

Tarentula hispanica, *Lycosa tarantula* the Wolf Spider by Greg Bedayn

History of the spider

In southern Italy during the 16th century Paracelsus and his contemporaries were moving medical wisdom from exorcisms, witchcraft, madness, diabolic possession, and chastisements of the ill to the belief that illness was provoked by natural causes. Although homœopathy with its genetic-progression theory of the origins of disease had not yet been brought into vogue by Hahnemann, the dawn of the new age of medicine had begun. The populations were beginning to recognize the origins of disease as being something other than black magic. They were beginning to recognize the materialistic side of the transmission of disease.

In southern Italy, large numbers of the 'Wolf Spider' (so named because of its two large fangs, viscous appearance, and long legs which enabled it to scurry rapidly in pursuit of its prey), would annually migrate through a town named Tarantum and so the spider became named the 'Tarentula'. This arachnid was common to Mediterranean countries with a dry and sunny climate (Spain, Greece, Southern France, Tunisia, etc.).

The bite of the Tarentula is very painful but less than that of the common scorpion. Since antiquity, however, the injurious effects of its sting have been widely chronicled and it was claimed that it was capable of producing a disorder which came to be known as 'Tarantulism' or 'Tarantism'. There is scepticism by the allopaths as to the true pathogenesis of this infamous arachnid bite. Whether *Lycosa* actually envenomates its victims or instead throws them into hysterical terror (or both) is to this day a controversial (allopathic) medical question. Is it possible that the psychogenic factor responsible for the seizures of 'dancing mania' or tarantism, is based on fear and loathing and is not from envenomation? The modern allopathic literature is full of references to the old world view of the symptomatology of *Lycosa* but they report the significance of the Wolf Spider envenomation as 'innocuous', and that Tarantism never truly existed.

It is curious to examine the extensive literature of medical descriptions of cases of Tarantism which were recorded between the 15th and 19th centuries. Various types of Tarantism were identified: the sporadic and the epidemic (particularly prevalent in the Spring); the acute and the chronic (with relapses at the return of warm weather), etc. The victim, who was often stung in the neck during the night or during the summer afternoon siesta, felt great pain, followed by a sensation of acute melancholy, anguish, and depression with premonitions of death. These symptoms were either accompanied with, or followed by, an irresistible urge to dance with frenetic agitation. This convul-

sive condition, which was impossible to control, could be suppressed and cured only by music with a fast and strong rhythmic beat, performed on appropriate instruments, generally with a shrill timbre. The music was best when closely related to the particular temperament of the victim. He would call out to the performers with desperate instructive cries while dancing indefatigably for hours or even days on end (three days non-stop seems to be the commonly recorded limit), until he was completely exhausted. During the enforced pauses he was covered with blankets and given a strong broth with wine which caused him to perspire. (The same treatment was administered to the unfortunate musicians who followed the dance until they, too, dropped with exhaustion.) Eventually a cure was achieved, but only after having sweated out all the toxins of the spiders venom.

The descriptions of Tarantism vary, certain doctors of the period write of vomiting and fainting, raving, lasciviousness, jaundice, and hydropsy. It was often enough for a young adult (interestingly note that children were never reported as being afflicted) to dash out into the street shouting and leaping during the siesta time or the early hours of the night for the symptoms of Tarantism to be recognized. He was promptly joined by veterans of the malady who felt a resurgence of the infectious urge to dance with frenzy to the rhythm played by a few musicians hastily called together by the neighbours in whom there was a deeply rooted fear that the victim was doomed to death without the swift intervention of music. The early medical authorities are in agreement on the curative effect of the music therapy, or 'Iatrophony' provided it was performed as soon as the attack started to the rhythm which came to be known as the Tarentella, and in sufficient doses. A defective performance or an error on the part of the musicians merely aggravated the condition, and a dose of insufficient duration brought about a relapse. The psychoneurotic nature of the many recorded cases of Tarantism seems possible, as does the contagion by hysterical imitation. It is interesting to note that the homeopathic preparation of the toxin is also used in treating the patient who imagines himself bitten.

In many parts of Europe there were veritable epidemics of convulsive dancing, for example at Aix-la-Chapelle in the 14th century where manifestations of maniacal dancing of enormous proportions occurred involving hundreds of men and women. The epidemic spread to Cologne, Metz and other towns in Germany. The outbreak became so serious that the Church was obliged to resort to the remedy of public exorcisms to drive out the devil and put a halt to the spread of the diabolic dance which, as late as the 17th century, was still called the *Lascivia Chorea* in German speaking countries. Even before the 10th century this kind of wild dancing was known in Italy. In the south it was attributed to the sting of the Tarentula. Towards the end of the 15th century it began to be thought possible that this dance was capable of actually curing a victim of the effects of the hypothetical poison of the Tarentula. The dance was stimulated by certain types of music, and both the dance and the music of the Taranto region came to be known as the 'Tarentella'. It was, at first, a cure for Tarantism and later developed into a dance of the upper class, the strutting men in their powdered wigs and cod pieces, the women in masochistic corsets and caked rouge. The participants would get all gussied up and cut-a-rug together. Their dance was accompanied by fast music with a strong beat and a faint frenzied motion to it, similar to Tarantism symptoms.

