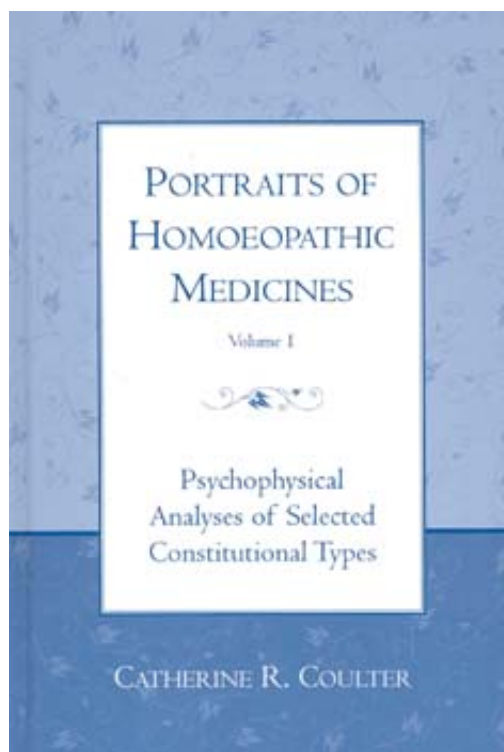


Catherine R. Coulter

Portraits of Homoeopathic Medicines Vol.1

Reading excerpt

[Portraits of Homoeopathic Medicines Vol.1](#)
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Sepia

THE remedy *Sepia* shares important characteristics with several other polychrests—*Phosphorus*, *Pulsatilla*, *Sulphur*, *Lachesis Arsenicum*, and especially *Natrum muriaticum*, with which it is frequently compared. This does not prevent it, however, from being a major constitutional remedy in its own right, with a personality distinctly its own.

Sepia is made from the fresh ink of the cuttlefish — an independent creature which swims alone rather than in a group and lives in the crevices of rocks in the cool depths of the sea. When in danger it sends out clouds of ink to cover its escape, and when securing its prey it ejects the ink for camouflage. Thus the brownish-black liquid serves both defensive and aggressive purposes.

The remedy is predominantly female. The classic picture is the woman seeking emancipation from her traditionally passive and too limited role as wife and mother in the home. Homoeopathic *Sepia*, however, comes in different guises. For a better understanding, it must be divided into three distinct faces: the worn-out overworked housewife or emotionally withdrawn woman; the contented career woman; and finally, the dissatisfied complainer.

The Overworked Housewife

Margaret Tyler gives a graphic vignette of the first face, describing a tired housewife with her sallow, bloated complexion and free perspiration, who can stand neither stuffy rooms nor cold air, who suffers from constant backache or headache, is constipated, and has an overall "dragged-down" feeling. So worn out is she with the cares of home and children that she only wants to lie down and rest; her very eyelids

droop from weakness (*Gelsemium*, *Causticum*). In her run-down condition she feels stupid, dull, forgetful; and when overwrought she feels she must hold tightly to something to keep from screaming. At times, driven to an extreme of irritability, she lashes out at her children and especially her husband. From this picture arises the image of the rebellious dissatisfied woman who wants to leave her husband and children ("aversion to members of family": Kent) and "get away from it all." Or she has simply become "indifferent to her loved ones" (Hering). But *Sepia* is more complex than that, and the terms "aversion" or "indifference" must be qualified.

In certain cases, *Sepia* can indeed be found lacking in maternal instinct, as evidenced by the remedy's success in animals who refuse to nurse or care for their young (and may actually attack their offspring: Tyler), but she is not intrinsically devoid of emotion. Feelings run strong and deep in this type. She loves her husband and children dearly but is too exhausted to feel *anything* but the need to get through the day's work and survive to the next. She simply has no physical or emotional energy left for love.

All manifestations of love — marital, parental, filial, and even close friendship — are a drain on her reserves of energy and an obstacle to her need for a certain amount of privacy and independence ("company aggravates, amelioration when alone": Kent). The cuttlefish, after all, is a solitary animal. *Sepia's* immediate family, being the greatest emotional drain, is naturally the greatest threat. She may see her children in direct conflict with her need for self-expression, and so she fights the emotional bonds that stifle the growth of her individuality. Where another woman would see them as enhancing her mental development, she feels them to be a hindrance.

