

# The Pomegranate

## Readers' Forum

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DANIEL SCHULKE WRITES:

I am writing concerning the Solanaceae, Flying Ointments, and modern experimentation. As an ethnobotanist, plant folklorist and herbalist within Traditional British Witchcraft, and a 15-year pupil of the Solanaceae as well, there are a number of points I would add to Chas Clifton's article "If Witches Didn't Fly" (*Pomegranate* #16).

The first concerns the stae of academic investigation of the so-called 'Flying Ointments', which is inconclusive. While numerous references to flying ointments may be found in Inquisition literature (and, less frequently, in medieval and early modern magical literature), there is no consensus among scholars concerning the extent of these unguents' historical use in European folk magic. Some positions, consumed with the neo-pagan romance that Flying Ointment has accreted in recent years, assume the ointment's widespread ritual use in medieval and early modern Europe in connection with an equally romantic view of folk magic. Others dismiss the phenomenon entirely as part of the sabbatic inquisition-construct. Some investigators exclusively focus on the pharmacological

aspects, while others consider the powers of the Unguent to have been merely sympathetic magic attached to fats and oils in general. Modern 'entheogenic' approaches seem almost exclusively preoccupied with 'unraveling the secret' of the Flying Ointment, either attempting a deterministic explanation, or trying to create an easy, fast, and convenient method of ingestion for modern practitioners. Few researchers seem ready to include in their investigations the predominating folk-cosmologies of those who would have been using these sacraments, their magico-religious practices, or to examine the existence of other sacred unguents used in European folk magic but not in connection with 'flying'.

Second, in examining modern usage of the Solanaceous plants and the Sabbatic Unguent, we might scrutinize the predominating approach to inebriating drugs and psychotropic plant sacraments in modern industrialized countries, which has probably been influenced as much by western allopathic medicine as by the 'Psychedelic Sixties'. Specifically, the notion that if the correct chemical compounds are isolated from a plant and made available in a convenient, easy-to-ingest form, a desirable, easily-measured outcome will result. While there are some similarities between this methodology and that of folk magic in late-medieval and early modern Europe, there were no doubt other factors that were considered which have now been largely abandoned: the ritual context of the ointment use, the magical praxis with which the sacrament was integrated; the influence of the spirits for beneficence or harm; observation of omens; and the knowledge and magic of preparation, admistration, and antidotes.



Sensitivity to tropane alkaloids (atropine, hyoscyamine, scopolamine and cuscohygrine, etc.) can vary widely from person to person, and their concentration in plant tissue varies from plant to plant. Therefore, to assert that x amount of Thorn-Apple is safe to ingest is not only irresponsible, but also misses the point. The Hexing Herbs, by their nature, refuse to be taken conveniently on human terms.

A wise approach to plant medication is beginning with the Nature of the plant itself. This is especially important with the plants of the Solanaceae. Unfortunately, few modern practitioners seeking to integrate phytognostic sacraments within their work realize that medicinal protocols are not identical for all plants: one cannot use the same approach to Angel's Trumpet (*Brugmansia* spp.) as one would use for Cannabis. This is more than a matter of personal safety, it is also basic common courtesy to the plant in question. A basic education in toxicology, as well as work with such plant preparations as flower essences, greatly aids a practitioner in this. Committed, sincere magical praxis attuning the subtle body (such as ecstatic trance or oneiromancy) potentiates and contextualizes the use of such plants.

Finally, many modern practitioners who work with these plants observe a taboo of silence concerning the specifics of their use, for to divulge such secrets not only invites irresponsible use and possible litigation, but in some cases is passed on purely in an initiatory context.

Daniel A. Schulke  
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ANGELINE KANTOLA REPLIES  
TO DAVE GREEN:

My letter (*Pom* #16) regarding Dave

Green's article on Chaos Magick (*Pom* #15) was an alarmed response to seeing so many popular but misguided notions about scientific thought and practice perpetuated in *The Pomegranate*, and perhaps legitimized by the appearance in these pages. Mr Green's personal beliefs were not intended to be the focus of my previous letter.

As a sociologist with one foot in scientific philosophy, Mr Green should know well that beliefs about scientific understanding—that is, the unadorned machinations of the material world, even apart from technological applications or the people who have described those machinations—have as much of a real-world impact as do beliefs about human history and culture. In *The Pomegranate*, historians and anthropologists have sought to set the record straight about factually inaccurate beliefs widely held and dearly beloved in the Pagan community. The fanciful wishful thinking that has grown up around ridiculous interpretations of quantum mechanics is ripe for the same treatment—or at least a potshot or two. The overblown rhetoric of the Chaos Magickians was an irresistible target.

I'd like to remind Mr Green that *every* action works in the world with a double edge. Assigning the blame for greed and callous disregard for human life solely to science or 'scientism' is at best naive. In his original article, Mr. Green asserts that "Science needs its *other*". Apparently Chaos Magick needs one too.

