

GAY PLANTS

ISSUE ONE: MONSTERS

*Illustrate Jecia *13*



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Cover Art:
front - **Illustre Feccia**

“This illustration is inspired by an anthropological book about witchcraft in Europe before and during the Middle Ages: *Donne delinquenti. Storie di streghe, eretiche, ribelli, rivoltose, tarantolate* (by Michela Zucca).

In some pagan visions, the vagina is the centre of the universe. A magic, shamanic, orgiastic and wild dream!”

back - **Moule**



GAY PLANTS F.A.Q.

GAY WHAT?

This is a zine for queer and trans people who have relationships with plants. That is to say, who relate to or interact with them in some way. Perhaps while healing ourselves. Hopefully while becoming stronger (or, to echo the title of a soon-to-be-published book that we like the sound of, 'Becoming Dangerous'). Definitely in the process of decentring, questioning or 'queering' the human.

We want to make more zines. Each one faggier and more vegetal than the last. And maybe branch out into other formats, other methods that deepen the connections we are forming and increase our capacity to act in the world.

WHY PLANTS?

Because we're ridiculous, we can't be serious, we're taking things way too seriously, we're not funny, we're a joke.

Because there are no humans who can teach us these things.
There is just nobody gay enough.

In a way, there's nothing special about plants. For those who prefer to think and create with animals or stones or riots or stars, something similar applies. But of course, to us, there is something special about plants. We've always known it somehow. Or maybe we suspected, but were too shy to ask...

SO... WHICH PLANTS ARE GAY?

We don't want to get bogged down in the right and wrong uses of 'gay'. If the only right circumstance for using it is to describe a self-identifying person, then calling plants gay might be wrong but also harmless, like gendering a cat.

Our experience as people who are regularly called this word and sometimes or always use it about ourselves, is that this has never been the point. Words are weapons that don't belong either to us or to queer-phobes, who have their own quite independent criteria for calling something or someone gay.

And the same goes for queer, fag, faggy, tranny, trans (adjective), trans (noun) (as in 'a trans', yes really we've had that one).

We juggle these words - always somewhere between throwing them out at the world and having them thrown back at us. We use them strategically, playfully, seductively, provocatively. Frankly we are scared of what would happen if we let them fall still, inert, getting heavy with meaning.

If we subtract subconscious sex from the equation we are left with the reactionary perspective which seems to underlie a whole range of deployments of the term 'gay'. Here, 'gay' is generally produced whenever two or more individuals with the same or similar sex organs have sexual contact.

And, you know, with most plants that reproduce sexually, both or all individuals involved exhibit the same two types of sex organs* at work in their reproduction. So, in that sense, plant sex really is gay.

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*Although, as Caspar Heinemann points out in *Fucking Pansies* (see our tribute at the end of this issue):

when we are talking about plant gender, we are potentially discussing at three different scales - the gender of an individual flower, the gender of an individual plant, and the morphology of the species as a whole, all of which determine each other. Although obviously not directly translatable, these multiple scales of plant gender provide a nuanced and useful framework for thinking through human gender, in that we are always referring to a complicated enmeshment of biological sex, individual identity, collective identity and socially enforced role, none of which can be considered independently of one another.

TRANS PLANTS

towards a trans-positive herbalism

One of the main reasons for starting this project is to open up a space for sharing info and ideas around trans-led and trans-competent herbalism.

For those of us who are making or have made changes to our bodies, herbs can provide various forms of support. While herbs generally can't do what synthetic hormones can do, they can be a very useful supplement to their use. And for some people plant-based hormones may be a desirable primary means of physically transitioning.

Beyond this, herbalism includes possibilities for autonomous, co-operative and DIY health practices, all of which lend themselves to a politics of resistance towards institutional and hierarchical arrangements of power and knowledge - a politics which is at the core of transfeminism and the trans liberation movement.

To speak briefly and crudely in a language we are not accustomed to using, we could say that feminists both at the centre and the margins of the third wave have not always known how best to relate to the body of work that comprises the 'women's healths movement'. The contribution of this movement is vast, diverse, and incredibly useful - but in some crucial ways much of it now seems flawed or limited. The main limitation, the reason for its awkward and incomplete inclusion in many contemporary feminist practices, is obviously the essentialist language to which it is tied.

As this work is carried on in different forms today, in the context of the struggles against patriarchy, transphobia, gynophobia, misogyny, and gender itself, the goal should not be to find a single 'perfect' language in which to express ourselves. Instead we need an intersectional, self-critical and empathic approach to language which opens strategic possibilities rather than one that forecloses or solidifies. A process and not a destination. *Gay Plants* doesn't seek reform or 'solutions', but only lines of flight, their points of meeting and their multiplication.

To complicate the matter of misrepresentation, erasure and exclusion through language, transfeminist and trans-positive herbalism encounters this wider issue in radical health circles at the same time as it encounters active, intentional trans-exclusion, and transphobic violence.

Lots of people have been approaching these problems from multiple different directions, for a long time. We are new to this conversation, but we want to offer a space for sharing and commenting on some of these approaches. We think there's plenty of stuff still to do and say. If you're doing and saying this stuff,

we want to share your work alongside related queer and transfeminist enquiries, and pay you for it. We know we've only scratched the surface, but we've put together a selection of resources below - including details of practitioners, projects and sources of information.

Onwards, towards a trans-positive herbalism,
for feral queerness,
against the gendered nightmare,
towards the creative nothing!

GP

xx

Online Resources

Queering Herbalism

queerherbalism.blogspot.co.uk/

'Brown. Queer. Herbalism'

A QTPOC-led project covering black, indigenous, queer herbalism, with a huge amount of info and projects to follow, plus an active blog.

Trans Wellness for Practitioners (Facebook Group)

A place to ask questions and also find individuals, groups, and up-to-date projects and announcements.

TransNatural for Professionals

www.americanherbalistguild.com/sites/default/files/kara_sigler_-_transnatural_o.pdf

class notes - by Kara Sigler, RH (AHG) - www.sfherbalist.com

aimed at professionals/practitioners, there's loads of information that can be used here

Includes 'recipes for Transmasculine spectrum individuals' (by Dori Midnight)

Competent Care for Transgender, GenderQueer and Non-Binary Folks

sites.google.com/vtherbcenter.org/transhealth/home

'A Resource for Herbalists and other Practitioners'

Curated by Vilde Chaya Fenster-Ehrlich and Larken Bunce

Breast Nexum

www.breastnexum.com/

CN: some essentialist language throughout. A transfem site not at all limited to breast growth. There are over 1,500 threads on herb-assisted transitioning with over 15,000 posts. The threads with the most carefully curated information, backed-up with research, should be easy to find. See for example: 'Squirrel's hoarded acorns of information (cache of research info)'

Prism Integrative Accupuncture

prismintegrativeacupuncture.com/resources/more-info-on-herbs-to-support-transition/

A list of mostly external resources but check out the rest of the site, including the other resources sections.

The site's own information on trans health are here, and see particularly the herbal/dietary articles:

transfem:

<https://prismintegrativeacupuncture.com/category/prism-blog/transfeminine-health/>

<https://prismintegrativeacupuncture.com/2015/05/25/feminizing-diet/>

transmasc:

<https://prismintegrativeacupuncture.com/2015/05/18/masculinizing-diet/>
<https://prismintegrativeacupuncture.com/category/prism-blog/transmasculine-health/>

Inclusive Herbal Medicine

<https://inclusiveherbalmedicine.wordpress.com/>

A survey of trans-inclusive herbal medicine resources and research. It was made by three cis people. They're very apologetic about this in their statement...