Sepia experiences love not as excitement or enjoyment (*Phosphorus*), not as a blessing as natural and necessary as the sun (*Pulsatilla*), not as a rare and beautiful gift or unattainable ideal (*Natrum muriaticum*), nor as a human's inherent due which can almost be taken for granted (*Sulphur*, *Lycopodium*), but rather as a responsibility — or even a burden. She thinks of love somewhat as follows: "These people love me. They expect something of me. I must live up to their expectations and not disappoint them. I've got to do well as wife, mother, sister, or daughter." Yet how does one express love toward, for example, one's children? *Phosphorus* and *Pulsatilla* easily pour out affection and ca-

resses; *Natrum muriaticum* provides instruction, instinctively assuming the role of teacher; *Calcarea* indulges her children and enjoys them in an effortless empathy; *Arsenicum* enjoys taking command and organizing her charges' lives. For *Sepia*, however, love has no easy outlet, no natural form. Kent has an interesting phrase in this connection, "Love does not go forth into affection." Love is not absent, but the manifestation of love is benumbed and cannot be expressed.

So she falls back on *duty*. Even when at the end of her resources, her sense of duty keeps her going until gradually she begins to resent her incarceration and struggles against the ties that bind her. In her wretchedness she projects gloom, just as the cuttlefish ejects its cloud of ink. No one can spread darkness around herself like a discontented *Sepia*. Then she begins to think of leaving home, to escape from the burdens of imposed love.

Actually to *do so* — to forsake her home and family—a woman must usually possess *Lycopodium* in her nature. For *Lycopodium* does not feel guilt, regret or self-condemnation as other types do. The more purely *Sepia* woman might want to get away but is restrained by a sense of duty and guilt. So she stays on to complain, nag, and perhaps to fall ill from the strain.

Furthermore, she is proud, as well as dutiful, and in the best sense of the word. Though needing independence and possibly desiring a career for emotional fulfilment, she will still put much care into a task uncongenial to her nature. She tries hard to do things the "right" way. But the right way is so difficult for *Sepia*. She is like a puppy raised among kittens who tries to climb trees and spring onto tables, not realizing that she is a dog and not a cat. The housewife's pathology arises from the sheer physical stress of an uncongenial role.

Whitmont, adapting Jungian psychology to the homoeopathic method, interprets this aspect of the *Sepia* psyche as rooted in a conflict with the other sex within her. Every individual is composed of both male and female genes. The conscious personality has the attributes of the dominant sex, while the unconscious bears marks of the opposite sex and performs a complementary balancing function. In the healthy individual these two forces (the Yin and the Yang) work together harmoniously, but in the *Sepia* woman an imbalance occurs. Failing

her suppressed femininity (which takes on a dark character by virtue of its suppression) retaliates in the form of certain aggressive characteristics and neurasthenic conditions. On the physical plane this struggle manifests itself, not surprisingly, in malfunctioning of the female reproductive organs.

Thus *Sepia* should be considered for sexual and menstrual complaints of all kinds, including frigidity and the disturbances of menopause; it should also be considered for disorders of pregnancy, such as tendency to abort and morning sickness, as well as for severe post-partum depression ("baby-blues") and other ailments while in childbed or nursing. The remedy is further effective in uterine displacements and disorders such as prolapse, "bearing-down" sensations, fibroids, and violent stitches upwards from the vagina. Hering has six pages of frequently-encountered "female" symptoms. Perhaps most dramatic of all is its power to counteract female sterility. There have been many "*Sepia* babies" whose existence the mother attributes to this homoeopathic remedy. *Calcarea* and *Natrum muriaticum* are the other two frequently effective remedies, and *Natrum carbonicum* sometimes works when these classic remedies fail (Kent).

Even when not lacking in maternal instinct, *Sepia* does not take readily to motherhood. It is too binding, too psychologically draining, and too physically exhausting for her constitution, which often exhibits a picture of low thyroid, low blood pressure, or adrenalin deficiency* Hence the mental symptom, "indifference to those loved best" is doubtless the result, rather than the underlying cause, of her problems.

This distinction is important, since it explains why, contrary to expectation, *Sepia* frequently makes a good, even an excellent mother. The woman whose outlook on life is soured or dreary and whose personality is tiresome will still raise independent, contented, creative children who, reacting healthily to their mother, are charming, attractive and a pleasure to be around. This is partly because she is not overly protective, sentimental or self-imposing. She is often matter-of-fact and stands no nonsense. She does not oppress her children (as does *Lycopodium*) or attempt to mold them according to some preconceived image (*Arsen-*

* The whole picture of adrenalin disturbances as related to the physiological and psychopathological action of *Sepia* has been discussed by Whitmont and Gutman.

icum). It is hard enough for her to live with one *Sepia* (herself), let alone encourage her offspring along similar lines. She respects the child's personality and lets him be himself, yet without overindulgence.

