

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL? – THE MANDRAKE MYTH IN
GERMAN LITERATURE FROM 1673 TO 1913

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GERMAN LITERATURE FROM 1673 TO 1913

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A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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– **Für meine Familie, Priscilla und alle Freunde.**

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GLOSSARY

- Bb* Döblin, Alfred. "Die Ermordung einer Butterblume." *Prosa des Expressionismus*. Ed. Fritz Martini. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003. 102-15.
- Gm* Grimmelshausen, Hans Jakob Christoph von. "Galgen-Männlin." *Kleinere Schriften. Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*. Ed. Rolf Tarot. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1973. 73-109.
- Rb* Tieck, Ludwig. "Der Runenberg." *Märchen aus dem "Phantasmus"*. Ed. Walter Münz. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003. 86-112.

Introduction

Mandrake was and still is one of the best-known plants – not without good reason. According to Michael Taussig, there is one “flowering plant that stands out with regard to life and death, a plant that perturbs the pious platitudes of life and death and is known as the mandrake or mandragora” (Taussig 111). From its first appearance in the Ebers Papyrus¹ to its reference in Goethe’s *Faust II*² and Hanns Heinz Ewers bestseller *Alraune* at the beginning of the 20th century, the plant-human has been notorious for its presence in folklore and superstitious beliefs, as well as in literary works and films among different epochs and cultures. Mandrake is regarded as one of the oldest and most powerful plants used for medical purposes, in religious ceremonies, and superstitious rituals. Originally native to the regions of Persia and Mesopotamia, both the plant itself and its use for various purposes have been passed to Central Europe over the past 3000 years (see Starck 79). At the beginning of the 16th century the mandrake cult became popular in Central Europe, and especially in the area that is now Germany. Zarcone (2005) claims that: “It was German romanticism, copied by French romanticism, which turned the mandrake of the occultists into a literary theme” (Zarcone 120). Wilhelm Tieck's *Der Runenberg* (1802), Friedrich de LaMotte Fouqué's *Eine Geschichte vom Galgenmännlein* (1810), Ludwig Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten* (1812), and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober* (1819) are some of the many works in German literature that

¹ Papyrus Ebers (1550 BC) is one of the two oldest preserved medical documents anywhere.

² „Da stehen sie umher und staunen, vertrauen nicht dem hohen Fund / Der eine faselt von Alraunen, Der andre von dem schwarzen Hund.“ (*Faust II* 4977ff.) Interestingly so, Goethe himself had possessed a mandrake that he kept in an oval-shaped box with “Alraune” written on the lid (see Walther 129f.).

explicitly draw on the idea of mandrake. However, with the exception of some works written from the perspective of folklore and historical anthropology there has been no discussion of the mandrake and its literary dimensions so far. Therefore, this study approaches mandrake and its myth in German literature and culture from 1673 to 1913. Why this timeframe?

In 1673, Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen published the treatise *Galgen-Männlin* (Gm), which, although it is not the first scholarly attempt to deal with mandrake and its myth in German, marks, in my reading, the transition of mandrake into a myth in German fiction. In 1913, Alfred Döblin published *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* (Bb), a short story that, at first glance, has nothing to do with mandrake. This would certainly please Grimmelshausen, whose treatise's sole concern (again at first sight) seems to be how to get rid of the plant in German culture. However, a closer look shows that in both works mandrake is present *and* absent at the same time. While the plant and its myth are present in *Galgen-Männlin* at the level of the signifier, the text reinterprets and transforms its content. In the case of Döblin's text, the plant and its myth are absent at the level of the signifier, yet, although again reinterpreted, the plant and myth are present on the level of interpretation. From such a perspective, my work attempts not simply to present an overview of the occurrence of mandrake and its myth in German literature, but, moreover, aims to trace and discuss mandrake and its myth in relation to its meaning within the reading of the texts. This study is not, however, so much an exhaustive analysis of mandrake in German literature as it is an attempt to explore the occurrence of mandrake, its myth, and the related texts.

Central for my argument is the assumption that the potential of the mandrake as the anthropomorphic being par excellence allows insightful readings concerning the relations of myth, literature, and language. In order to establish a common ground from which to approach the aspects related to mandrake in German literature, the first chapter begins with an in-depth analysis of the plant, its occurrence in various folk myths, and the superstitions connected to the mandrake as a myth. In this manner, the chapter provides not only mandrake's socio-cultural backdrop but presents a perspective toward myth that lays the theoretical foundations for the analysis of the plant's occurrence in German literature.

By combining a historico-anthropological background with an analysis of German literary texts from the late 17th to early 20th century, I generally aim to provide a closer look at both the content of the mandrake myth and its discursive aspects. On this meta-level, this study is predominantly concerned with the status of the mandrake myth: to what degree does the mandrake myth allow for readings of texts that differ from their conventional interpretations? What kind of myth is mandrake in literature? How can we describe the role of mandrake in German literature if we keep in mind its intermediary status between plant and human, nature and culture, internal and external world?

