A Chymical Narrative: The Strange and Wonderful Elixir
Etymology:
e·lix·ir

1. Pharmacology. a sweetened, aromatic solution of alcohol and water containing, or used as a vehicle for, medicinal substances.
2. Also called elixir of life. an alchemic preparation formerly believed to be capable of prolonging life.
3. an alchemic preparation formerly believed to be capable of transmuting base metals into gold.
4. the quintessence or absolute embodiment of anything.
5. a panacea; cure-all; sovereign remedy.

1266, from M.L. elixir "philosopher's stone," believed by alchemists to transmute baser metals into gold and/or to cure diseases and prolong life, from Arabic al-iksir, probably from late Gk. xerion "powder for drying wounds," from xeros "dry." General sense of "strong tonic" is 1597; used for quack
The *elixir*, both alchemical and pharmaceutical, has a long history of wonder and controversy dating back to Babylonia. Derived from both Greek and Arabic origination, the prepared elixir is steeped in magical tradition, as well as, legitimate apothecial uses. Elixir, or in Greek in medical terms, meaning “any dry powder” is mysterious, resulting from the cross-over of science and spagyrics, or the process of making herbal medicines using alchemical processes. Many of the apothecaries, like Michel de Nostredame, utilized elixirs magically, cosmetically, and medically. This presentation uncovers a few historical formulas and provides a quick demonstration on modern elixir making.
Pedanius Dioscorides (c40-c90AD), Greek
Pharmacological uses: Basically, medicine

Folio from *De Materia Medica of Dioscorides*, 13th century
De Materia Medica, Akoniton napellus, in Greek and Arabic (bound), 15th century
5-49. OINOS APSINHTITES
SUGGESTED: *Artemisia absinthium, Absinthium vulgare*

— Old Woman, Wormwood — Absinthe

*Narcotic*

*Absinthites* is made in various ways. Some mix one pound of Pontic wormwood with forty eight pints [Italian amphoras] of water and boil it until a third is left. Afterwards they pour on it six pints of Must [grape pulp] and half a pound of wormwood. Then having mixed them carefully they put it in a jar and strain it out when it is settled. Others put a pound of wormwood into nine gallons of must, beat it, and binding it in a thin linen cloth, leave it alone for two months. Others put three or four ounces of wormwood and two ounces each of Syrian nard [1-6, 1-7, 1-8, 1-10], cinnamon, cassia, flowers of *juncus odoratus* [4-52, 1-16], and Phoenicean dates into nine gallons of must, beat them in a mortar (afterwards corking it tightly) and leave it alone for two or three months. Then it is strained, placed in other jars and stored. Others put fourteen ounces of Celtic nard [1-7] and forty ounces of wormwood, binding it in a linen cloth, into a *metreta* [? measure] of must, and after forty days store it in other jars.

Others put one pound of wormwood and two ounces of dry pine rosin into twenty pints of must, and after ten days they strain it and put it in jars. It is good for the stomach and urinary, good for slow digestion, the liverish, for kidney disorders and jaundice, for those who lack appetite, stomach complaints, long-lasting distension from hypochondria [nervous gastric disorder], gaseousness, roundworms, and for the restrained menstrual flow. It is good for drinking down with *ixium* [3-103] and honey, taken copiously as a drink and vomited up again.

Translated into English by Tess Anne Osbaldeston, 2000

(ixium – viscous mixture
*Syrian nard – Spikenard
*juncus odoratus – Sweet rush*
"Physician Preparing an Elixir," Folio from *De Materia Medica of Dioscorides*, 13th century
"Preparing Medicine from Honey,“ Folio from De Materia Medica of Dioscorides, 13th century
Galen, c. 129 – c. 200AD
The composition or making of the moste excellent and pretious oil called oleum magistrale. First published by commandement of the King of Spain ... Also the third book of Galen of curing of pricks and wounds of sinowes. A method for curing of vvounds in the joynts, and the maner how to place them. Abreef gathering togither of certain errours which the common chirurgians dayly use, 1574 ...
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XLI

TRIACHA


TRIACA


(Venedia, c. 53r).
Title page of ‘The Pharmacy Wares Drugs and Stuffs Act 1540’ (32 Henry VIII c 40)
The English Dance of Dance: the Apothecary, by Thomas Rowlandson, 1816
Rise of alchemy, Nostradamus, and the search for the Philosopher’s Stone