Trans and Trans-Competent Practitioners

Europe:

Otter Liefte (Safer Healing - thai massage, Belgium)

<https://saferhealing.org/>

US:

big list of herbalists, healers, and health services on Queering Herbalism:

<http://queerherbalism.blogspot.co.uk/p/queertrans-healers.html>

Rae Swersey (Take Care Herbals)

www.takecareherbals.com/tag/rae-swersey

Dori Midnight

www.dorilandia.com

Medicine County Herbs (Janet Kent and Dave Meesters)

<http://www.medicinecountyherbs.com>

Sean Donahue

<http://www.seandonahueherbalist.com/>

Jacoby Ballard

<http://jacobyballard.com/herbal-medicine/>

Zines

Trans-Care Surgery Zine

<http://jacobyballard.com/product/surgery-zine/>

Holistic Care Through Gender Transition

<http://jacobyballard.com/product/holistic-care-gender-transition-zine/>

- by Jacoby Ballard

These zines are both \$10 and sold in the US. Check our site soon for details on reading this zine for free in London (UK).

The Transgender Herb Garden

https://lgbtchat.net/data/attachment-files/2015/03/547_3f187e1a1fc8e308b8fe1e8e5c11a16.pdf

'An MTF guide to disconnecting one's self from big pharma'

- by FlyingOtter (PDF imposed for printing)

An anarchist zine about one trans woman's experience using herbs and not synthetic hormones. The anecdotal value is limited: pretty much she says she took a bunch of herbs for a while and now she passes as a woman, sometimes. But there's lots of useful info, especially about which plants you can 'transplant' or grow from cuttings...

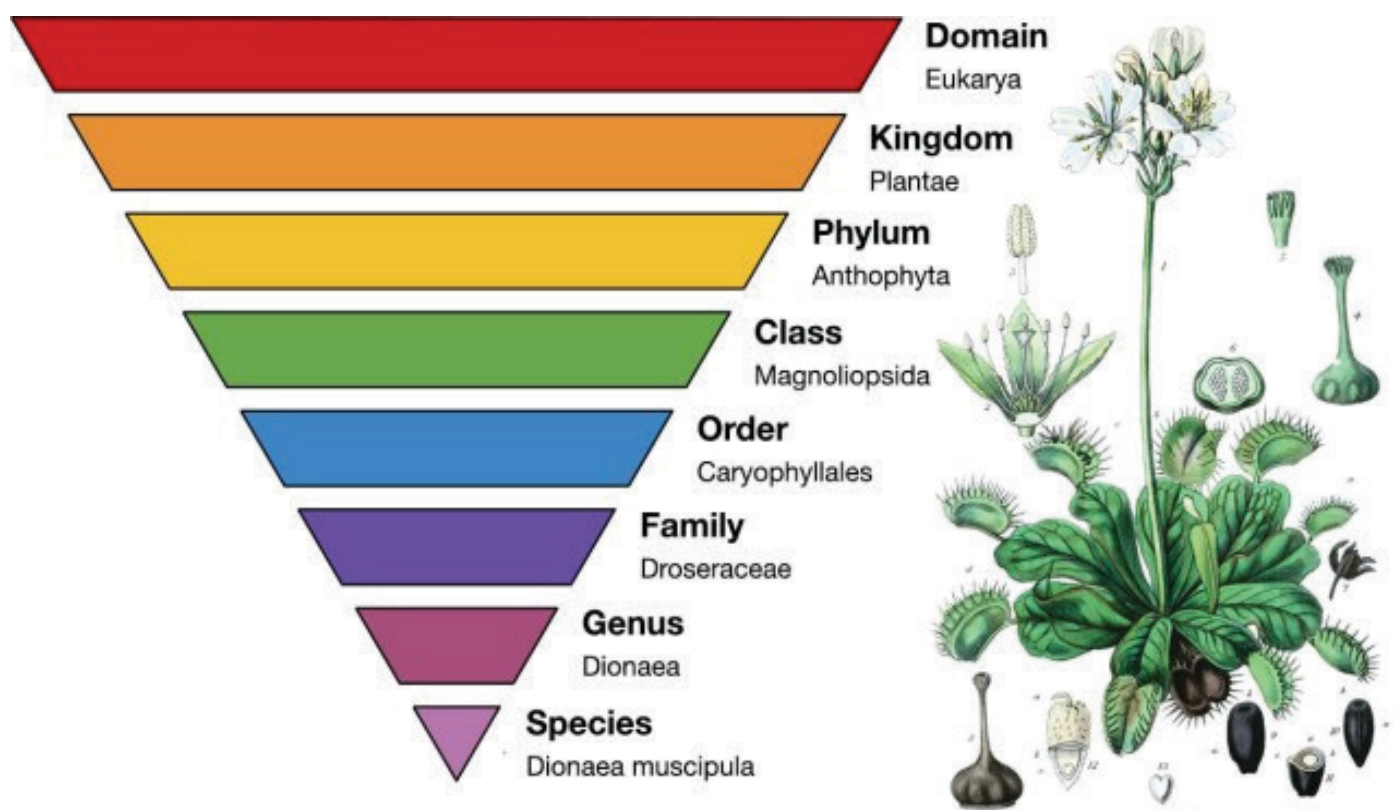
STRAIGHT PLANTS?

a potted history of plant (hetero)sexuality in the west

This is a potted history because it's necessarily partial, uprooted. While in various ways, in different times and places, lots of people have thought of plants as having or expressing sexuality, the idea now recognised by Western science that plants reproduce sexually has a finite history. It was not seriously considered by European naturalists until the late 1600s, and for the next century and beyond the idea in its various articulations would prove both factually controversial and morally and politically charged.

The mania for categorisation that characterised the Eighteenth Century and beyond was inextricable from colonialism. There's plenty to say about colonialism's relation to science, and about science itself as a form of conceptual colonialism. In this period, women and people of color were designated as objects of study but barred, often by law, from joining the professions that did the studying. The twin projects of scientific racism and scientific sexism centred whiteness and maleness and formally established them as ideals from which sexual and racial difference marked a divergence. This essay will focus on early scientific explorations of plant sexuality, which, while not so extreme in their relation to oppressive structures, were not exempt from this kind of politicisation.

The potential that new botanical categories might either undermine or strengthen social categories was recognised by those who presented and disseminated research. When it came to plant sex, some approached the topic with a degree of poetic license. Londa Scheibinger's book *Nature's Body* (which this essay draws from heavily) documents "Hermaphroditic plants 'castrated' by unnatural mothers. Trees



and shrubs clothed in ‘wedding gowns.’ Flowers spread as ‘nuptial beds’ for a verdant groom and his cherished bride” - all language used by Carl Linnaeus and his disciples.

Linnaeus, now seen as a ‘father of modern botany’, set out his system in *Systema Naturae* (1735). It emerged in a crowded market: “By 1799, when Robert Thornton published his popular version of the Linnaean system, he counted fifty-two different systems of botany”.^{*} Linnaeus’s quickly became one of the most popular, and was used with some adaptations throughout the 18th Century. Elements of the system such as binomial species names persist today, effecting the basis on which plants and other organisms are known and studied into the present. Linnaeus was an early adopter of the theory that plants reproduced sexually. Under his original system, plants’ sexual organs were key to their categorisation, in a way that was, without any particular “empirical justification”, framed by patriarchal ordering:

the number of a plant’s stamens (or male parts) determined the class to which it was assigned, while the number of its pistils (the female parts) determined its order. In the taxonomic tree, class stands above order. In other words, Linnaeus gave male parts priority in determining the status of organism in the plant kingdom.

