Carbon: Organic and Hydrocarbon Remedies in Homeopathy

By Roger Morrison, MD

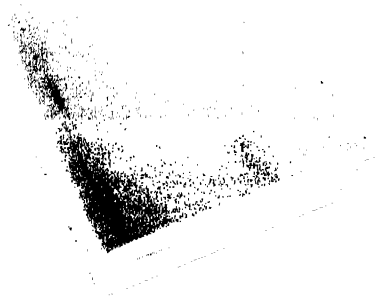
Hahnemann Clinic Publishing. Grass Valley, California 2006.
Hardbound. 837 pages. ISBN: 0-963-5368-4-2. $108, plus shipping.

Reviewed by George Guess, MD, DHt

An immense undertaking, *Carbon*, represents five years of painstaking labor spent detailing and categorizing 182 organic and hydrocarbon remedies. In his usual concise, thorough and precise style, Dr. Morrison provides us both a complete rendering of the materia medica of these remedies as well as a fascinating synthesis of the essential characteristics of the organics in general and of the various organic groups – aliphatics, amines, terpenes, aromatics, sugars, etc.

This impressive work has something for everyone, whether or not in agreement with the contemporary scheme of categorizing remedies in groups, having identified those characteristics common to several remedies within the group. Within the descriptions of each remedy, when available, are all of the following elements – standard materia medica information, proving data, and conjectural (by the author's own admission; he advises clinical confirmation before one accepts his synthesized profiles as accurate) mental-emotional profiles synthesized from the author's understanding of the homeopathic meaning of the various chemical moieties constituting the remedy. Additionally, the author provides very thorough descriptions of the chemistry and industrial, agricultural, medicinal, etc. uses of each substance.

The overarching themes Dr. Morrison provides for the carbon-based remedies in general will, I believe, prove very helpful for prescribers. Such themes are derived not from fancied properties derived from specific chemical moieties, but from painstaking scrutiny of pages and pages of materia medica and clinical case notes. From such profound study certain apparent themes emerge. Such themes can then provide an initial reference point to prescribers when analyzing a case. The danger of such themes, so often criticized, lies in applying them for exclusionary purposes; that is, to eliminate a remedy from consideration.



Themes, by their nature, bear similarity with allopathically derived treatment protocols in that they are the product of phenomenological generalizations; they speak only for the group and not so precisely for the specific individual or remedy, whose complexity and potential for limitless variability of expression confounds prediction. Thus, themes are rightly used to suggest a class or range of remedies which must then be winnowed down to one well-chosen remedy based upon sound materia medica, when available. Excluding a remedy from consideration because the patient's overall presentation does not seem to coincide with the themes of a group of remedies is a strategy fraught with peril.

Here then are, in skeletal form, the major and minor themes of hydrocarbon remedies as defined by Dr. Morrison:

Major Themes of the Hydrocarbons

Confusion
Identity (loss of, blandness, invisibility)
Value (focus on materialism, poverty, etc.)
Mental Weakness
Sensation of Sinking
Isolation
Fire and Explosion
Passivity and Motivation
The Past

Minor Themes

Ghosts
Suffocation and Constriction
Aggression
Hurry
Euphoria
Shock
Floating
Penetrating
Jumping
Sexuality
Childishness

I urge the reader to obtain his own copy of this invaluable book to familiarize himself with characteristics of each of these themes.

There are myriad clinical case histories contained in this tome, most of which are very well developed and fully illustrate both hydrocarbon themes and the specific characteristics of the remedies.

Dr. Morrison is nothing if not thorough, and the reader will find in this volume several very small remedies, many lacking any proving and having a paucity of symptoms; e.g., *Alumina acetica, Anilinum sulphuricum, Antimonium natrum lacticum, Fuligno ligni,* etc. One doubts such remedies will ever have much utility; still the author is to be commended for his diligence and perseverance.

Several helpful appendices end this book, among them are a brief primer on organic chemistry to facilitate the reader's comprehension of chemical terms used in the text; a listing of organic compounds that merit provings in the author's opinion; a brief explanation of how chemical structure might correlate with miasms; and, lastly, a few guidelines about case analysis.

The volume is indexed and bound attractively.