“Alchemists using fire in the distillation process,” Stradamus, circa 1550

“The preparation of Elixirs requires a thorough knowledge and experience, since an exchange of powers and substances takes place among the species” – from Spagyrics, Manfred M. Junius
“Agricola” by Michael Meier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1617
Paracelsus, c. 1493-1541
We must therefore understand that when we administer medicine, we administer the whole world: that is, all the virtue of heaven and earth, air and water. Because if there is sickness in the body, all the healthy organs must fight against it, not only one, but all. For one sickness can be death to them all: note how Nature struggles against sickness with all her power. – **DAS BUCH PARAGRANUM** (1529-30)

4 Pillars of Medicine: Philosophy, Astronomy, Alchemy, and Virtue.
Urbigerus, Baro. Aphorismi Urbigerani, or, Certain rules clearly demonstrating the three infallible ways of preparing the grand elixir, or circulatum majus of the philosophers: discovering the secret of secrets, and detecting the errors of vulgar chymists in their operations: contain'd in one hundred and one aphorisms: to which are added, The three ways of preparing the vegetable elixir, or circulatum minus (1690). Translated by William Faithrone.
Philosophers call it a stone
The which hath a great nature
To bring a stone that is so pure
So he have kindly nourishment
    Perfect heat and decoction
But in the matrix when they be put
    Let never the glasse be unshut
Till they have ingendred a stone
    In the world there not such a one...

Excerpt from “Ripley Scrowle,” 16th c.
Mutus Liber, attributed to Isaac Baulot, 1677, alchemical text showing the process of making the Philosopher’s Stone.
Portrait of Michel de Nostredame (Nostradamus, c.1503-1566) by his son César de Nostredame (1553-1630?)
c. 1614
LE VRAY ET
PARFAICT EMBELLISSEMENT DE LA FACE,
& conservation du corps en son entier; contenant plusieurs Re-
ceptes secrets & deli-
rees non encore
veus.

Par M. Michael Nostradamus.

Pour accoustrer le sublimé qui ha telle vertu
& efficace, qu'il rend la face d'une beauté,
tirant sur la couleur d'un argent fin, que si la
face estoit copperouée, la rendra tant excel-
lemment blanche, que nature par ses na-
turelles effectz ne pourroit d'avantage faire.
A vn perfomage tache d'aucune espèce
de la drogier, luy fait perdre celle maligne &
detestable couleur, & la face chager en blan-
cheur. Une cicatrice sofit par feu ou pour au
prem utilisation, mesmes si elle est plie de
jeunesse, par petite succession de temps la
fait perdre.
HOW TO USE THE SAID composition, the potency and effectiveness of which resembles auro potabilis or an auric drink.