Embedding patriarchy into his categorisation of plants was not the only way human social/sexual categories were mapped onto plants. Linnaeus dispensed with the non-gendered terms ‘stamen’ and ‘pistil’ to describe sex organs, instead using the words ‘andria’ and ‘gynia’ which derive from the Greek words meaning man/woman and also husband/wife. All plant sexual contact is described in terms of marriages and plants are “divided into major groups according to the type of marriage each plant has contracted”. Arguably, he got a bit carried away with his own metaphor:

The flowers’ leaves . . . serve as bridal beds which the Creator has so gloriously arranged, adorned with such noble bed curtains, and perfumed with so many soft scents that the bridegroom with his bride might there celebrate their nuptials with so much the greater solemnity. When now the bed is so prepared, it is time for the bridegroom to embrace his beloved bride and offer her his gifts.³²

Linnaeus’s frame of reference was the form of sexuality he was familiar with - heterosexual, and legitimised by the institutional relation of marriage. These elaborate anthropomorphic dramas seem to echo social changes in the same time period - specifically the emergence of middle-class romance and courtship rituals as marriages based on love/affection rapidly grew, and arranged marriage became less common.

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The ‘sexualist’ theory of plant reproduction took decades to be accepted as fact. Objections based on empirical research persisted into second half of the 18th Century, and there was huge and lasting contention over the moral implications of the way in which plant sex was portrayed.

“William Smellie, chief compiler of the first edition of the *Encycopaedia Britannica*, blasted the ‘alluring seductions’ of the analogical reasoning upon which the sexualist hypothesis was founded.” He took objection to the idea that plants could change their sex, “that trees that had been female might suddenly assume the robust features peculiar to the male.” And, “[he] felt certain that pollen, flying ‘promiscuous-

ly' aloft would produce universal anarchy and cover the earth with 'monstrous productions'." He labeled Linnaeus an "obscene romance writer" for the way in which he presented his findings.

Erasmus Darwin (grandfather of Charles Darwin) wrote a long poem entitled *The Loves of the Plants*, published (at first anonymously) in 1789. With this book, according to Scheibinger, "[the] desire on the part of botanists to view plants as highly erotic creatures reached its peak". The poem is a melodramatic plant sex romp, in which, for example, "an ordinary *Gloriosa Superba* repulses the incestuous advances of her son who, clasped in her arms, steal a guilty glance toward the bed of his passion and, quivering, plunges a dagger into his own heart."

Darwin may have been intentionally using the poetry to attack the social norms around sex and reproduction in his own society - and certainly this was how it was received by some critics. Darwin was an atheist, a critic of social conservatism, and had two illegitimate daughters (Susan and Mary Parker, whose mother is unidentified) "whom he and his second wife raised on equal terms with their other children". *The Loves of the Plants* was published by Joseph Johnson who also published Mary Wollstonecraft and other radicals. Scheibinger particularly draws attention to Darwin's activity in The Lunar Society, a group championing "liberty, equality, and leadership for the middle classes in politics". In 1789 (the year *The Loves of the Plants* was published) the society welcomed news of the French Revolution.

In an atmosphere of "relative political stability" in post-1750s England, "mild expression of unorthodox opinion by men of the gentry and professional classes could safely be tolerated." Under this class protection, extra-marital sex was tolerated and openly discussed. "Sexuality expressed within the bounds of upper-class sensibility and decorum could be tolerated because it did not pose a serious threat to the social order."

The French Revolution changed this atmosphere of stability. By 1791, the conservative backlash to news of revolutionary events in France led to patriotic, pro-royalist riots in England. The Birmingham Riots of 1791 began with an attack on a banquet celebrating the Revolution; Joseph Priestly's home was looted and burned, as were others belonging to dissenting Christians and members of the Lunar society.

Conservative moralists attacked free love and explicitly argued that it had the capacity to "undermine English society in the same way that it had French society." Whether or not Darwin was intentionally championing extra-marital and non-monogamous sex in his plant poetry, at least one conservative thinker, Reverend Richard Polwhele "associated loose sexual imagery with Jacobin free love" and, "writing shortly after the French Revolution, asserted that the open teaching of the sexual system in Botany encouraged unauthorized sexual unions."

He condemned Mary Wollstonecraft and wrote his own poetry to get his point across: 'The Unsex'd Female', is an ideological attack on 'the female Quixotes of the new philosophy' who were inspired by French revolutionary ideals. In one passage cited by Scheibinger, a 'lascivious' and 'licentious' encounter between Wollstonecraft and a lover, takes place under a bush, and the feminist dissenter seems to become some kind of weird plant monster for no clear reason:

A myrtle bower in fairest bloom array'd / To laughing Venus streams the silver shade / Bath'd in new bliss, the Fair-one [Wollstonecraft] greets the bower / And ravishes a flame from every flower; / Low at her feet inhales the master's sighs, / and darts voluptuous poison from her eyes.

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The sexualisation of plants coincided with and participated in a stark acceleration in a long process of human alienation from plant life and the non-human world. Emerging at the peak of classical European imperialism, the new scientific categories held together by gendered hierarchy differed starkly from the Early Modern classifications of plants, which tended to place importance on their medicinal uses and mystical associations. “By the time of Linnaeus, what counted as knowledge of a plant was its name, kind, species, attributes, uses and *litteraria*; the cultural significance of the organism was reduced to one final category.”

The process was extended with particular intensity in the territories colonised by Western states. “European naturalists collected specimens ... but not world views, cosmologies, or alternative ways of ordering and understanding the world [...] they collected the bounty of the natural world, but a bounty divested of traditional names, cultural meanings (symbolic and allegorical), and increasingly of medicinal and culinary uses.” Simultaneously, colonialism undermined and actively dismembered the basis for the maintenance and reproduction of traditional knowledges.