She can be unsociable and "averse to company" (Hering). She does not want to go out, largely because of the physical effort which sociability demands (as one patient said, "I don't even have the strength to comb my hair before going out, to raise my fork to eat or to pull the muscles of my mouth into a smile"), and she is too fatigued to delight in music, museums, nature, or even her friends. Uninterested in what others are saying, reluctant to contribute anything herself, too tired to follow the conversation ("concentration is difficult": Kent), she may answer in monosyllables: "she feels stupid . . . with difficult flow of ideas" (Hahnemann); "incapable of mental exertion" (Boenninghausen); "language comes very slowly, has to drag out the words to express ideas; forgets the chief points" (Hering). All of the foregoing contribute to the general picture of "indifference."

Yet, once she *does* make the supreme effort and attends a social gathering, once the adrenalin is stimulated to flow, counteracting her sluggish and "ptotic" state, she comes alive, is good company, and enjoys herself thoroughly* In fact she may become "very excitable when in company" (Boenninghausen). Amelioration of physical and mental symptoms from strenuous (as against mild) exertion is a guiding symptom (Boger). Otherwise, she only wants to crawl into her lair and be *left alone*, not touched, approached or bothered, just allowed to sleep: "avoids the sight of people" (Kent); "wishes to be by herself and lie with closed eyes" (Hahnemann). For many of her symptoms are markedly better from sleep, even a short nap (*Phosphorus*). Unlike *Lachesis*, whose symptoms are worse from sleep, or *Natrum muriaticum* who needs a long, deep sleep to feel better, *Sepia* can lie down feeling hopeless and depressed and wake up a short time later with the gloom temporarily dispelled.

In her unsociability she may at times resemble *Natrum muriati-*

' *Sepia's* weary, "dragged-down" emotional state finds its physical counterpart in ptosis: the "dragging" or "bearing-down" sensation or prolapse of any part of the body, but in *Sepia* particularly of the uterus.

cum's loner mentality; also, like *Natrum muriaticum*, she may be "worse in company yet dreads to be alone" (Kent). But her loneliness proceeds from a different source. *Natrum muriaticum* needs the love she appears to be pushing away and suffers from its absence. *Sepia*, however, is truly seeking to escape from close emotional ties and the obligations they impose, and can be content without them.

In certain cases her emotional unresponsiveness takes the form of what Tyler calls a "stony" or "frozen" indifference. This emotional apathy may develop from some profound sorrow or disappointment in a reserved individual who cannot allow herself to feel because she cannot afford it. A case in point was a 26-year-old woman with amenorrhoea who, three years earlier, had suffered severely from an unfortunate love (in *Sepia*, as in *Natrum muriaticum* and *Ignatia*, profound grief can lead to cessation of menses). Since that time she had been cold and unresponsive with her family and friends and toward the world in general. She had seemingly withdrawn into some chilly arctic region where she was determined to remain remote and uncommunicative. No one was able to reach her in any way. She was polite and dutiful, but completely indifferent: "the death of a near relative or some happy occurrence leave her equally unaffected; no trace of her former love for friends, or even for her own child" (Hering).

For an older person, buffeted by fate, the attainment of such mental serenity may be desirable, even at the cost of some lack of emotional response. But in a young woman on the brink of life such aloofness from the richness and variety of emotional experience is sad. The patient consequently received a dose of *Sepia* 50M.

Initially there was no dramatic change. *Sepia* can be a slow starter. Yet on a visit two months later she was a different person—not carefree or even happy, but more caring and responsive, and her menses had resumed. No further remedy was prescribed, since the single dose had obviously reached some deep level of her emotional disharmony and was beginning to heal it. Instead, the remedy was allowed to continue dispelling her "stilled" (Kent) or suppressed emotions, as she blossomed into a warm, lovely and now happy human being.

According to Pierre Schmidt, Hubbard and other authorities, *Sepia* (like *Sulphur*) can be prescribed with benefit for patients who are unable to respond to other indicated homoeopathic remedies, just as they cannot respond emotionally to life.

In addition to being an independent constitutional type, the remedy can be indicated during a *temporary stage* in a woman's life. It has proved invaluable for adjustment to the increased sexual demands of marriage; when a woman is trying to resolve the conflict between home and career; for the one who has "never been the same" since childbirth, an abortion, or a miscarriage; during the change of life, etc. Upon receiving *Sepia* these women often revert to their basic *Phosphorus*, *Calcarea*, or *Pulsatilla* selves. Thus the physician should recognize the episodic as well as the chronic state of the *Sepia* psyche.

Altogether, the first face of *Sepia* is characterized less by absence of emotions than by the attempt to escape them. Either she needs independence or seeks a self-imposed emotional detachment after having been injured in her feelings—contrasting with *Lycopodium's* ingrained or inherent detachment. In particular, love is sensed by the housewife as a confinement and burden, even as she tries to counteract these feelings with duty.