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The victims dancing for hours on end, succeeded in producing a final catharsis followed by the healing of the attack of Tarantism. Many of the victims of the affliction manifested a distinct tendency towards exhibitionism, bedecked with garlands of rushes and coronets of vine-leaves, and more or less naked, they behaved with frenzied abandon, making obscene gestures and reproductive-like undulations improvised by a highly stimulated subconscious completely liberated from all inhibitions. The current and popular allopathic opinion feels that the phenomena of Tarantism and its 'attendant epidemics' were no more than outbreaks of a collective neurosis with hysterical reactions of revolt against the church inspired repression of libido.

The Essence

Perpetual restless motion linked with boundless anxious energy. A person becomes very restless when bitten by the spider; wild dancing gives relief. The bite is not fatal, but affects the nervous system with restlessness. The bite of the Tarantula brings actual restlessness and anxiety plus a state of hysteria. The *Tarentula* patient can have an over stimulated nervous system that is compelled to diffuse energy. It is as if there is an excess of neurotransmitters, a chemical state. They feel the build up of energy and feel that they must keep moving and busy to release the extra pressure of energy inside. Their nervous system is wound up and tense, yet when relieved is only temporarily palliated, returning again with the next stress. The venom hyper-accelerates the nervous system.

Dr Vikki Menear's case

A woman belonged to three different bay swim clubs at once and would make daily loops between them, swimming in the cold bay at each club until that group was tired, then on to the next, etc. She would finally return home to an active job. This woman also kept a group of televisions next to each other in a room at home. She would turn on as many different aerobic fitness programmes as she could find each morning and if one got slow or went to a commercial, she would shift her attention to one of the others. She only slept 1-2 hours per night. She bicycled everywhere. She went from anorexia to bulimia. The remedy slowed her down which was OK with her because she was suffering so badly. She became much less hurried and her sleep was greatly improved.

Tarentula can be effective in chorea or epilepsy. Twitching, jerking, chorea. Movements range from fast-angular-wild, to slow-rhythmic-choreiform. This is a big epilepsy remedy. They can show very fast reflexes. They can become obsessed with things like video arcades and pin-ball games, activities that drain the energy. Certain jobs attract them, like being an air traffic controller, switchboard operators, working on the floor of the stock exchange, working in day-care centres, etc. These type of jobs can put a person into a *Tarentula* state. Their nervous system can also be greatly aggravated by touch and by the Rastafarian colours of black, red, and green (they are also the only listing under Mind: Colour, charmed by blue, green red).

Hurry

Tarentula hispania is the most hurried remedy in our materia medica. They feel compelled to move constantly and the lower extremities are often the most restless. Restlessness continues at

night. Mind: Restlessness, bed, tossing about in (3). In the morning, the bed looks like a battle zone, sheets twisted into knots, pillows strewn on the floor, he awakes upside down in bed.

They will often have Anxiety (2), with their restlessness. On the physical level, this is commonly felt in the stomach or heart. Stomach: Anxiety (*Tarentula* is the only 3). Chest: Anxiety, Heart, region of (2). They may say they are anxious because they are 'afraid things will not get done' in spite of their hyper-activity, or they may fear 'some calamity will happen' and they feel it in their stomach. It is an irrational fear. The symptoms are accompanied by a burning sensation. Differential Diagnosis with *Arsenicum*. Both are chilly (2), restless (3), and anxious (2). The difference is *Tarentula* restlessness is from over stimulation of the nervous system. In *Arsenicum*, the anxiety comes from inner insecurity and is an emotional, not physical state. *Arsenicum* holds their anxiety in and tries to control it. They are intense and demanding. With *Tarentula* they talk very fast and answer quickly. You feel their hurriedness and their pressure in how they interact with you. *Arsenicum* can be very intense and demanding and dependent as they complain of their fears-insecurities-anxieties. But with *Tarentula* they are forceful and hurried.

Hurried (3). They are annoyed if people are going slowly in front of them. They walk very quickly (would rather run than walk). Their activity is always very fast and they will yell ahead to people on the sidewalk who are slowing them down to clear way; (a great remedy for 99% of NYC cabbies...). They will walk faster and faster and often will start to run out of their restless compulsion. Vikki Menear's case: A mother's kids slowed her down because she used to run or bike everywhere. As soon as the children were old enough to bicycle, she bought them bikes so that they could keep up with her. Walking was too slow. Mind: Hurry, everybody must (3). Imagine the hurry-scurry in a nest of Tarantulas.