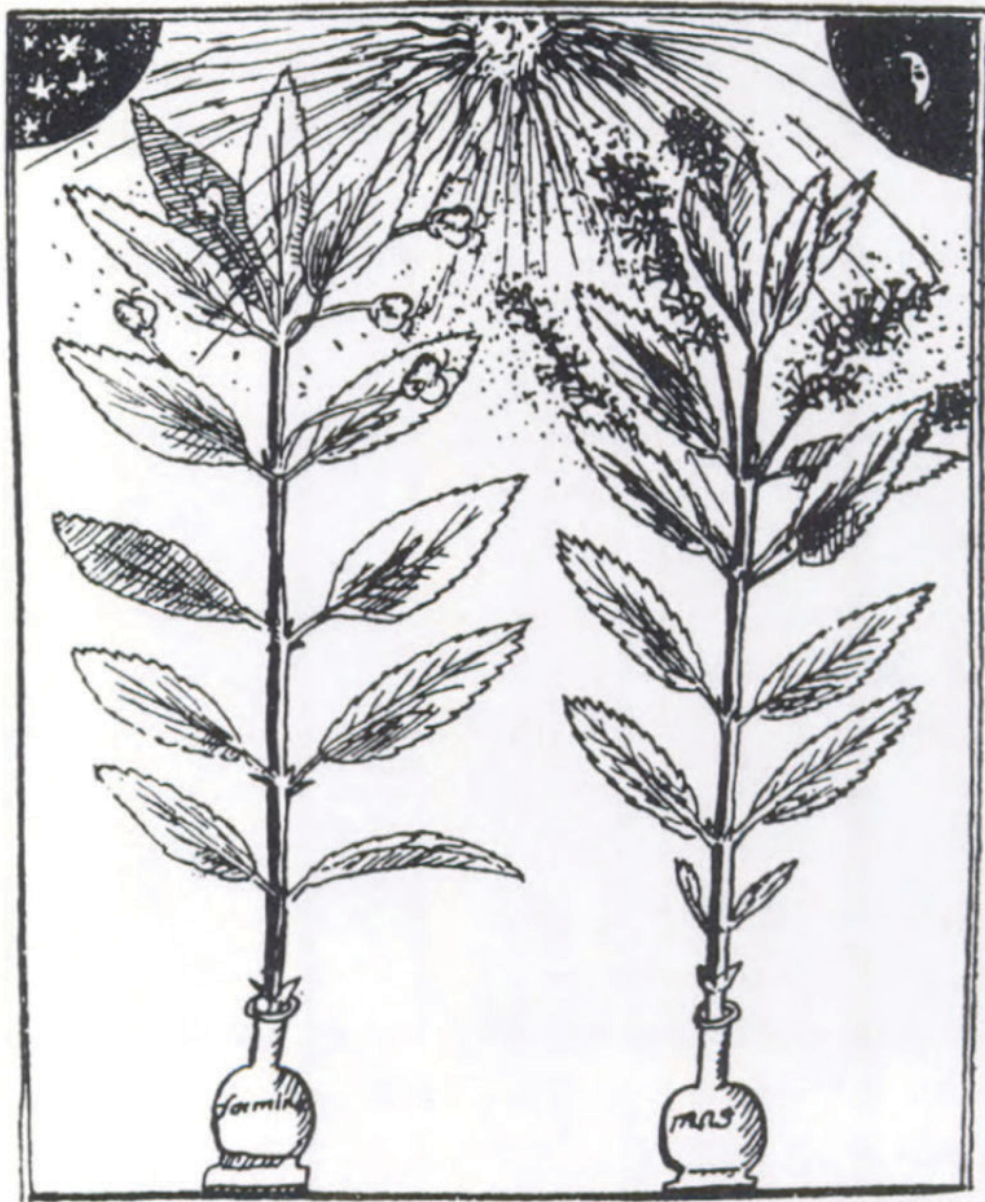


FIG. 1.3. “Love attacks the herbs themselves”: sexual relations between a female (left) and a male (right) plant as portrayed in Linnaeus’s *Praeludia sponsaliorum plantarum* (1729), in *Smärre Skrifter af Carl von Linné*, ed. N. H. Lärjungar and

Scheibinger looks at the near-total exclusion of women from the field of naturalism as one mechanism by which patriarchy and white supremacy asserted itself through botany. Maria Merian, who travelled to Surinam (a Dutch colony) in 1699, “may have been the only European woman in this period to have travelled independently for the service of science”. She collected observations about plants and animals, although “she presented only her observations, leaving classification to her male colleagues.”

Merian discussed the uses of the plant *Flos Pavonis* as an abortifacient. Specifically, she noted that indigenous women were intentionally taking the plant for the express reason that they didn’t want to have children born into slavery. None of the scientists who cited her in the next two centuries mentioned this. One mentioned that it made a nice hedge (Scheibinger, p. 210).

This time period also saw the dismantling of remaining traditional knowledge about contraceptive and abortive methods in Europe itself. The ‘boomerang effect’ of colonialism on domestic populations intensified a centuries-long process. “European domestic and global expansion in the 18th-19th Centuries [...] encouraged pro-natalist, mercantilist policies that targeted for extinction midwife’s and women’s control of fertility.” “Vegetable and mechanical methods” of abortion and contraception – at least 200 if which survived as late as 1600 – fell into obscurity.

Controlling access to plants and plant knowledge was evidently crucial to the development of compulsory heterosexuality. Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch* documents this development as part of the social transformations necessary for the extension of global capitalism’s control over the organisation of life and labour. It seems weird to think about botany having a role in these world-historical processes. But this is because it is precisely the cherished ‘neutrality’ of scientific categories that obscures and erases a sense of the reciprocal transformations that humans and non-humans can perform on each other. A relational view is called for in undoing this perspective.

Scheibinger argues for a correction in the way we see science, and the biases and exclusions that still plague it, in the light of its racist and sexist history. Reflecting on the contemporary relevance of her work, she asks how science might have developed differently if this heritage did not exist, or be practiced differently today if it was properly taken into account. Given the context of Scheibinger’s research, we have to place it in other contexts, such as the work of Federici, in order to take it in a direction that can advance our project. Our hatred for science relates to both the violence in which it is tied up and the logic of control and domination that it upholds. But we have to be realistic about the way it informs our own thinking, and cannot simply dismiss it if we want to make ourselves heard and understood. Without entering into tedious debates about the ‘master’s tools’ we hope that some of the ideas we’ve set out above can animate further strategic thoughts and actions towards the creative dismantling of the scientific perspective.

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At the background of the entwined and at times turbulent early histories of human and plant (hetero)sexualities, are the troublesome plants themselves. Darwin’s and Polwhele’s weird poetic plant fictions showcase both liberal and conservative imaginations straining to make plants fit into the authors’ competing visions of the proper social order. Both were writing at a time when heterosexuality was an emergent category in human relations, carrying with it the idea of sexuality not tied to marriage, and marriage and fidelity not so strongly tied to the social and economic interests of an individual’s family. In the space that this idea opened up, a radical threat to social order seemed to emerge.

Both are alternative ways to deal with this threat and assert order, shutting out the possibilities that spring from its absence. The non-monogamous vision implied by Darwin's poetry at the same time as seeming to invite new possibilities, also closes some off, for example by completely ignoring the perspective we sketched out in 'Gay Plants FAQ' whereby plant sex could be seen as mostly made up of same-sex encounters. Caspar Heinemann notes in 'Fucking Pansies',

Flowers must be kept at arms length to prevent them from contaminating human sexual norms, but the mapping of those norms onto the flowers becomes necessary to attempt to rationalise what is found when those flowers are not kept at arms length.

We want to play among the 'monstrous productions' that the encyclopaedist George Smellie feared would be let out of the box by lurid descriptions of plant sex taking place uncontrollably before our very eyes. In the 18th Century, new ways of seeing plants and new ways of seeing humans needed careful categorisation and imaginative zeal to ensure they stayed tamed, pruned, and in place, like so many plants exhibited in one of the pleasure gardens that proliferated in the same time period. Condemnation, warnings and if necessary violence need to be deployed in the face of anyone who threatened to stray off the path. In the history sketched above, among the voices inviting disobedience to the signage in this imaginary public garden is the unheard call of Gay Plants.

One interpretation of queerness is an attempt to actualise sexual and social existence without reference to the spectres of hetero- and homo-sexuality, and binary gender. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick invites us to consider "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically". From this perspective, it becomes important not to establish 'queer' as another monolith, a governing ideal around which a 'free' sexuality or gender can be organised. We haven't called the zine *Queer Plants* because it might be less fun, less playful, more respectful to categories to do so. We both are and aren't taking the piss when instead we choose to animate the much neglected and historically invisible specter of Gay Plants.

Inspired by and in opposition to Darwin and Polwhele, we want to see the mostly unwritten canon of Gay Plant poetry, and distribute it in this publication. Our choice of theme for this issue seeks to set free the 'monstrous productions', and we take this project further in the next essay 'This Is a Horror Story', examining the genre in which we can feel plants guiding us through the dark, to the limits of human-centred mindset, and into the unknowable beyond.

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*All quotes (in double quotation marks) are from Scheibinger, unless stated otherwise. Quotes from sources she cites are in single quotation marks.



THIS IS A HORROR STORY

It obviously takes a sense of humour to imaginatively navigate the destabilisation of categories that Gay Plants invites. But we also think a sense of horror is a valuable tool.

Not horror as a moralising reaction. As in: ‘I am horrified at what humans are doing to the world / each other’. But something that perhaps takes this as the surface feeling of something deeper, a dark pool in which to immerse ourselves and then emerge, changed.

Horror can shine a light on the mutilation of self and others at the dead centre of what we have been taught to understand as normal, healthy existence. It can show us how life in the ordered garden of civilisation exists in symbiotic relation to the monsters that lurk outside its walls. The stories about these monsters are multiple, and shifting. The ones which are told today may not be the ones told tomorrow, but the classics never get old: race, family, nation - and their respective outsiders...