Angie Kantola  
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PETER STAUDENMAIER WRITES:

I am very gratified that my article on "Fascist Ecology" (*Pom* #15) has sparked a



## THE ONGOING MUTUAL ATTRACTION BETWEEN FAR-RIGHT POLITICS AND ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY IS A PROMINENT FEATURE OF NEOPAGANISM IN GERMAN-SPEAKING EUROPE TODAY, AND THIS ALARMING CONNECTION MERITS CAREFUL SCRUTINY BY ANGLOPHONE SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS OF NATURE RELIGIONS.

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thoughtful discussion in the pages of *The Pomegranate* about the politics of right-wing environmentalism. The article's condensed format provoked several misunderstandings, and I appreciate the opportunity to clarify my argument by responding to several of Gus diZerega's criticisms (*Pom* #16). My work is by no means an "attack on deep ecology and Nature religion", as diZerega would have it, but a warning about the potential pitfalls that adherents of deep ecology and nature religions face. The article is, on the other hand, undoubtedly "hostile to certain spiritual values", namely fascist ones. The ongoing mutual attraction between far-right politics and ecological spirituality is a prominent feature of neopaganism in German-speaking Europe today, and this alarming connection merits careful scrutiny by anglophone scholars and practitioners of nature religions.

DiZerega's initial objection to my historical overview of fascist ecology stems from his conviction that German National Socialism was not a variant of fascism, which he takes to be a largely Italian phenomenon. This is a historio-

graphically reputable position, but not one that I or most contemporary analysts of Nazism share. Such differences regarding ideological classification are hardly a matter of "error" on my part or on diZerega's. Yet his categorical insistence that "no such thing as ecofascism ever existed" depends entirely on this terminological disagreement. Moreover, the case of Julius Evola demonstrates that a prominent strain within Italian fascism also partook of the ecofascist worldview traced in my article.

DiZerega's second objection concerns the fact that many Nazis were forthrightly anti-environmentalist, an aspect that my article takes into account. The Nazi "green wing" that I describe was of course a minority tendency within the party as a whole. This fact does not, however, support diZerega's conclusion that "the worst crimes of the Nazi regime had nothing to do with environmentalism". To establish this, he would need to argue that no important Nazi criminals were environmentalists and that Nazism's genocidal impulse was unrelated to its biological politics, both of which are clearly untrue.



DiZerega is quite right that my "real target" is several contemporary trends within environmentalism (though not, as he thinks, neopaganism as a whole). The disturbing tendency among many Greens and deep ecologists to recapitulate the arguments and assumptions of the Nazi "green wing" is exactly what prompted me to write the article in the first place. Until deep ecologists and esoteric environmentalists face this legacy squarely, as the more perceptive among them already have, it will be necessary to critique such inadvertent revivals of ecofascist thought.

DiZerega's further complaint that I neglected marxism-leninism in an article on Nazism leaves me puzzled, and I very much doubt that marxist-leninists "would have endorsed" my anarchist analysis, as he conjectures. I quite agree, however, that my article ignores the liberal tradition, a tradition I reject as incompatible with emancipatory ecological politics. DiZerega's claim that "totalitarian horrors do not arise in a liberal culture" has unfortunately been disproven by the historical experience of the twentieth century. That many contemporary environmentalists are wedded to liberal assumptions is not, in my view, a bulwark against the current re-emergence of ecofascism. What will help to stem this resurgence is critical reflection on the historical entwinement of environmentalism and far-right politics. I hope that readers of *The Pomegranate* will have much to contribute to this process of critical reflection.

*Peter Staudenmaier*

#### GUS DIZEREGA RESPONDS:

Peter Staudenmaier argues I must demonstrate "no important Nazi criminals were environmentalists" and "that

Nazism's genocidal impulse was unrelated to its biological politics." I agree these statements are false, but I also maintain that they are irrelevant.

To say someone was a Nazi and an environmentalist does not establish causal, psychological, or logical links between these views. Nazism's politics was based on a biological concept of race, and the survival of the fittest. Neither is particularly connected to environmental thinking. Non-environmental Nazis also believed in biological conceptions of race and politics. Survival-of-the-fittest doctrines more easily argue against preserving weaker 'races' or species than seeking their preservation. He has mixed different meanings of the word 'nature', creating the illusion of relationship.

Staudenmaier claims he is targeting deep ecologists and Greens who "recapitulate arguments and assumptions" of green Nazis. Which Greens? What arguments and what assumptions? No influential deep ecologist or Green to my knowledge embraces 1) race as a biological category, 2) domination as a necessary condition between races, 3) hostility to democracy, 4) belief in dictatorship or 5.) extreme or 'völkisch' nationalism. Where's the threat?

Staudenmaier reads us a different history than I regarding totalitarianism. It is in the illiberal part of Europe that the violent Right most successfully manipulates Pagan, Christian, or whatever views to gain power—as the violent Left did the grievances of workers and peasants. Both created hellish societies. Marxist-Leninists liked science, cities, 'rational' analysis. If 'mystical ecology' was a cause of totalitarianism they should have been immune.

*Gus diZerega*