Anyone who, each morning an hour and a half before a meal or snack, takes a drachm of this composition with good white wine or malmsey will be protected against all kinds of sickness. For indeed it strengthens the heart and the brain, will get rid of epilepsy in the case of those who are not yet twenty-five years old, rejuvenates people and slows down the ageing process, and if anyone takes it during an epidemic, he will not be infected that day. A crown’s weight of this composition provides much more and better potency than a whole capon and so it protects one against leprosy, drives away melancholy and eases stomachache. The greatest virtue which it has, however, is this: if, mixed with alkanet water, it is taken by someone in his last hour, when he is on the point of death and nature and his sickness are doing battle with each other, it will so invigorate and strengthen the patient that the outcome and final judgement on the sickness will be in the patient’s favour and nature will obtain the victory. For it strengthens and invigorates the heart 100 times more than Alchemies’s confection. In addition, if a woman would like to have children or heirs, it so arranges the male member and the womb that both seeds unite and remain in the bearing place until it is time for the birth. Therefore doctors of medicine, when they think carefully about the effects of this composition, will sing its praises no less than I do. Again, if someone faints and takes only a little of it, he will soon recover his senses. However, this composition is not suitable for everyone, even though we are all human. So if anyone has the desire to live a
long life in happiness and good health, let him have some made up, but at the same time let him be on his guard and not trust every apothecary, for although it is true that there are good ones among them, for every good one there are 100 or 1,000 bad ones. For several among them are not worth what they charge and others, although they have enough money and are of exceedingly good standing, are avaricious, selfish and cunning. For because they are concerned they might not make as much as they would wish, they do not use half or even a third of the ingredients. Many of them are ignorant, incapable and have no desire to learn anything, which is a dreadful crime for such people. Others, however, are very dour and slovenly and act in a very negligent manner with everything they touch. On the other hand, I will not say that there are not some among them who have none of these faults, who in the first place have ability and a good conscience and who are not lacking in skill, but they are careless in their profession and commission anyone with the task, who may carry it out badly. For I must acknowledge that there are some who will do something properly, but they are rare birds and it does not happen very often. Thus I have travelled extensively throughout the whole kingdom of France and have met many apothecaries and become acquainted with them, but I have seen them do so many unspeakable things that I believe one could not find any other trade in which there is more malpractice and conscience so sorely tried. Even if I were to describe just the hundredth part of what I have seen with my own eyes, my paper would melt away. It is not that I particularly wish to cast blame upon certain individuals, for I do not intend to say where such things have happened in order that the sun may seem to shine more brightly upon me, but because I have seen that the world recognizes the characteristics, complexion and skills of all kinds of people and that there are good and bad storms and many places to be explored and herbs to be investigated, which may be useful in one place, but not in another. When I myself was practising medicine, which at the time was my main profession, I came across so much malpractice in so many towns that I gave it up, so that I should not malign anyone. So I will speak of other things, as Lucianus did when he praised Demosthenes, who painted a horse lying on the ground when he wanted, though, to paint it in action. Nevertheless, I have been in many places where the noble art of medicine was very much in fashion and excellent work was carried out, but it does not happen everywhere, as is indeed the case today. Now and then it happens that a doctor goes to an apothecary’s premises and, in order to look after his patient’s interests, would like to see the medicine himself and weigh out what is necessary, particularly if the apothecary is inexperienced. What happens? If the apothecary happens to be a foolish, proud, seemingly friendly, arrogant, useless, eccentric ass (for good and bad are to be found everywhere), he will reply to this young doctor as follows: ‘Why do you want to cause me all this confusion? Do you perhaps think that I am not an honourable man? You should know that I will make it much better than you can prescribe, therefore stick to your own profession and calling and do not interfere with our medicines!’ ‘Since I will make it better!’ – from that and 1,000 other stupid remarks which they make you will understand that I cannot write the twelfth part of the things done by such idiots. It is true, however, that among them I have met very honest and upright men, well versed in their art and exceptionally well instructed in it, who have remained true to it. Among all the places I have visited, however, I know of none where medicine is held in worse esteem and carried out in a more dreadful manner than Marseilles, apart from two or three apothecaries, and the position would be much worse if the doctors of medicine were not so honest and learned.
There is a M. Louis Serre, a renowned and learned man, and, like Hippocrates, able to predict the outcome of an illness, who is doing as much as he can there and spares no effort to ensure that everything is done correctly and without deception. If, however, I were to recount here all the places I have repeatedly visited and how medicine is regarded and carried on in each, this book would become much too large. I will, however, single out for praise one man (regardless of the fact that other honourable and just men will not be mentioned in it). He is Joseph Turel Mercur, born at Aix-en-Provence, who is famous both here and elsewhere and currently working with us here at the salon of Francisco Berardus. I am quite prepared to accept that someone might, with justification, say that there are many other places to which I have not been or may have left out, which is what Your Excellency might also have done. That is of course true, for to visit them all would be impossible and human life is short. For I well know that many will not be satisfied, because the evildoers will only gain support and encouragement from it. I have, however, done so for no other reason than to emphasize that if someone wishes the above-mentioned composition to aid or assist him, he must go about things diligently and take care that not the slightest ingredient is omitted, in order to be certain of its efficacy, for it has such a potency that if someone has a very weak heart, it will swiftly penetrate it and prolong the person’s life.
DEAR FRIENDLY READER, at this point, not without very good reasons, I have omitted from my translation into German the eighteenth chapter, because it teaches such things as are not fitting for a Christian or God-fearing man to know and I therefore felt it better not to make any mention of them.
Nostradamus Love Elixir or “Love Jam”
Take three mandrake apples and go and cull them as soon as you see the sun rising, and wrap them in verbena leaves and the root of the mullein herb, and leave them alone until the following morning. Then take the weight of six grains of magnetite from the point where it repels the iron, as revealed by the use of the quadrant, and pulverise it on the marble as finely as possible, sprinkling it a little with the juice of the mandrake apple.
Next take:
the blood of seven male sparrows, bled via the left wing; of ambergris the weight of 57 barley seeds; seven grains of musk; of the core of the best cinnamon that can be found the weight of 377 barley seeds; of cloves and fine lignum aloes the weight of three deniers [pence]; of the arms of an octopus [the original French misprints 'pourpre poisson' for 'poulpe poisson', as is not impossible with dictated typsetting] one eyelet from each, preserved and prepared in honey; of mace the weight of 21 grains; of sweet flag the weight of 500 grains; of the root of Lyris Illyrica or Sclavonia ['Illyrian or Slavonian Lyre'] the weight of 700 grains; of the root of Apii Risus ['Bee's Laughter'] 31 grains; of Cretan wine double the weight of the whole; of the finest sugar the weight of 700 grains, which is just a little more than an ounce.