A friend sent us a pdf of a book edited by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga, called *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*. In her introduction, Keetley brings together some of the reasons that plants can evoke horror:

Affronting our blindness to it, vegetation stages, in plant horror, what Evan Calder Williams (2011) has aptly called “the insurrectionary prospect of the background coming monstrously into its denied prominence” [...] Randy Laist (2013) claims that plants “transect ontological boundaries” and challenge “our basic assumptions about what it means to be a living thing”

We have already attempted to outline how plant gender and sexuality have at some points been in danger of breaking through into the conceptual foreground, messing up the careful categorisations at the base of ordered social existence. Gay Plants, then, in celebrating this, takes its cue from something that Keetley and the assorted theorists she quotes find again and again in the world of human/plant interactions.

Plants easily become monsters, then, because they are the absolute “other,” because they exist on and beyond the outer reaches of our knowledge, because they “silently deconstruct,” as Marder (2013) insists, our very system of metaphysics. Never completely accounted for by humans’ efforts to categorize them (although we have certainly tried), plants already lurk perilously close to the very definition of the monstrous—which [...] centers precisely on its refusal of known categories. Noël Carroll (1990) defines the monster as embodiment of the impure — “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory” (p. 32), “not classifiable according to our standing categories” (p. 34), and “un-natural relative to a culture’s conceptual scheme of nature” (p. 34).”

One example of a conceptual scheme that plants disrupt is that of the food chain. Keetley explores this, first with reference to a human/animal encounter:

“In an insightful and moving essay that describes her near-fatal attack by a saltwater crocodile, Val Plumwood (1999) explores what it means to realize, as she puts it, “that I was prey,” uttering visceral protest of this fact: “This can’t be happening to me. I’m a human being, not meat” [...] “I glimpsed the world for the first time ‘from the outside,’ as a world no longer my own, an unrecognizably bleak landscape composed of raw necessity, that would go on without me, indifferent to my will and struggle, to my life or death” (p. 79).

When we encourage you to think about the landscape of ‘raw necessity’ evoked above, we are not trying to talk about some kind of elemental state of ‘nature’ where every decision and interaction is a question of bite or be bitten, or whatever. We’ve already tried to make it clear that it is not our project to rest on simplistic binaries of the natural and the unnatural, and at any rate there are plenty of forms of behavior and relationship in the more-than-human world which do not fit the caricature of all-against-all carnage.

But this does not change the quality of absolute indifference that Plumwood describes above. In fact, as Keetley points out, this perspective is intensified if rather than thinking about the possibility - unlikely for most of us - of being eaten by animals, we consider instead the very likely prospect - for many of us - that we will be (posthumously) eaten by plants. As Keetley puts it, “Each of us is, finally, what Plumwood (2012) calls a “food-providing self as material body” (p. 11). And each of us becomes the landscape from which we spend our lives trying to distinguish ourselves.”

We would like you to think of this, not as somehow revealing something about the true face of ‘nature’, but rather as illuminating a perspective, almost a psychological state, and the basis of a set of practices - all of which we can call ‘green’. We want to align ourselves with certain anarchists who associate with the colour green perhaps in spite of what the ‘green movement’ is and has been in the 20th and 21st centuries. For the green movement, green is a colour in which ‘to do politics differently’ (UK Green Party website, 2017) - a bright, healthy colour in which existing institutions and relations might be painted so that they can prevent or withstand future crises. Whether governments, corporations, NGOs, or ‘grassroots’ movements are best placed to do this painting is perhaps a matter of disagreement internal to the movement that covers itself with the green flag.

For us and our friends, green - as in black and green, as in green anarchy - is so much richer than this. One thing that enriches it is this streak of darkness through which green becomes visible as the colour of horror, “the perennial and terrifying ability of vegetal life to swallow, engulf, overrun, and outlive humans”. The backdrop suddenly becomes vivid foreground in the form of the realisation, horrific from a certain human-centred point of view, that in all likelihood our ‘individual’ fate is, ultimately, to become plant food.

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Another horror theorist not mentioned by Keetley is Eugene Thacker, who outlines an anti-humanist philosophy of horror in his book *In the Dust of This Planet*, which is taken up by Alejandro de Acosta in the essay ‘Green Nihilism or Cosmic Pessimism’. The latter essay is in part a reflection on the anonymous anarchist pamphlet ‘Desert’ which argues for the abandonment of any project predicated on global anarchist revolution or an attempt to ‘save the world’ from catastrophic climate change brought about by the capitalist/statist organisation of society. ‘Desert’ sketches a more realistic future in which climate change renders the world increasingly unmanageable. The ‘future’ disintegrates from a singular global scenario (where we’re doomed or we’re saved), into multiple fragmentary futures. Roughly, ‘Desert’ envisages the retreat of the dominant regime from some limited areas and the expansion of ‘deserts’ (but not the total collapse of control societies entirely, which may in fact strengthen their grip on some parts of the world). The desert is abandoned but not totally uninhabited terrain, the space left behind by civilisations, where unorganised life has the potential to flourish in spite of the ruination. Both the author of ‘Desert’ and de Acosta are attracted to the possibility of cohabiting with these desert life-forms, not by founding new societies but by abandoning the logic of society entirely.

De Acosta detects something in Desert which he expands on by bringing it into contact with Thacker's thought. He sees all social life as grounded in the delusion that the world is somehow 'for' humans. The new realities into which a changing climate is taking us confront us with the negation of this view, which Thacker calls 'Cosmic Pessimism':

The view of Cosmic Pessimism is a strange mysticism of the world-without-us, a hermeticism of the abyss, a noumenal occultism. It is the difficult thought of the world as absolutely unhuman, and indifferent to the hopes, desires, and struggles of human individuals and groups. Its limit-thought is the idea of absolute nothingness [...]

This is the perspective encountered by Val Plumwood in her run-in with a crocodile, and the one which, following Dawn Keetley, we think plants are well placed to help us to see. To Thacker, it is 'unconsciously represented' in the form of apocalyptic horror narratives

[...] in the many popular media images of nuclear war, natural disasters, global pandemics, and the cataclysmic effects of climate change. Certainly these are the images, or the specters, of Cosmic Pessimism, and different from the scientific, economic, and political realities and underlie them; but they are images deeply embedded in our psyche nonetheless.

Taking this thought on, the essay concludes with some reflections on its possible implications for a Green Anarchist/Nihilist practice.

[Resistance] manifests in unknowable ways, obeying no conscious plan. It could well be a particularly fancy kind of neurosis; but survival means just this, that we do not know the way out of the situation and we must live here with the idea of anarchy. Another way to put this is that if our rejection of society and state is as complete as we like to say it is, our project is not to create alternative micro-societies (scenes, milieus) that people can belong to, but something along the lines of becoming monsters. It is probable that anarchy has always had something to do with becoming monstrous. The monster, writes Thacker in another of his books [*After Life* (2010)], is unlawful life, or what cannot be controlled.

[...]

That the cosmos is not our natural home is a thought outside the ways in which we might survive here. To say we survive instead of living is in part to say that we have no idea what living is or ought to be (that there is probably no ought-to about living). But also that we resist any ideal of life, including our own. Becoming monstrous is therefore the goal of dismantling the milieu as anarchist identity machine. Being witness to the nameless thing, to the unthinkable life or Planet or Cosmos, is not a goal. It is not a criterion of anything, either. It is more like a state, a mystical, poetic state (though in this state I am the poem).

//

Since Gay Plants is mostly just a poorly-disguised fanzine for Baedan, this discussion of horror gives us a good excuse to bring up the bit in Baedan 1 when they talk about Lee Edelman's reading of Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller 'The Birds'.

