

Welcome to this participatory performance/workshop, *The Herbs of the Commons Became Weeds, the Women of the Commons Became Witches* which will explore and celebrate the wild plants that women would have used as food and medicine, particularly the rose, and its hip.

Hopefully you have either received some rosehips in the post or have gathered yourself some from your local area and have prepared them, but if not, don't worry you can still join in the discussions...

does anyone still need to do some preparations?

So shortly we will get the water going before we infuse it with the rosehips. Once ready, we will then imbibe the brew whilst reflecting on the relationship to our bodies, the land, and wild plants, their nourishment and healing. We will try to feel through our bodies as this **infusion** infuses us bringing the nutrients and other knowledge into our bodies, hopefully then sharing these reflections together through discussion to unearth, revive and disseminate knowledge lost by our being severed from our lands and our ancestors of wise women who were persecuted during the witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, **thereby making and re-making the commons.**

Decide on the order of this and how to get people

So let's take a few minutes or so to gather our materials – ASK: do people need to do this?

- Check those who have gathered their own and what state they are in
- Remind them that if they are loose, and they are being placed directly in your water you will need to strain them out with a fine mesh, such as a coffee filter, piece of cotton cloth, tightly woven muslin, a jelly bag. This is very important as you don't want to ingest the downy hairs.

So shall we boil our kettles or get the water going on our hobs as I am doing here!

Also gather a mug, and a saucer, lid or plate to cover the cup. If it is cool where you are, bring a towel to wrap around the cup to keep the heat in. And of course, find your hips.

If you have gathered them yourselves, I hope you have managed to prepare them by chopping, crushing or grinding them. You can place them directly in your water or place them in a jelly bag, tea bag or similar. You can do it now or when it is boiled when you pour it into the cup.

Are there any questions?

Boil a pot of water and pour the hot water over the rose hips.

If using fresh rose hips, use ¼ cup of hips to 1 cup of water. If using dried rose hips, crush them up and use 1 heaping tablespoon per cup of water.

Put instructions in the chat

Boil water.

Add tea bag or loose hips to cup.

Pour over water.

Add lid of some kind.

Before drinking, strain out with a fine mesh, - coffee filter, piece of cotton cloth, tightly woven muslin, a jelly bag or similar

Whilst we are doing this preparation, boiling the water and then allowing the hips to infuse 'becoming with' the water, I will share some of the context, ideas and practices I have been exploring as part of a wider project about the commons, their enclosure, and one of the consequence, that of persecution of women as witches, and their being driven off of the land, as well as out of the healing professions which might also help frame our later discussions.

PAUSE – Are people ready?

Are there any questions?

The enclosure of the commons instigated a profound and damaging transformation in the web of relations that bound us as humans to the natural world, to our bodies and each other. Through a series of violent actions and Acts of Inclosure over hundreds of years, not only were commoners, our peasant ancestors, removed from and subsequently denied access to the land they had relied on for their subsistence, so too were a world of social and cultural practices and beliefs destroyed. According to ecofeminist and Neopaganist, Starhawk in *Dreaming in the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, first published in 1988, this 'rupture [from the land] underlies the entwined oppressions of race, sex, class, and ecological destruction,' the legacy of which we are experiencing today.¹

PAUSE

Enclosure was the first step in the move towards Capitalism. In this state-initiated strategy, the land that had previously enabled subsistence living was shifted into market production. And with it the state was able to possess, control and create a work force, initiate demographic movement, as well as implementing measures to attempt to control procreation. As the open-field system and customary rights were abolished with the hedging of common lands, the peasant population no longer had access to property and so was forced to depend on whatever work was given to them and accept the low payment in what would signal the beginning of a wage system.

Capitalism, as we are still experiencing it, as Marxist feminist Silvia Federici describes, is a 'major attack' on anything relational, any 'collective activity, collective work, collective games, collective decision-making (through assemblies), festivals, gatherings, work co-operation, - our 'commons wealth'². In the destruction of the collective and particularly the commons, 'it individualises work relations'³ and destroys 'solidarity and sociality'. [...] Physical enclosure was 'amplified by a process of social enclosure.'⁴ Federici connects the enclosure of land with that of a constraint on bodies and knowledge, in her 2018 book *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*, Federici proposes,

"...we have to think of enclosures as a broader phenomenon than simply fencing off land. We must think of the enclosure of knowledge, of our bodies, and the relationship to other people and nature."