Industrious

Industrious (3). The industriousness comes from the need to diffuse all the energy in their bodies, often leading them to work at two or three active jobs a day. They only need three or four hours sleep. They are very effective and highly productive in their work. *Nux vomica* is effective and may work twelve hours a day, but they push themselves to do that with the goal of being promoted or rewarded. The competition is the goal for *Nux vomica*. In *Tarentula* patients the work is the goal. *Nux vomica* pushes themselves because they want to get to the top, they are driven by the sweet carrot of competition, *Tarentula* is driven by their own energy. They may end up at the top but the process is different. They do get satisfaction from their success, but in *Nux*, the success is the goal.

Music Ameliorates. (4) (MacRepertory: Complete Repertory.) They are commonly relieved by rhythmical music or can be aggravated by music if it is strong and does not meet their mood. They will dance like wild-men 'Wild dancing' - Kent, fast frenzied vigorous, yet oddly, with graceful and flowing movements.

Threatening (3) (*Tarentula* is the only 3). Acute, quick (*Hep., Stram., Tarent.*) Can be very sharp tongued (*Sep., Lach.*) Can be very angry if contradicted. Mind: Anger, from contradiction (1). They can unload on you and can become 'ballistic' in

confrontation. This sharp attack can be quite aggressive, though not like *Stramonium*, who goes towards violence. They have such an intensity and are verbally so capable that it backs you up a bit when they get upset at you. In the end stage they can move from threats to desire to kill with tearing of clothes, Mind: Destructiveness, of clothes (the only three). Banging of head and other destructive states.

Cunning (added rubric). They know how to get what they want and how to work the system. Big time manipulators on an essence level. Lying, deception. Mind: Kleptomania (1), feigning sick (2). Mischievous (2). Vikki Mencar tells of one *Tarentula* patient that she always tells she has exactly an hour before her next appointment arrives, yet the patient always is able to squeeze an additional 30 minutes out of her. Now Vikki just schedules it in instead of producing the required formidable resistance. *Tarentula* patients will often magnify their symptoms for secondary gain (feigns sickness, etc.)

Hysteria (3). 'There is hysterical hyperaesthesia: The least excitement irritates, followed by languid sadness' – Clarke. The dance is performed by those bitten and those who imagine themselves bitten. It can be hysteria or just a sensitivity as in dislike of contradiction. Imagines that they have been insulted. Ailments from disappointed love, grief. This may be causation. Sankaran offers an interesting interpretation of the desire for music, dancing, and colour, together with deceitfulness and cunning, as an idiosyncratic need to attract sexual attention based on the essence of *Tarentula* being that of ailments from unrequited love (only remedy listed in MacRepertory: the Complete Repertory) This leads the patient to act as if he was fixed in a state of unrequited love even though this is not so objectively. The *Tarentula* patient can exhibit erotic hysteria and mania which is very aggressive sexually. Lascivious hysteria (*Lascivia Chorea*). Nymphomania (2). Coition can aggravate (2). Can progress to shameless behaviour (2), exposes the person (*Hyoscyamus*.) They have much sensitivity everywhere in the nervous system, even the genitalia. They desire sex, even rough sex. They expect sex to make them feel better, but it makes them worse; yet they still want more. They can be very possessive in relationships to violence, and the desire to strike, and to kill with superhuman strength and endurance. (An interesting note is the spider weaves elaborate webs to trap its victims. Before the rainy season they migrate, nesting in the ground in small holes lined with a web. The spider sits and waits for its prey to fall asleep or become still, then it attacks with sudden and violent energy only to then immediately retreat back into its underground sanctuary, the victim often sees nothing.)

Sympathetic (addition) worse seeing others in trouble. Dr. Mencar tells of a case where a *Tarentula* patient populated her home with street people and the homeless who eventually destroyed it. This woman was thrown into turmoil whenever she was posed with the prospect of leaving a homeless person on the street or bringing him/her home with her. She was also very manipulative and destructive. She told Vikki one day 'Nothing I have told you has been true'. There is a general lack of boundaries in the *Tarentula* patient. In this woman, her interest was in schizophrenics.