Most of the first journal is a response to Lee Edelman, a US-based academic queer theorist, whose book *No Future* (2004), defends queer negativity against the logic of liberal inclusion governing, among other things, the US gay rights movement. Reading with rather than against right-wing condemnations of queers as posing a threat to children, society, and the future, Edelman positions queerness as the ne-

gation of this ideal triad, which he groups together as the meta-ideology of ‘reproductive futurism’. (I mean, I could make this point more clearly, but if you’re remotely interested you should really check out Baedan 1. It’s free, online, at the Anarchist Library.)

In a reading which Baedan claims is “borrowing heavily from [Guy] Hocquenghem’s understanding of the body as colonized by language through the process of domestication”, the uncontrollable birds who flock out of nowhere to terrorise humans in the film are seen to behave as a dark, unknowable force acting against “the domestication, the colonization, of the world by meaning.”

Their choice of targets, including a children’s birthday party, is seen by Edelman as striking “at the very organization of meaning around structures of subjectivity that celebrate, along with the day of one’s birth, the ideology of reproductive necessity.”

The Birds mark for Edelman “the unacknowledged ghosts that always haunt the social machinery and the unintelligibility against which no discourse of knowledge prevails.” As such they “lay to waste the world because they so hate the world that will not accept them that they, in turn, will accept nothing but the destruction of that world.”

Baedan is against Edelman’s reduction of queer negativity to a “tame survey of film and literature”, but they are prepared to take what they find useful and leave the rest. In this case they are inspired by the image of

resistance as a storm-like mass, a de-centralized swarm of bodies ceaselessly attacking their enemies. Pursuant to a reading of the birds, our storm must be irrational, incomprehensible, anonymous, mob-like, offensive, de-meaning, incoherent, and unrelenting.

Baedan also quotes the Individualist Cell of Birds of Fire who articulate a vision of queer insurrection as lived practice: “our revolution has already begun, we make it from day to day [...] we make it when we stop being men and women and become unique human beings.”

//

When we contemplate de Acosta’s proposal that ‘we must become monsters’, humourously taken up by Aragorn! in ‘A Child’s Guide to Nihilism’ (a colouring-in exercise asks: ‘which monster will you become?’), we have Thacker’s horror narratives, and Baedan’s invective as a model of what to do with them. Their encounter with real, imagined and cinematic birds shows us that monstrosity is something already existing in society’s unconscious, a latent quality belonging to supposedly innocuous beings.

What makes them so credibly and instantaneously transform into monsters is the a result of the fragility of society’s grip on ‘nature’ and ‘human nature’, a flimsy script always at risk of failing to keep things in their place. The ‘absolute rupture of the known’ (Keetley) is not some distant horizon but a lurking presence, a quality waiting patiently in the camouflage of the ordinary, its time to strike, particularly in strange climatic times, perhaps not so far away.

If we must become monsters, then it’s true, we have to dwell on what kind of monsters we’ll be. It is with this task in mind that we have included resources about intuitive herbalism in our online resources section (see gayplants.noblogs.org), as well as the contributions by Joelle Solarsky and María Medusa. Holding onto our twin senses of humour and horror, how can we be open to letting the plants show us what kind of monsters to become?

WE DO NOT THRIVE IN YOUR LIGHT

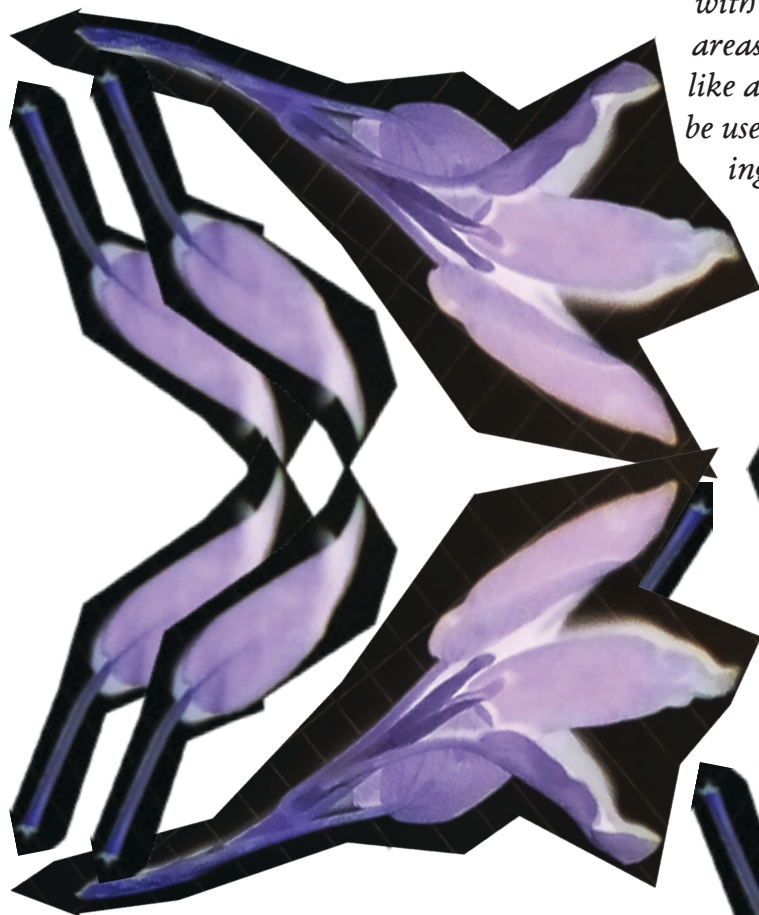
Joelle Solarsky
notes on moon gardens

As the moon moves through its phases, we see it look many different ways. It takes on different identities. Full, half, crescent, new, and every phase in between, that's more than just a phase. It goes through its shape-shifting journey while remaining itself.

The Moon connects us to the subtle aspects of ourselves: our intuition, our feelings, our shadow. Who we are when we're alone with ourselves. How we bloom in the night. Reflecting us to ourselves in the half-light, for all that we contain.



Mugwort has long been associated with the moon and with dreams. It's known to provide protection to the areas where it's planted, helping your garden to feel like a sheltered sanctuary. All parts of this plant can be used in medicinal preparations to enhance dreaming, and its silver leaves support the mystical space of a moon garden.



Our depths can't be explored by day, but can be seen by the dim light of the Moon.

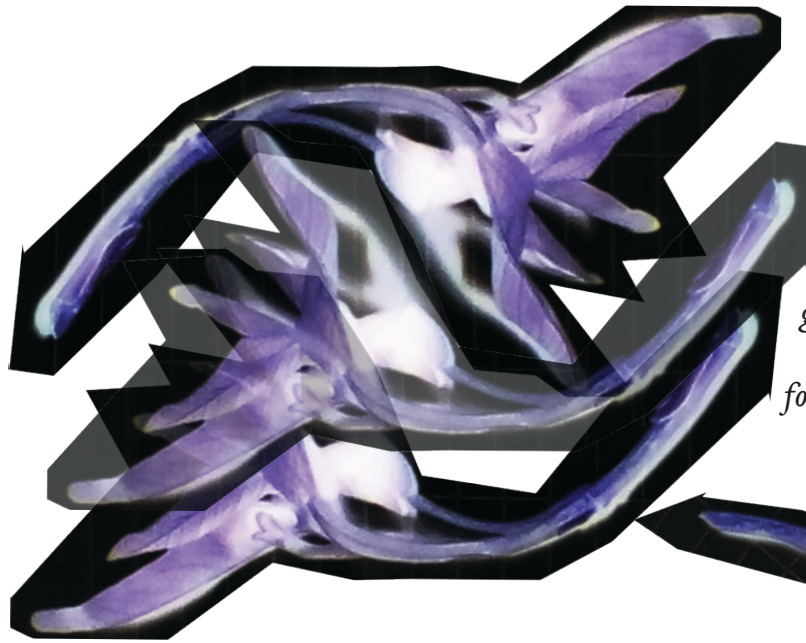


Night Phlox have pale pinwheel faces and purple bottoms, but are best known for the scent of honey and vanilla they give off at night. For their sweet aroma, night phlox plants are known as midnight candy. Night phlox are resilient plants that can adapt to many conditions, and will also attract nighttime birds, bees and butterflies for late night visits.