My analysis of the mandrake myth in German literature that I propose is structuralistic insofar as its main literary focus lies on texts from Grimmelshausen, Tieck, and Döblin. This study thus follows Charles Moorman's approach toward myth in literature. Moorman makes the claim that "one of the most useful techniques of handling myth in literature is by a kind of comparative mythography" (Moorman 73). I seek to avoid, however,

the limitations of such a structuralistic approach by beginning with an overview of the history of mandrake and its related myths in different cultures. My study thus attempts to focus on the status of the mandrake myth in German literature without neglecting its history as both a medical *and* mythical plant.

In this manner, I attempt to avoid the basic shortcoming of previous texts on mandrake and its myth: to be overtly concerned with one aspect of the plant while neglecting the other. In other words: to focus on the history of mandrake without considering its appearance in literary texts. My framework follows Bidney, who makes the claim that “a scientific study of myth should be concerned with the comparative and historical analysis of myth” (Bidney 13). Moreover, the combination of historico-anthropological information with an analysis of the mandrake myth in German literature is, according to Moorman, the only way to avoid the trap of a pseudo-myth. “A pseudo-myth is thus a manufactured myth: not one inherited from a *bona fide* folk tradition, but one consciously manufactured in order to provide a clustering point” (Moorman 69; italics in original).

The second chapter focuses on mandrake in Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* (1673), a text that forms an elaborated yet problematic transition from non-fictional, predominantly academic writing about mandrake to mandrake in works of fiction. From such a perspective, it was not solely German romanticism that turned mandrake into a literary subject but also *Galgen-Männlin*, a text written 130 years earlier. In Grimmelshausen's treatise of mandrake, the plant and the belief in its mythological powers are used as a starting point for a much more general critique on the state of language, belief, and society in Germany at the end of the 17th century. By

analyzing these aspects in detail, my study shows how Grimmelshausen's text acts in form and content as an intermediary between non-fictional and fictional writing about mandrake. In this manner, the text acts as transition from the mandrake of the superstitious folk belief to mandrake as a myth in German fiction.

The third chapter elaborates on the insights from the preceding two chapters and analyzes the role of mandrake and its myth in Ludwig Tieck's *Der Runenberg* (Rb). Published in 1804 during the heyday of Early German Romanticism, this text stands out from other Romantic literary works that deal with mandrake due to its intermediate position with regard to the aforementioned level of signifier and signified. On the level of the signifier, Tieck's text mentions mandrake only once. However, on the level of the signified, the myth is present throughout the text. From such a perspective, the analysis of *Runenberg* enables not only new insights into the reading of Tieck's text, but also allows for a discussion of the aesthetic representation of self, community, and Christian faith in German Romanticism.

In the final chapter, the analysis of *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* shows how mandrake, its myth, and the aforementioned aspects become part of modern German literature at the beginning of the 20th century. In Döblin's text, a "chance collision" with a buttercup turns into a life-defining moment for the protagonist Mr. Fischer. By reading this encounter and the consequential events against the backdrop of the mandrake myth this study departs from standard interpretations of the text and discusses the relation of individual, nature, and life at the beginning of German literary modernity. This combination of aspects eventually adds another dimension to the meaning of modern man's *Entwurzelung* (engl.: uprootedness) as represented

in modern German literature. Being uprooted takes on the meaning of being cut off and being freed at the same time. However, with regards to the mandrake myth, this study argues that the evaluation of this action is much more complex than commonly assumed. Therefore, my investigation generally attempts to read mandrake and its myth against the perspective of, what first may seem, a somewhat obscure and ephemeral occurrence: not to turn it into an easy road to understanding but rather to examine the nature of the plant-human in German literature from 1673 to 1913.

1. Plant, Rituals, and Myths: An Introduction to Mandrake

Since early times, the mandrake attracted attention in a variety of cultures, chiefly due to the shape of its root: with a forked root as “legs“ and rootlets as “hairs“ it resembles the human body.³ Being a member of the nightshade family *Solanaceae*, its genus consists of four to six different species, which all share the same characteristic features: the thick and bulbous pair of roots, dark green leaves, and purple blossoms.⁴ The fruits' color ranges from yellow to reddish. They have a strong odor and an apple-like shape. According to Gassen/Minol, the mandrake is mainly found today in vineyards, abandoned fields, and in the Mediterranean, Minor and Central Asia, and the Himalayas (see Gassen/Minol 302f.). It is not indigenous to northern Europe but has been introduced as a garden plant in some places. According to Simoons, it was cultivated in Germany and England during the 16th century. In the 19th century, it was more common in English gardens (see Simoons 103). However, mainly due to climatic reasons, real mandrakes and their roots were probably quite rare and, therefore, extraordinarily expensive in Central Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries (Hävernick 22; Marzell 21f.).