Carbon is an impressive work, a text that fills a huge gap in our understanding of the materia medica of these basic, critical building blocks of nature. As such, many of the remedies contained in this book should (and some already do) prove essential additions to our homeopathic armamentarium. Every homeopath should read it.

In a future issue of this journal look for a reprinting of two materia medica chapters from *Carbon*, courtesy of the author.

About the Reviewer: George Guess, MD, DHt, practices homeopathy in Charlottesville, Virginia. His is editor of the American Journal of Homeopathic Medicine and Vice-President of the American Board of Homeotherapeutics.

Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts: China, Healing and the West to 1848

By Linda. L. Barnes

Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass.
458 pp., include. Notes, Bibliography, and Index.

Reviewed by Dick Moskowitz, MD, DHt

The author of this book is an Associate Professor in the Departments of Family Medicine and Pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine, which began as a homeopathic school and produced many fine classical prescribers and leaders in the field until, like most of its counterparts, it caved in to the Flexner Report and converted to allopathic medicine in the years after World War I. Whether or not Professor Barnes was aware of this history, I could not help but be charmed by the fact that she wrote to the *American Journal of Homeopathic Medicine* to solicit a review on behalf of our readership, whose dwindling numbers certainly rule out any commercial motives on her part.

I may fitly begin with the following extract from the press release by Harvard University Press:

"When did the West discover Chinese healing traditions? Linda Barnes leads us back to the earliest known encounters in the thirteenth century [and] traces the story through the mid-nineteenth century in Europe and the United States.

"How did Westerners make sense of unfamiliar concepts and practices of healing? [Prof. Barnes] has unearthed examples of Western missionaries, merchants, diplomats, and physicians encountering and interpreting both Chinese people and their healing practices, and adopting their own versions of [them].

"A medical anthropologist with a degree in comparative religion, Barnes illuminates the way in which [preconceived notions] of medicine, religion, race, and the body informed Western understanding of the Chinese and their healing traditions. The book brings together issues in medicine, religion, and race [in the] story of *the precursors of today's practitioners*

and researchers in complementary and alternative medicine [italics mine: R.M.]. At the same time, it is a social history of cross-cultural exchange."

The italicized portion may perhaps explain why Professor Barnes thought a homeopathic audience might be particularly receptive to her book, although I'm not at all sure how closely these generous sentiments may tally with the leisure interests of most practicing homeopaths today. She does mention homeopathy in a couple of places, but only very briefly, by way of explaining the cultural and historical setting in nineteenth-century America: in that sense her book is indeed a test case of cultural exchange.

There is much to admire and even more to savor in this book. Her erudition is vast, her scholarship meticulous and impeccable, and the scholarly apparatus that she has assembled to document it is truly formidable. The footnotes alone fill 12 pages, and are often detailed and illuminating, while the extensive bibliography runs to 62 more. Most of the entries are in English, with quite a few in French, and a much smaller number in Latin and other European languages. None are in Chinese or Japanese, a fact which suggests limited command of the original languages, but this must not be held against her, since her purpose is to give an authoritative account not of Chinese medicine or culture *per se,* but only of Westerners' interpretations and misinterpretations thereof, especially the latter, based on common preconceptions and prejudices, chiefly in medicine, but also to a large extent in religion and folklore, as the title suggests.

It is true that further exegesis of the classical texts, such as the *Nei Jing,* the so-called "Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine," might have helped readers with no knowledge of Chinese to distinguish what acupuncturists were actually being taught, for example, from what their Western observers saw or thought or imagined they saw. But this is a minor quibble.

By far the most entertaining and informative part of her book is the travelogue of Western visitors to China over a period of five centuries, from the merchant Marco Polo and the earliest Catholic missionaries in the medieval period to the scholarly dedication of a small but growing number of Sinophiles, both physicians and diplomats, who similarly devoted much of their lives to attempting to decipher the alien world of Oriental medicine and religion that had captivated them. What they saw and how they often and in a sense inevitably misinterpreted it according to their own preformed mythologies and conceptual categories is the real core of the book, is elaborated in rich and ample detail, and can be read with profit and pleasure by any reasonably curious and intelligent reader.