Physical generals and organ systems

Nerves irritated. The physical system is over stimulated so there is hyperaesthesia of the skin, eyes (patients will complain of being

photo phobic) and of genitals. Fingertips sensitive or have needle-like sensation in the fingertips. (*Phosphorus* has numbness of just the fingertips). Sense of formication in the skin anywhere. Worse touch. Mind: Anger, touched, when (the only 3). Mind: Touched, aversion to being; (3). Better rubbing (2). Burning pains (2). Ulcer like pains in stomach, uterus, rectum, bladder. Also burning in palms and soles. Right sided chorea. Right eye is dilated. This may occur during chorea. Chilly, cold-damp aggravates. Usually very thin. Emaciated. Periodical and paroxysmal ailments. People bitten by the spider have a return of symptoms every year at the same time (with decreasing violence). Aggravations occur in the autumn. Profound action on the heart. A common remedy for angina and mitral valve disease. Violent palpitations associated with anxiety. The patients relentless activity may wear out the heart muscle. Fibroids, testicular tumours, much itching of the vulva and perineum which is worse when menses ends. Sensitivity and burning pains in uterus. Intense sexual drive in both sexes. Cystitis with burning pains. Sugar in urine (3), so diabetes may respond to *Tarentula*. Prefers strong tastes, spicy, salty, also desires raw food (overlapping *Phosphorus*.) Skin can be dark red or purplish colour. Boils, carbuncles etc. This remedy can effect varied and profound actions on every organ system in the body and is similar to *Arsenicum* in its symptomatology and modalities on the physical level. Great emaciation.

Comparative materia medica

Arsenicum: Chilly, emaciated, anxious, hurried, Right-sided. They are intense but it's from a dependence and insecurity. They are more controlled.

Iodum: Also has tremendous energy and is restless. He feels the need to move. Can be exhausted by their activity. There is an inner restlessness and if that's suppressed they get in a rage. On a physical level, *Iodum* is hot and has a ravenous appetite though they emaciate. Cause can be disappointed love or shock. *Iod.* is not hyper sexual.

Lilium tigrinum: Quite hurried. Very aggressive sexually. It is the suppression of their intense sexuality, which they are not very comfortable with, that leads to a build-up of anger rage, and hurriedness. They can be very hateful, very suspicious people. They can produce a lot during the day, they can talk fast, they walk fast. They can be very edgy. The 'Bitch from Hell'. *Tarentula*'s are intense, but their manipulative nature gives them the capacity to engage you in a more easygoing (albeit potentially deceptive) way. *Lilium tigrinum*. doesn't put on any airs. They are better for sex. Polarity of expressing sexuality or anger. In *Tarentula* you can see both. In the office, *Tarentula* is easier to be with. Even though they are in a hurry, they are manipulative and cunning enough not to say something to offend and insult you directly.

Nux vomica: Intense. Workaholic, driven by idea of competitiveness., success, productivity. Drinks coffee to feel what *Tarentula* naturally has; to wind them up to go out and slay dragons.

Phosphorus: Chilly or warm. Sensitive nervous system. *Phosphorus* is more distractible and more reactive and influenced by external events. *Tarentula* is more driven from the inside.

Sulphuric acid is hurried, impatient, irritable with an underlying feeling of weakness and-or exhaustion. *Tarentula* patients feel that hurry inside.

Thuja. Comes up in a lot of the hurried rubrics as a (2). Vikki has never seen the two remedies go back and forth (as is *Phosphorus* or *Tarentula*). *Thuja* is also deceptive but from a different place: to hide shame or who they are. It's a more harmless manipulation. *Tarentula* is after what they want.

Veratrum album. Can be overactive, more in the mind than the nervous system. They will stand on the corner raving about God and their own importance. They are less efficient with the energy of their physical body. They are not effective like *Tarentula*.

The *Tarentula* patient is often a difficult case to manage. Imagine trying to gently hold the restless spider on your palm. Antidoted, disrupted, and lost cases are common under this remedy. Vikki tells of a patient with mild cerebral palsy and mild choreic activity of right hand. his chief complaint was ulcer pain. He was working two jobs and only sleeping 2 or 3 hours a night, was chilly, intense, and got upset if people didn't work fast enough. Vikki told him he would relax with the remedy but that he may not have that intense compelling energy that allowed him to work two jobs. He refused to take the remedy. His dream depended on his being able to buy a house. In our society, an abundance of energy is commonly desirable even in the face of pathology.

Acknowledgements

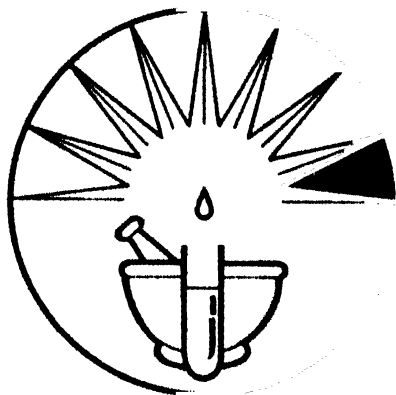
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Hahnemann, Organon 6th edition § 269

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