Mix all of this together and pulverise and macerate it thoroughly in a marble mortar with a wooden pestle.

Ladle it out with a silver spoon and put it in a glass vessel, and set it to boil on the fire until it reduces in quantity to the point where the sugar has become like syrup, or julep. And take care above all that it is not a willow fire. Once it has boiled, strain it all carefully but vigorously, and put it in a vessel of gold, silver or glass. And when you want to use some of it, put just a little of it in your mouth, as it were the weight of half a crown, and even if you swallow some of it, it will not harm you at all, provided that if you do not find the person to transmit it to, you do not fail that very day to have sex, wherever it seems best to you.
To make the basis for a perfectly good and excellent aromatic powder whose perfume is not strange, but confers an agreeable and long-lasting sweetness, though it can only be prepared once a year: Take one ounce of the sawdust or shavings of cypress-wood, as green as you can find, six ounces of Florentine violet-root, three ounces of cloves, three drams of sweet calamus, and six drams of aloes-wood. Reduce the whole to powder before it spoils. Next, take three or four hundred in-folded red roses, fresh and perfectly clean, and gathered before dewfall. Pound them vigorously in a marble mortar with a wooden pestle. When you are half through pounding them, add to them the above mentioned powder and immediately pound it all vigorously, while sprinkling on it a little rose-juice. When everything is well mixed together, form it into little flat lozenges, as you would pills, and let them dry in the shade, for they will smell good. And note that from this mixture may also be made aromatic soaps, cypress powder, violet root powder, aromatic balls, perfumes, 'Cyprus birds' and perfumed waters. And in order to make the mixture even more excellent, add as much musk and ambergris as you either can or wish. If these two are added I do not doubt that you will produce a superbly pleasant perfume. Pulverise the said musk and ambergris, dissolving it with rose-juice, then mix it in and dry in the shade. Quite apart from the goodness and scent that this mixture lends to the items and mixtures mentioned above, you only have to keep it in the mouth a little to make your breath smell wonderful all day. Or if the breath was stinking, whether as a result of the teeth being rotten or because of bad smells emerging from the stomach, or because the person involved had some stinking ulcer somewhere, or some other odd case that obliged him to flee people's company, keep a little of it in the mouth without chewing, and it will give out such a good smell that nobody will be able to tell where it is coming from ['Whence is that goodly fragrance blowing.'?!!]. And in time of Plague, keep it often in the mouth, for there is no smell better for keeping away the bad and pestiferous air.

Translation by Peter Lemesurier, 2000
Contact:
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Elderberry Elixir

1 cup dried elderberries (if wild crafted, dry)
1/2 cup (echinacea, hops, passionflower or elder)
2 T. ginger root
1 T. cinnamon chips (or powder)
16 oz. water (distilled or fresh)
4oz vodka or brandy (for kids, straight-edge use vegetable glycerin)
1 juice of a lemon
16 oz. honey or sugar syrup (vegans can use sugar or agave)
Sometimes I add in 1/2 cup of mullein or 1 t. of licorice root

Organic and local is best!