Moon garden plants grow white and silvery from the soil, reflecting back all visible light to be absorbed by the night.

Queers absorb social influences as fertilizer, and internalize it through an alchemical process of transformation.



Sage adds a soothing presence to a moon garden, with silver colored leaves that reflect the light of the moon and stars. The silvery foliage gives off its powerful scent when crushed between fingers, releasing a purifying fragrance.

Many moon garden blooms can be thought to be weeds. They can have high toxicity. Although poisonous they're also used by those who know the powerful effects that they can have in altering consciousness.



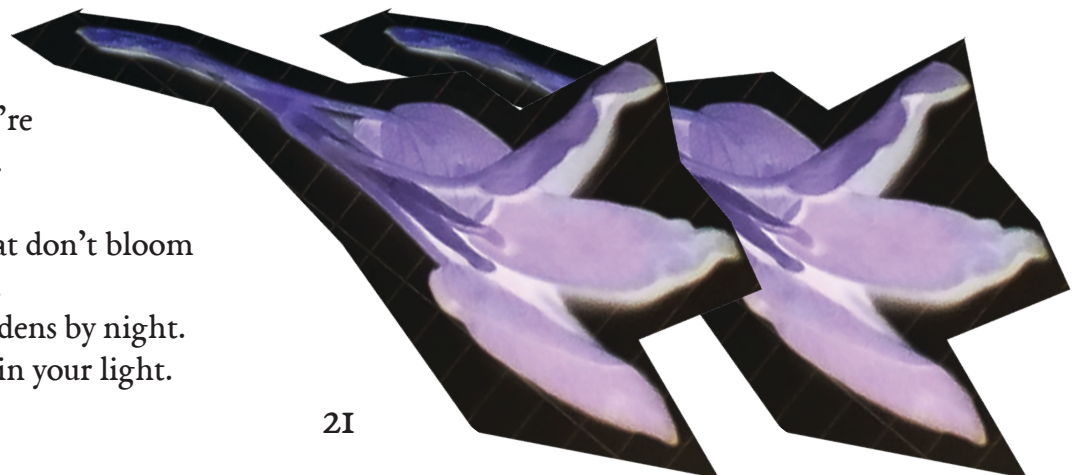
Moonflowers unfurl their large, pale trumpet-shaped flowers in the evening and curl up again for last call with the dawn. These tenacious blooms resist heat and drought, and will reseed to the point that some consider them to be invasive. As a Datura plant, these flowers have been associated with divination and dark magic for how unpredictable and potentially toxic they can be when ingested.

Queerness alters consciousness, to turn against the institutions that have power, to riot and demonstrate and organize through forms that the current mainstream society views as an attack.

Harvest and dry the blooms and leaves from moon garden plants to use as charms for support, to remember the life that shines in the darkness.

It's an act of resistance to bloom in a world where we're thought to be weeds.

We tend to the flowers that don't bloom by day.
We take to our gardens by night.
We do not thrive in your light.



MARGINS AND MURMURATIONS

an extract from the novel by
Otter Liefte

After dinner, Ash and Pinar sat outside the cabin drinking an infusion of hops and valerian and watching the darkening forest. A pair of owls were calling each other from across the valley.

“Are you feeling any better?” asked Pinar.

“A little.” Ash slurped noisily from her hot tea. “I’m still a bit freaked out. I mean, I know it was five years ago, but somehow, I managed to forget that night. Or at least to dull the memory a bit.”

“I wish I could do more.”

“It’s fine, you do plenty for me.”

“I just wish I—”

Ash thumped her cup back down on the table.

“Let it drop, Pin. When I need help, I’ll ask for it.”

“Okay...sorry.”

God, she never stops fussing, thought Ash. There’s a reason we don’t live together anymore.

“Do we have clinic tomorrow?” Pinar asked gently. She already knew the answer—their herbal clinic for the resistance had been every Tuesday for the last three years. In all that time, they had only missed one week when they both came down with the flu and neither of them could get out of bed.

“Yes,” said Ash glad to change the subject. “I think Yonah might pass by in the evening to pick up another batch for the City group. She said the trans collective had run out of oestrogenics and androgen blockers again—”

“We have enough hops for sure, I think we’re low on red clover though. I’ll go and get some in the morning.”

“Perfect. There should be another hormone drop off at the river in a couple of days as well, she’ll tell us when.”

As Ash’s boat-home was situated at the edge of the State’s boundaries, she received regular medical deliv-

eries from resistance members outside.

For years they had fought to keep the trans part of the clinic running as they were told again and again that hormones for trans women were ‘non-essentials’. But Ash knew that for some people, having access to hormones, or at least the herbal replacements, was as essential as anything else: for many, it meant the difference between life and death.

“Last time there was almost nothing in the delivery,” she said sadly. “It’s getting harder every month to source this stuff.”

“Yeah. I’m worried about that too. The herbs are great, but I’m not sure that they’re as effective. Unless people take such large quantities they get liver damage.”

“And the pharmaceuticals destroyed the ecosystem. And mass produced oestrogens and prozac killed the starlings...”

Pinar nodded silently. She’d heard this rant many times before.

“Guess what?” said Ash cynically. “The system’s really fucked up.”

Pinar smiled despite herself.

“We just have to keep trying,” she said. “I’m a little more optimistic than you, I guess.”

“How so?”

“Well, we’ve survived this far. Despite what they told us, it was never about consumer choices in the supermarket—or the pharmacy—or feeling guilty for social systemic evils. It’s always been about wider social change, about tearing down the crap and building better alternatives.”

“—Of course—”

“And although the able-bodied cis guys kept telling us that we’d be the first to die after the crash—the disabled and the pharmaceutically dependent and the trans people—you know what? We’re still here.”

“We sure as hell are.”

“And in fact the resistance would have been nothing without us. Isn’t that enough reason to be hopeful? I guess I just really want to be optimistic, even if it’s hard sometimes.”

Ash leaned over and gave her friend a peck on the cheek.

“I’ll let you.”

They sat quietly for a while, listening to the sounds of the forest.

“The planes stopped flying overhead,” Ash commented as she looked up at the red sky. “It’s been weeks since I saw one.”

With no phones, no television and no internet, it was rare to get news from the outside world. Ash hadn't left the State's boundaries for the last three decades, Pinar even longer than that. They had often talked about leaving, but every time the conclusion was the same: they were still needed there, they still had work to do for the resistance.

"Maybe the oil finally ran out?"

"Maybe," said Ash. "Hopefully."

Pinar finished her tea and stood up.

"Ready for bed?"

"Go ahead, I'll be there in a minute. I just want to go do something in the forest. I'll be a while, so go ahead and sleep if you like."

"Okay, hon, good night."

"Night, Pin."

Ash stepped off the little porch of the cabin and following a route she knew like the back of her hand, she walked out into the dark.

MAGICAL CHEAT SHEET

María Medusa

INTRO

Here I've compiled a list that will serve you as a starting point to magic and plants so the path is simpler and you find yourself immersed in the word of herbalism in a much more smooth manner.

CANDLES

blue (light): calm

black: protection

brown: finding what is lost

green: growth

lavander: power

orange: creativity

red: power

rose: love

silver: victory

white: healing

yellow: intelligence

HERBS

clary sage: menstrual cramps, calming, soothes veins

calendula: anti-inflammatory, regulates period, skin infections

echinacea: relieves allergy symptoms, sunburn

grapefruit: happiness, tonic
gingko biloba: oxygenates brain (better memory)
jasmine: antioxidant, improve immune system
lavender: calming, helps sleep, better breathing, soothing
oregano: improved metabolism, menstrual cramps, energy boost
rose of castille: antidepressant, aphrodisiac, hangover
rosemary: detoxify, improve memory, respiratory system
thyme: circulation, allergies, anti-fungal, asthma
turmeric: tooth aches, chest pain
sage: pms, regulate menstrual cycle, mental stability

Can be implemented into your life by making infusions, tinctures, using essential oils or adding them to your cooking.