Through enclosure '**when commoners were ploughed off their lands**',⁵ 'a world of social/cultural practices and beliefs [...] was wiped out.'⁶

PAUSE

The consequences of enclosure, particularly for women were even worse affecting them more acutely, resulting in a sexual division of labour, a 'new social-sexual contract' that Federici speaks of in her book *Caliban and The Witch*:

‘...proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction [...] *every woman (other than those privatized by bourgeois men) became a communal good*. For the first time, the activities of women became ‘defined as non-work’ and became ‘a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink.’⁷

Women’s labour had become completely devalued. For example, the crafts and guilds in the late fifteenth century began excluding women from workshops and by the end of the sixteenth century, the hand of the state reached via the husband to ‘consolidate[e] the family and male authority within it.’⁸ There was also a de-valuing of women as a social subject, solidarity was oppressed, friendship amongst women could become criminalised, and with it the knowledge that they would pass down over generations and through the community was enclosed, constrained, becoming at risk and lost.

PAUSE

Such a devaluing of women’s **work** also ‘drove women out of the work of healing’.⁹ ‘Foremost among the rising professionals eager to consolidate their power were doctors’, Starhawk writes. ‘In medieval times, women practiced as physicians and apothecaries. Among the poorer classes, the village wise woman, or Witch, who preserved the traditional knowledge of herbs and natural healing, was often the only available source of medical care’.¹⁰ However, Henry VIII in 1540 initiated medicine as the state sanctioned province of men, granting a charter for the Company of Barber-Surgeons preventing by law, women, and anyone without a licence, from administering medical advice. ‘Surgery became the art of the male doctor’ as Nick Hayes summarises in *The Book of Trespass*, ‘and the holistic services provided by the cunning women, both psycho-spiritual (therapy) and herbal remedies, were outlawed. The herbs of the common had become weeds,’ he surmises ‘the women of the common were witches.’¹¹

PAUSE

Medicine and healing is ‘a vitally important part of culture’¹² and ‘an area in which women had always played a vital role,’¹³ and as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English celebrate in their radical pamphlet, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* first published in 1973, ‘it is part of our heritage as women, our history, our birthright.’¹⁴ But history has written us out this history, hence why their account was/is so essential.

Women were ‘autonomous healers [and] often the only healers for women and the poor’.¹⁵ These cunning folk ‘had a host of remedies which had been tested in years of use’ [...] ‘developed by [with many] still hav[ing] their place in modern pharmacology,’ as Ehrenreich and English write,

‘They had pain-killers, digestive aids, and anti-inflammatory agents. They used ergot for the pain of labor [with its] derivatives [being] the principal drugs used today to hasten labor and aid in the recovery from childbirth. Belladonna-- still used today as an anti-spasmodic --was used by the witch-healers to inhibit uterine contractions when miscarriage threatened. Digitalis, still an important drug in treating heart ailments, is said to have been discovered by an English witch.’¹⁶

These women were also midwives and ‘male doctors began to encroach upon what had always been the female preserve of midwifery.’¹⁷ They start to attend the upper classes but soon also cast doubt on the expertise of female folk healers, ‘mak[ing the name of the wise woman] synonymous with dirt, ignorance and superstition.’¹⁸

And it was these women, the healers and herbalists, those who were autonomous, the unmarried or widowed, and those who were outspoken, resisting, difficult, who found themselves in the most dangerous positions of being targeted, and would suffer the ultimate persecution during the witch hunts of

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where, as Federici laments, ‘hundreds of thousands of women were burned, hanged, and tortured in less than two centuries.’¹⁹

Anne Llewellyn Barstow in her 1994 book, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* reports that the;

‘hunts affected the traditional image of women in European society [...and...] reinforced the received traditions of misogyny and patriarchal control, narrowing women's status and demonizing the image of women in a damaging way. That women were criminalized for the first time as witches left its mark. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did the status of Western women begin to recover from the witch hunts.’²⁰

With such persecution and the “newform of enclosure”, the knowledge “accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation” was being erased.²¹ The removal of access to folk healing knowledge, Federici writes, and the concurrent ‘rise of professional medicine [...] erected a wall ‘of unchallengeable scientific knowledge, unaffordable and alien, despite its curative pretenses’.²²

PAUSE

And Barstow is not sure that we have ever ‘entirely recovered.’²³ Such a severing from the land has resulted in trauma that we experience daily in our bodies, I would argue, for example, in our gut, which influences our whole physical, mental and emotional landscape. Being separated from land and nature over generations triggered by enclosure, has instigated a rupture in our knowledge of wild foods and medicine which has resulted in the ingestion of a reduced diversity of plants and microorganisms in the western diet especially via the prebiotics of fibrous material, causing in a reduced gut microbiota.