From the separate embassies of Franciscan friars Giovanni Carpini, William of Rubruquis, and Odoric di Pordenone to the court of the Great Khans of the mid- to late-thirteenth century, we get a fascinating first glimpse of Chinese medicine and culture through the equally potent filtering of Christian missionary zeal, on the one hand, and the Mongol conquest on the other. Friar William, for example, wrote from his own direct observation:

"Their physicians know a great deal about herbs, and diagnose very cleverly from the pulse; on the other hand, they do not use urinals or know anything about urine: I saw this myself."

Their writings were richly supplemented by the narrative of Marco Polo, son of an Italian merchant, who may or may not have traveled through Kublai Khan's vast domains, as he claimed, but nevertheless fashioned from the actual journeys of his father and uncle a classic tale of adventure that made him justly famous then and now.

With the voyages of Columbus, Magellan, and others in the age of exploration to America and the Far East, a similar mix of sailors, merchants, and both Catholic and Protestant missionaries established regular contacts with Chinese officials, and became fascinated with many aspects of Chinese culture, including the abiding influence of the Confucian classics, observed medical practices, wrote learned treatises on Chinese medicinal plants, and also succeeded in converting a number of Orientals to Christianity. As in the medieval period, their collective attitude towards Chinese medicine ran the whole gamut from sincere or grudging admiration to dismissive contempt.

All of these sources, both narrative and critical, are cited and often quoted in rich, informative, and often fascinating detail. Her account of ginseng, for example, including how its fundamental importance in Chinese medicine facilitated the pioneers' discovery of the even more potent American variety, which various Plains Indian tribes had been using for centuries, and which in turn came to be preferred by the Chinese themselves, furnishes a classic example of the kind of give-and-take that the book is ultimately about.

What did not work as well for me was Prof. Barnes's valiant attempt to provide a relevant theoretical schema for the process of such two-way exchanges, using what I presume to be the currently fashionable categories of cultural anthropology. It is here that she descends all too frequently for my taste into technical jargon that will be more or less unintelligible to anyone without an advanced degree in her

field, and at best results in turgid, clumsy academic prose that is difficult to plow through and will probably scare off many readers seeking a livelier and more user-friendly narrative. Here is a typical example from her Introduction:

"One can simultaneously view a phenomenon in multiple ways, like one can see the drawing of a goblet as two faces staring at each other. I have accordingly composed this study to be read from different perspectives. The first focuses on the *racializing* of the Chinese in the context of emerging Western categories of what I am calling humankinds. The second focuses on how those grounded in Christian traditions engaged in a process we might call the *religionizing* of the Chinese. The third addresses the interaction between traditions of healing, with attention to how Western observers viewed and reported on Chinese traditions. This perspective includes the *medicalizing* of the Chinese."

Here's another, from her summary Conclusion, which similarly uses needlessly cumbersome verbiage to embellish a more or less obvious truism and make it seem bold and startling:

"I have argued that healing traditions provide a window onto how understanding of humankinds, religion, medicine, and healing intersect over time, and that this intersection is in turn expressiveof broader cultural trends. Normative views of humanness, for example, enabled one generation of Westerners to define the Chinese as white and another to define them as yellow, with attributions of monstrosity mapped at the margins. The early presence of polarized meanings – of Mongol hordes and images of disease in the social body, on the one hand, and of paragons of civilization on the other – stands out as a forerunner of anti-Chinese rhetoric in tension with stereotypes of model minorities. In tracking the genealogies of these meanings, we see where we have come from."

Although what may well be my own learning disabilities used up an unconscionably long time in reading and reviewing it, Professor Barnes's book offers a rich and often delightful compendium of Western views on China and the Chinese over a span of six centuries, as well as much food for thought on how cultures perceive and ultimately influence one another through their own preconceived mythologies. It is thus both more and less than a technical history of Chinese medicine that would be of much clinical use to a Western practitioner. It should be read and enjoyed by all with an interest in Chinese culture, as seen through Western eyes and often reshaped by the myths that limited and distorted what was visible to them.

About the Reviewer: Richard Moskowitz, M.D. practices classical homeopathy in Watertown, Massachusetts (Boston area). He is on the editorial staff of the JAIH; he previously served as President of the N.C.H. and is currently on the faculty of the N.C.H. Summer School. He is the author of the books "Homeopathic Medicines for Pregnancy and Childbirth" and "Resonance:The Homeopathic Point of View." AJH