CRYSTALS

amethyst: eases sadness
agate: detoxification, reduce nervousness
carnelian: connect with inner self
citrine: happiness and boosts self-esteem
lapis lazuli: mental clarity
moonstone: discover your true self
onyx: cleanse air and creativity
quartz (clear): cleanses aura
quartz (rose): love and harmony
quartz (smoky): protects from nightmares
tiger's eye: guidance through travel and difficult times

PHASES OF THE MOON

new moon: setting intentions, intention, planting seeds
first quarter moon: action, paying attention
full moon: peak energy, blossoming
last quarter moon: releasing what no longer suits us

If you want to start a grimoire or book or shadows or simply a book with all your notes hopefully this will help you get started.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Alongside the resources on trans herbalism printed above (see 'Trans Plants') we're putting together a list of resources online, with links to relevant info and related projects.

See the Gay Plants website: gayplants.noblogs.org

You'll also find the call-out for the next issue of the zine.

If you have any questions about that or would be interested in being involved in the project in any way, you can email: gayplants@riseup.net

FUCKING PANSIES

(a tribute)

Caspar Heinemann didn't reply to our email, so we didn't put an extract from their excellent literary/critical essay, 'Fucking Pansies' in these pages. But that's ok because it's on Ecocore and it's free. You should read it.

Fucking Pansies explores the affinities between queers and flowers, and how expressions of this affinity produce a kind of poetic ecology or ecological poetics. Read against a human cis-heterosexual logic (perhaps, in other words, a civilised one), flowers, rooted as they are in sexual selection and interspecies encounters, are helplessly queer, accruing a whole range of negative associations in the paranoid environment of straightness - associations that they share promiscuously with human queers. Heinemann champions this intersection as 'politically vital from an ecological perspective for imagining what abundance and joy could mean outside of physical re/production and consumption'.

If we can say that affinity can go two ways between human and non-human beings, it is insofar as it springs from somewhere deeper than what statism and capitalism understand as the 'individual', recognisable through its institutionally-mediated identity categories (straight, gay, cis, trans, human, etc). To borrow Tiqqun's term, affinity could be said to spring from distinct 'forms-of-life', or drawing on Max Stirner we could say from 'The Unique'.

Indeed, there is a Tiqqunist anti-politics of insurrection lurking in Heinemann's poetic sources, and in their call to push back against 'false scarcity and repressive taxonomies of gender and sexuality, creating breathing space for a politics of cornucopia, possibility and propagation outside the already-existing.' In this exploration we have a rich example of the 'attenuation' of forms-of-life (or turning down - picture a dimmer-switch) performed by the state and its institutions.

Working against this attenuation, we see in the creative encounters between queers and plants the adoption of a strategic opacity that is also a flaunting of excess, frivolity, artifice: 'speaking through flowers' acknowledges 'the impossibility and possible undesirability of an entirely transparent existence' choosing instead, as 'resistance to and avoidance of biopolitical control, a tactic of conscious illegibility and subterfuge'.

The Crimethinc-aligned critical queer anarchist pamphlet 'Terror Incognita' describes how the state, with its aspirations towards universality and omniscience, imagines its outside or limits in terms of 'terror'. It may be that this is mediated through an 'inclusive exclusion' or permanent state of exception (in Agamben/Schmitt's terms) which in fact buttresses the normal operation of state power, but it may as 'Terror Incognita' proposes, that the possibility of an untamed, unmapped outside nevertheless haunts the statist project. There is the figure of the 'terrorist' exploited as a pretext for the extension of surveillance measures, then there is the US changing its legal definition of terror in 2002 so that it no longer risked including its own military actions under the definition, and then there is the real, felt affect of terror.

If queers have been and in some ways still are rendered monstrous, terrifying figures, precisely because of the threat they have posed to reproductive futurity, then their natural habitat is the unmapped, 'non-striated' spaces that haunt the imagination of the settler, the coloniser and the civiliser. 'It is the

destination of our lines of flight. It is what lies outside consensus reality'. Not incidentally, the physical landscapes that historically evoked the terror in question, were those rendered less manageable and hospitable by the density of plant growth: the swamp, the forest, the wilderness beyond the frontier...

Heinemann introduces us to CA Conrad's poetic ritual performance 'Security Cameras and Flowers Dreaming the Elevation Allegiance (For Susie Timmons)', which sees Conrad taking on pansies as an accomplice in response to a technology that seeks to make the city transparent and available to state and capitalist surveillance (in counter-insurgency terms 'topsight'). We think this is an aptly monstrous image to leave you with:

CA describes his frustration at the prevalence of security cameras in his home city of Philadelphia ('FUCK YOU WATCHING US ALWAYS!!'). The ritual resistance he describes involves taking a basket of edible flowers to the scene ('I eat pansies, I LOVE pansies, they're delicious buttery purple lettuce!!'). He then looks directly into the camera and proceeds to place his tongue in the flower 'in and out, flicking, licking, suckling blossoms.' When confronted by a security guard he responds 'I'M A POLLINATOR, I'M A POLLINATOR!!'

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOS

Moule is French for mussel alongside being slang for vagina. Moule's illustrations celebrate a variety of femme figures and feelings, promoting self care, sisterhood and female empowerment. The childlike illustrations present both vulnerability and empowerment in their hairy nakedness, reflecting that there is strength in softness. Moule explores themes of mental health, sexuality, feminism alongside everyday issues of being a woman. (insta: @moulemoule / website: www.moule.uk)

cybermoon is a straight-edge, vegan, queer, non-binary, anti-fascist nerd provisionally operating in Western Europe.


Joelle Solarsky is a non-binary queer person living on Mayan land in Guatemala. They're into learning more about plants, their connection to the cosmos, and sharing inclusive information about accessible healing practices on www.queeringhealth.com

Otter Liefte (otterliefte.com) is a working class, femme, trans woman currently living across the channel [ed: *from the territory dominated by the Brexit-British state*] where she runs a trans and queer focused holistic clinic called Safer Healing (saferhealing.org). Margins and Murmurations is her first novel. In-between epic book tours, Otter shares her knowledge and experience through trans-competency workshops and training and has been an organiser with the Radical Herbalism Gathering for several years. Having lived on four continents, she speaks between three and five languages and rarely sits still long enough to watch the seasons change.

María Medusa (@venenoparamedusas) writes poems, works with herbs and is part of the feminist collective Féminas (@feminasclub).

Illustre Feccia ('illustrious scum') is a poetically provocative oximoron, an expression of the absurd nature of things. His sources of inspiration include satire, squat culture, punk, and situationism - artistic movements which have been inspired by nihilist and libertarian philosophy. fecciax.blogspot.co.uk

Contributors do not necessarily endorse each others' work or the editorial content of this zine.



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GAY PLANTS

IS AN ASSAULT ON THE ORDER OF THINGS.

WE LONG FOR THE DAY OUR DEVIANT TENDRILS
CREEP OVER YOUR HIGHSTREETS AND GALLERIES,
YOUR PUBS AND PARLIAMENTS, YOUR DISMAL
LABORATORIES.

WE DO NOT DESIRE INCLUSION IN YOUR SYSTEMS
OF CLASSIFICATION. WE DO NOT THRIVE IN YOUR
LIGHT. WE SPREAD - IN WAITING - OUR ROOTS -
UNDERGROUND.