PAUSE

Some one way for me to counteract has been to go out into the landscape and forage for wild foods and medicine and to create spaces like these to learn, share and disseminate wild plant wisdom thereby making and re-making the commons. And today we will focus on the wild rose. The rose is a mainstay of the hedgerows, a place nature and culture meet, and woods and scrub. It clammers in between and over other shrubs and climbers ‘using [its] large, hooked thorns’.²⁴ Flowering from June to July with ‘a glorious abundance of white and pink blossoms’²⁵ developing from late August to November to into hips. ‘The flowers and upper leaves are used as a mild astringent for tightening tissues and inflamed skin problems, sore throats, digestive upsets and mild diarrhoea’ writes herbalists, Vicky Chown and Kim Walker in *The Handmade Apothecary: Healing Herbal Remedies*, which could be administered by way of ‘scented waters, tinctures and infusions’.²⁶ These can also be ‘used for calming and uplifting anxious minds, for the female reproductive system, and to comfort those stricken with grief’ they continue.²⁷

But as forager, John Wright claims, ‘the real value comes from the hips’, which are ‘an extension of the stem and not actually the fruit - the real fruits are inside [known as the **achenes**], covered in hairs,’²⁸ which ‘possess numerous properties’.²⁹ Hips are ‘high in nutrients and antioxidants [...] contain[ing] flavonoids, which are powerful anti-inflammatories, and when combined with the natural vitamin C content, aid collagen formation and help with painful joints and arthritic conditions’.³⁰

As well as it being one of the important medicinal plants available at this time of year, easily accessible, and widely available, I wanted to focus on this thorny plant as an analogy and a suitable catalyst to contemplate the problematic and challenging times that we currently find ourselves in and as a legacy of the dark histories that I was talking about earlier. But also for its ancient symbolic association with secrecy.

We all know the associations that roses have with love, but it is because 'Cupid is said to have given Harpocrates, **Harpo-crat-ees** the god of silence, a rose, to bribe him not to betray the amours of Venus', as Roger Philips muses in his *Wild Food*, **which is where the connection between the rose, and Harpo-crat-ees and confidentiality originates.**³¹ But it is thought that 'the association of Harpo-cra-tes with silence and secrecy is actually a misunderstanding [by the Greeks and Romans] of Egyptian depictions of the god Horus. Heru-pa-khered -**hero-pa-card** or Horus the Younger is represented as a child with a finger-to-mouth gesture which is the hieroglyph for 'child', which was misunderstood as a gesture for silence.'³² So it is through this error that the rose became the symbol of silence. And in Roman times the form was 'carved on the ceilings of banqueting rooms to remind the guests that what was spoken *sub vino* was not to be repeated *sub dive*. From this, 'under the rose' or *sub rosa* means, in strict confidence.'³³

Other depictions of Heru-pa-khered **hero-pa-card, i.e. Horus on the Crocodiles** on stele in temple courtyards would have been 'immersed or lustrated in water; [with] the water then [being] used for blessing and healing purposes as the [god's] Name was attributed with many protective and healing powers'.³⁴ So it is therefore apt that we are immersing the rosehip in hot water so that we might absorb the wisdom of the plant as it infuses and flows through our bodies enabling the stories of our kinship to plants, land and healing to pour out in the safe space '*sub rosa*'.

So this evening's discussions will be just that – what is spoken here may not be revealed elsewhere. symbolises the freedom to speak plainly without repercussion.

in a safe space here.

So shall we see how our infusion is getting on?

REMEMBER - if you placed the rosehips directly in your water, you will need to strain them out with a fine sieve mesh, such as a coffee filter, piece of cotton cloth, tightly woven muslin, a jelly bag. This is very important as you don't want to ingest the downy hairs. If you

Through the creative act of making and drinking the herbal tea we might absorb the knowledge of the rose as it infuses and flows through our bodies enabling the stories of our kinship to plants, land and healing to pour out in the safe space '*sub rosa*'.

Starhawk's 'The view of land as private property was linked to the new world-view that saw nature as non-alive, and as something valuable only when it could be exploited.

Creating an intimacy between us as humans and the knowledge and teaching of wild plants
It is hoped that this workshop might offer 'space, time and guidance to be intimate' with wild foods and medicine, namely the rosehip, which forms part of our 'collective cultural inheritance but about which few of us know much about at all'.³⁵

To readdress what most of us are, 'ecologically impoverished, through dispossession and disempowerment'.³⁶

Infusions have been
Deep breaths

Before we take the lid off – lets take a few deep breaths.
Let's find a sense of place in the here and now.
Slow down into this moment

Let's take the lid off and notice the colour of the liquid.
Then take in the aroma of the tea – through continued deep breathing can you smell the tea?

Perhaps take note of anything that comes to your attention, how does it smell, do you experience any sensations in your body or are any feelings or images evoked?

