more thoughts of homeopathy.

I was reminded of the triangular patterns of the pylons, which range over so much of the county, matched in inverted form by the skeletons of umbelliferous plants at their feet, including the remedy 'weeds' Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) and Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).

Remedies wild and man-made

Hemlock is one of the few of the vast family of Umbelliferae which I have learned to identify with confidence. I recognise it by the characteristic purple splotchy streaks which stain its stems in summer and which, according to an old English legend, are there 'in sympathy with the mark put on Cain's forehead after he killed his brother Abel'. Cain's chilling response to God's enquiry about Abel's whereabouts, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (*Genesis* chapter 4 v9) seems to epitomise the tendency to 'emotional indifference and hardness' found in the homeopathic picture of *Conium*, which is one of the less attractive traits of advancing old age for which *Conium* is such a useful remedy. The dry, hollow, brittle limbs of the dying plant echo the gradually increasing rigidity, stiffness and fragility of old age and provide pointers to some of its many applications as a remedy with its keynotes of stony hardness or induration and 'ascending paralysis'. (The philosopher Socrates was famously put to death by the administration of this poison and is said to have been able to observe its paralysing effects on his body before it reached his mind.) Frans Vermeulen heads his account of *Conium* (in *Prisma*, 2004) with a quotation from Aristophanes: 'The road through the hemlock to Hades is cold and wintry, and soon the legs become rigid', and my mind's eye pictures Essex pylons against a January sky.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is another common weed of verges and wasteland. Its closely packed head of many florets is often white, but in my area is helpfully pinkish which by my own rather approximate 'doctrine of signatures'



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reminds me of this hardy, humble, somewhat smelly plant's dramatic 'blood' line! It is a remedy for haemorrhages of all sorts, but mainly bright red. This associates it with both love and war. Achilles used it to treat wounded soldiers at the siege of Troy, hence its Latin name. It can treat excessive bleeding in menses or childbirth and Melissa Assilem suggests it may have been an essential part of a midwifery kit in times immemorial! In *Women ripening through the Menopause* (2003) she mentions Yarrow as one of six identifiable plant pollens found in a Neanderthal cave site in Kurdistan. Its deeply indented foliage (*millefolium* means 'a thousand leaves') is as

finely branched as blood capillaries and reminds again of its affinity to the venous system.

Nature finds a way

Words like 'echoes' and 'similarities' trigger more thoughts of homeopathy

Homeopathy uses remedies from every 'kingdom' of nature: vegetable, animal and mineral and also from the 'creative' work of humanity – chemical, technological, artificial. Three examples of the latter group come to mind: *Hepar sulphuris*, *Folliculinum* and *Berlin wall*.

Hepar sulph is a liver brown blob of chemical impurity which has to be stored in closed containers because of its extreme sensitivity to air, heat and moisture; in other words, to almost everything! See it crouching there under the bell jar, pulsating with suppressed suppuration, consumed with the impulse to slash and burn. Which of us hasn't been there – either in teenage years or in dealing with teenagers – driven to violent anger and rudeness in reaction to pain; well, to almost everything really.

After an account of all the wonderfully creative ways the remedy *Folliculinum* can be used, Melissa Assilem comments:

This is one of the reasons why I love homeopathy so much: because something with all the sinister possibilities of synthetic oestrogen can be turned around and used in such a powerful way ... We can use it to reconnect, retune ourselves ... (2003)

And *Berlin wall*? I have found it extremely difficult to work out what to say about this particular 'new' remedy, although I feel strongly that it fits into what I am trying to say in general. Perhaps my hesitation is because part of me wonders whether it is valid to claim that a lump of concrete can be potentised as a remedy because of its historical and political and geographical associations – have I met my inner wall of suspended disbelief? Or perhaps I find myself lost for words and unable to express my ideas because of the very keynotes of the remedy itself, including separation, perfectionism coupled with deep, unspoken, unaccessed grief – impenetrability all round! Kees Dam (2006) describes *Berlin wall* as:

... the materialised (man-made) concept in the outer world of the inner separating, dividing, walling off (survival) mechanism present in most western (wo)men ...

What a potentially potent remedy for 'susceptible' types in our modern world, both the 'walled off, closed and barbed' types (compare >



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➤ *Natrum muriaticum*, *Sepia* and *Aurum*) and also those who cannot find and observe borders or be contained (compare *Phosphorus*, *Staphysagria* and *Ignatia*).

Connections to the wild

It seems to me there is a tremendous grace (in at least two senses of the word) and flexibility about our healing art (and craft and science) that it can utilise everything; even, maybe especially, the very things which threaten and inhibit our health and growth and well-being to promote healing. Like wild nature, it adapts, it bides its time and creeps back through the cracks in the metaphorical pavements of our human predicament in micro-cosmic glory. As above so below.

I think there is also a connection between the kind of observation made in the *Natural World* programme and our homeopathic methods of case-taking and analysis. The ideal of paying attention without judging, making connections, comparing, contrasting and differentiating, noticing patterns and themes, is something we strive for continually and something from

which we derive real learning and pleasure – even joy. It is right that we long to help those who come to us and also right that we humbly and realistically accept our own and their limitations, and work within them towards a shift which may be quite different from or beyond what we or they envisage.

As an Essex dweller, I've become wearily accustomed to

The signs of humans are everywhere

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being the butt of the county culture inspired jokes; so it was great to see something which celebrated Essex beauty, complexity, subtlety and wildness. As homeopaths many of us are becoming wearily accustomed to being mocked and maligned. May we continue to exercise the resilience, adaptability, integrity and grit (*Silica?*) of the true wild!

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