CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SPICE OF LIFE:
A JOURNEY TO PARIS AND A COOKERY BOOK

1. Introduction

In the last years of his life, Lister’s work demonstrated a desire to “understand Mankind” outside a medical context and became both broader and more reflective. In 1698, King William III sent Lister to Paris as a medical attendant to William Bentinck, the Earl of Portland, who was negotiating with the French about the Spanish succession. Lister, for his part, was more interested in French wine and French natural philosophy than diplomacy. As a student he had recorded his observations about his travels in his notebooks, and now, with six months’ time on his hands (from 1 January to mid-June 1698), he reprised the habits of his youth. Lister transformed the notes that he took on his journey into a travel memoir, entitled prosaically A Journey to Paris in the year 1698. Lister’s work became a best seller, which went through three editions, replete as it was with the rhetoric of exoticism, tropes of cultural inclusion and exclusion, and native expressions that added authenticity to his narrative.

Lister’s memoir was dedicated to Lord John Somers (1651–1716), who was a fervent Whig, Lord Chancellor, and President of the Royal Society. This act, and the influence of his niece Sarah Churchill, resulted in Lister being made a physician-in-ordinary to Queen Anne in 1702. Lister had many of what he described as “leisure hours” waiting on the gouty, perpetually pregnant, and overweight monarch. He used his spare time to publish his medical textbook Dissertatio de Humoribus (1709), which synthesized all his previous publications in medicine, but added new iatrochemical speculations. In 1712, the book was reprinted in Amsterdam and as part of an edition of his complete

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1 There was a second and third edition published that same year, also by Jacob Tonson. It continued to be published in travel anthologies throughout the nineteenth century, and, in 1967, Raymond Stearns edited a facsimile edition, which is the one I have been using for purposes of citation, noted as Stearns, Journey.
works; medical students at Leiden and at the University of Edinburgh were still using it in their studies throughout the eighteenth century.\(^2\) In 1709, he was made a second physician-in-ordinary to Queen Anne with few responsibilities due to his own ill health (chronic asthma, and kidney stones, which he wrote made travel by coach an agony, and writing at a desk almost impossible). Subsequently, Lister retired to Epsom to take the waters he had advocated many years before in *De Fontibus*. In his last days, he cultivated an enormous garden replete with exotic fritillaries, remarried, and penned responses against persistent satirists. Through it all, he maintained a lively interest in making observations of the natural world, continued to dissect specimens, and revisited the classical authors he had enjoyed as a student, publishing commentaries on Hippocrates and the Roman cookbook by Apicius.\(^3\) He was a virtuoso to the last.

2. *The Journey to Paris*

Though subsequently mined by historians for its anecdotes and descriptions, most scholars have not appreciated how very different Lister’s *Journey to Paris* was from the standard travel guide.\(^4\) Most early modern guidebooks to France were produced for the benefit of young gentlemen to acquire those accomplishments that became a person of estate and quality. It was thought that learning French, horsemanship, fencing, dancing, and drawing, as well as mixing with the rest of the citizens of the world produced “confident and comely behavior in the English gentleman and rid him of his English rusticity, sourness in conversation and laziness.”\(^5\) Louis XIV, with the help of his engineers, had constructed architectural wonders in Paris, fashioning his capital as the “new Athens,” and tourists came to study the city’s buildings, collections, and manners.\(^6\) The book trade responded. The first travel guide to architectural Paris was written by Germain Brice in 1684; arranged topographically and in a portable format, it went through

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\(^3\) Lister, *Hippocratisi;* Lister, *Apicii Coelii.*