Pause – count to ten??
Then shall we sip,

as you keep noticing any responses you feel.
Does the liquid draw attention to any part of your body?
How does your mood feel?
Is your stomach gurgling?
Are you sweating?
Notice anything and everything because these responses help inform you about the medicinal qualities of the plant.
As we continue to sip – keep breathing

What are through thoughts the memories, the stories, the histories that bubble up? **What might be unearthed ----- relationship to our bodies, the land, and wild plants, their nourishment and healing.**

If you are able, you might follow the steam as it snakes out of the cup. If we were able, we might read the escaping forms through **libanomancy**, divination by observing smoke patterns.

Witness how the water has changed from clear to a pale orangey-pink as the hips impart their **antioxidant flavonoids**.

Can we tap into what the rose might be telling us as it infuses our bodies? As it flows down our windpipe, to warm, calm and relax us, can we allow it to help initiate an 'openness' in opposition to the acts of enclosure, to privatisation and the fencing off of communal land?

And if we contemplate the meaning of the word 'infusion' from the early fifteenth century, Old French "'injection" or Latin *infusionem* meaning 'a pouring in [or] that which is poured in',³⁷ we can observe as we pour the rosehip in what stories might pour out of us to share *sub rosa*.

Open up the floor –

You might write down and possibly share...
Sit in silence for a few moments.

Things to say:

Cultivate a 'power-from-within' to counteract a 'power-over' of which we feel like have no control, as Starhawk writes.

'...the magic [that is] locked inside the magic world' Emma Talbot – Video Frieze Masters on her 21st century Herbal.

'Alongside factual information, Talbot poses existential questions about our relationships to and with nature and the magical gifts locked in the natural world'... 'human ongoingness'.³⁸

Advocate for one's own health

At end:

Continuing this oral tradition of passing cunning woman's knowledge down the generations is mirrored now in my 'Commons Feast Virtual Monthly Meet Up' participatory performance which I facilitate to share and disseminate wild foods and foraging knowledge.

¹ Starhawk. xxvii

² Silvia Federici Caliban... p.69

³ Silvia Federici in this podcast:

https://soundcloud.com/makingcontact/witch-hunts-and-enclosures-bodies-land-and-women?utm_source=blog.pmpress.org&utm_campaign=wtshare&utm_medium=widget&utm_content=https%253A%252F%252Fsoundcloud.com%252Fmakingcontact%252Fwitch-hunts-and-enclosures-bodies-land-and-women

⁴ Silvia Federici Caliban... p.84

⁵ Right2Roam Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkYF4EJoDQS/>

⁶ Silvia Federici (2018) *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*. Oakland, CA. PM Press, p.21.

⁷ Silvia Federici Caliban... p.97

⁸ W, W-H, W p.39

⁹ Starhawk xxvii

¹⁰ Starhawk p.201

¹¹ Nick Hayes *The Book of Trespass*

¹² Starhawk p.203

¹³ Starhawk p.201

¹⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English p.25

¹⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English p.27

¹⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* p.47-8

¹⁷ Starhawk, p.202

¹⁸ Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and institution*. New York: Bantam, 1976, p. 127.

¹⁹ Silvia Federici Caliban... p.164

²⁰ Anne Llewellyn Barstow – *Witchcraze*, p.12

²¹ Caliban, p.201

²² Caliban, p.201 (referencing Ehrenreich and English 1973; Starhawk 1997)

²³ Anne Llewellyn Barstow – *Witchcraze*, p.12

²⁴ Vicky Chown & Kim Walker: *The Handmade Apothecary: Healing Herbal Remedies*, pp.132 - 33

²⁵ John Wright, *A Natural History of the Hedgerow*, p. 293

²⁶ Vicky Chown and Kim Walker in *The Handmade Apothecary: Healing Herbal Remedies* p.133

²⁷ Vicky Chown and Kim Walker in *The Handmade Apothecary: Healing Herbal Remedies* p.133

²⁸ John Wright, *Hedgerow* p.131

²⁹ Jean Palaiseul: *Grandmother's Secrets: Her Green Guide to Health from Plants* P.104

³⁰ Vicky Chown and Kim Walker in *The Handmade Apothecary: Healing Herbal Remedies* p.133

³¹ Roger Philips (1983) *Wild Food* p.143.

³² <https://exclusivelyprivate.co.uk/under-the-rose-sub-rosa/>

³³ Roger Philips (1983) *Wild Food* p.143.

³⁴ Kemetic Orthodoxy 'Heru-pa-khered' <https://www.kemet.org/taxonomy/term/83>

³⁵ Right2Roam Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cg2J0UbOF0v/>

³⁶ Right2Roam Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cg2J0UbOF0v/>

³⁷ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=Infusion>

³⁸ https://www.frieze.com/video/emma-talbot-presents-21st-century-herbal-frieze-london-2022?utm_source=FRIEZE&utm_campaign=7b27f1122d-FLFM22_Newsletter_01102022&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f0ebe20dcf-7b27f1122d-208091634&mc_cid=7b27f1122d&mc_cid=9a1dfbeb4a