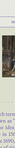

Potpourri (pot-pourri)

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The French term "pot-pourri" can be heard in many languages, but its origins seem to date back to sixteenth-century Spain, to a stew-like dish known as "olla podrida". This recipe – in which a variety of ingredients are simmered for a long time so that they decompose – evokes the idea of yet whose contents have rotted, i.e. fallen into decay and disintegrated. The term "pot-pourri" first appeared in French literature in 1564 in Rabelais's *Gargantua* Book, in reference to the same stew, the expression of which was translated into French (Fournier 1890, "pot"). Then, in the 17th century, still in the field of cuisine, the expression "pot-pourri" was used to describe a sequence of fragments of ate, before finally making its appearance in the field of olfaction to describe a fragrant mixture with multiple ingredients. Although the term originated in Spanish, it is the French meaning which has remained and been adopted by other European languages perhaps out of practical use, "pot-pourri" or "potpourri" – with a few spelling variations – came to describe the same device in English, German, Italian and even Spanish. Finally, through a lexical shift, "pot-pourri" has become a "pot" again, with the expression describing both the contents and the container (*Thésor de la Langue Française*, "pot-pourri"). The potpourri vase is therefore a container with a simple design – a body, a lid and sometimes a handle – and contains a mixture of dry ingredients.

If the term has prevailed in its French form, it is perhaps due to the great enthusiasm this type of vase was met with in France from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Fear of miasmas and of the transmission of disease through pestilence encouraged the French aristocracy to protect themselves against the "bad air" by surrounding themselves with fragrances. Potpourri was thus increasingly adopted to interior spaces for prophylactic purposes. However, the quest for high satisfaction living standards gradually led to the emergence of potpourri as a decorative and luxury item (Corbeau-Parsons 2006; Corbeau-Parsons 2009; Corbeau-Parsons 2014; Corbeau 2006, 2017; Dupuy 2009). At the time in France, particularly in the 18th century, still the field of cuisine, the expression became an important issue, as a meat there was a stock increase in the demand for fragrance diffusers with added decorative value.

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SMELLS

Bud (*Potpourri vase supposed to improve the smell of indoor spaces, which did these places otherwise smack of perfume and tobacco*) It is rare to find in the antique shops of Paris a potpourri vase with its lid still in place, hence, so it seems, rather unpleasant olfactory atmosphere. Louis-Sébastien Mercier's description in his *Tableau de Paris* is instructive on this point:

Narrow, poorly-ventilated streets, houses that are too high and interrupt the free flow of air, butchers' shops, fishmongers' shops, sewers and cemeteries all contribute to corrupting the atmosphere. Filling it with miasmas, which are sometimes so pestiferous that they cause epidemics. Cemeteries, which should be located outside towns, are in the middle of our towns. Cemeteries, which should be surrounded by cemeteries, it only remains that air is stale? The houses stink and the inhabitants are constantly bathed. Everyone knows that a cemetery is a place of putrefaction, a place where bodies are reduced to cesspools. [...] Ça speaks ylus low than many disgusting humors are hidden within your vestibules/ Vitrd, *Potpourri vase supposed to improve the smell of indoor spaces, which did these places otherwise smack of perfume and tobacco*, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, 19th century. Photo: Author. Les cimetières, qui devraient être situés hors des villes, se trouvent au milieu de nos villes. Les cimetières, qui devraient être environnés de cimetières, il ne reste plus qu'à se rendre malade! Les maisons puent et les habitants sont constamment baignés. Tout le monde sait que le cimetière est un lieu de putréfaction, un lieu où les cadavres sont réduits en bouillie. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1781, "Cimetières", p. 1 [Les fumées malfaisantes se concentrent, se chargent de particules impures, il que par un renfermant devient pesant & d'une infinitude malignes. [...] L'odeur cadavereuse est forte et pénétrante, elle pénètre, elle s'insinue, elle exhalaisons répandues continuent à empoisonner les hibles. [...] Indépendamment des cimetières, tout il attrapes un air fétide & malsain qui rend les maisons ainsi poisons, des habitants pestilentiels et incommodes. Chacun a donc la raison des magasins de corruption. [...] Comme une vapeur infecte de cadavres, elle pénètre, elle s'insinue. [...] Ça ayant ville, ces cimetières, ça ayant ville, ces cimetières, ça ayant ville, ces nouvelles, ça ayant ville, ces cimetières, ça ayant ville, ces cimetières, ça ayant ville, ces cimetières