Surprisingly, this was not a hindrance for the widespread re-occurrence of the

³ According to Colin Falck (1994), the formal resemblance of extra-human forces to the form of human embodiment is fundamental to the importance of myths. “If a mythic presence takes the form of an animal or other non-human being, it will be because of the relationship in which that animal or being’s form and natural behavior stands to our own human form and natural behavior” (Falck 117). In the case of mandrake, the form of the root already naturally resembles human form, which could be one reason why the plant is considered as preternatural.

⁴ *Mandragora officinarum* and *Mandragora autumnalis* are the two best-known members of the genus in Europe while *Mandragora turcomanica* (Turkmenistan), *Mandragora caulescens* (Himalaya), *Mandragora Shebbearei* (Tibet) and *Mandragora chinghaiensis* (China) are generally considered to be rarer and far less researched. (see Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 14ff.) Other members of the nightshade family, for example, are the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*), and tobacco.

cult surrounding the human-shaped root and the fruits of the plant in the Middle Ages: the mandrake's close resemblance to other plants led to the practice of imitating them. Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*) and bryony (white = *Bryonia dioica*; black = *Tamus communis*) were most often used and sold as fake mandrakes (see Simoons 101ff.; Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 125f.).⁵

The plant is known under a number of names, which hints at the multitude of superstitious powers and beliefs associated with it. According to Gassen/Minol, *mandragora* could be a Greek composite formed by *mandra*, “stable,” and *agora*, “gathering place,” thus referring to the places where it was commonly found. At the same time, *mandragora* could also be derived from the Persian *mardom*, which can be translated as “causing magic” (see *ibid.*). In Zarccone, the etymology of the term becomes even more complicated, although he, too, mentions a possible Persian root of the word – albeit a different one: *mardum-giyah*, “plant-man.” He states that the Greeks had a second term denominating the plant: *anthropomorphos*, which makes the plant-human mandrake the prototype of anthropomorphic existence (see Zarccone 115).⁶ According to Gassen/Minol (302), it was Pythagoras who called the plant *anthropomorphos* for the first time (see Gassen/Minol 302; Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 19). On the front page of Galen of Pergamon’s (129 – c. 210 A.D.) medicine book Euripides receives a mandrake plant-human from

⁵ Marzell (1964) reports the case of the writer and publisher Johannes Trojan, who had bought a so-called “Glücksalraun” at the department store Wertheim in Berlin at the beginning of the 19th century. The immediate botanical examination by Paul Ascherson revealed the true nature of the root medallion: Alpine Leek (*Allium victorialis* L.) and Gladiolus (*Gladiolus communis*) (see Marzell 21f.).

⁶ Further ethymological research, as mentioned by Zarccone, hints that *mardum-giyah* might be a version of the old Persian *gayo mertân*, “the name of the first man” (see Zarccone 115). Yet, from still another perspective, *mandragoras* could be related to the Sanskrit *mandâraka* – which denotes one of the four types of mandrake –, therefore pointing to the possibility of a common root of the Sanskrit and the Greco-Latin (see *ibid.*).

Euresis, the goddess of discovery (see Stearn 22).⁷

It was most likely through the spread of Judeo-Christian and Muslim culture that other regions became familiar with mandrake and its mythical knowledge. Especially through Arab culture, which played an important part in transmitting Greek scholarship to medieval Europe, the mandrake and its usage were introduced to regions beyond its indigenous habitat. Zarcone mentions the *Wonders of Creation (Ajâ' ib al-makhlûqât)* by the Persian geographer Zakariya al-Qazvîni (13th century) that contains an engraving showing “a man in a turban pulling up mandrake assisted by a dog” (see Zarcone 116).⁸ This depiction is in line with the traditional wisdom about dealing with the plant:

Because the root had an uncanny resemblance to human limbs, the mandrake was considered half demon; if dragged out of the soil its fearful shriek would cause death from terror. So you had to stop your ears with wax, expose enough of the plant to tie it to a dog, then incites the animal to pull [sic] the mandrake, the dog dying in the process. After that the plant was safe to handle and had various magical properties. (Thompson 3)

Mandrake was considered to be a magical plant, the gathering of which required certain proper procedures: violating them not only went against custom, but also placed its gatherer in great peril. Despite the elements of superstition, these precautions were similar to the ones pharmacists and herb collectors commonly took to avoid injury by harmful plants. According to Theophrastus, the precautions to be taken in mandrake gathering included “using a sword to draw three circles around the plant; facing towards the west

⁷ For pictures of mandrake in flower and with an unripe fruit, see Stearn 98.

⁸ Muslim Persians and Turks further carried the legend of the mandrake into the Asian interior. The Turkic-Arabic tribes gave it the composite word *adamotu* or *insanotu*: *adam* or *insan* = man; *ot* = plant, while the Turkic-speaking people of China, the Uighurs, used the Arabic-Persian composite *adäm-giyah*: man-plant. The Chinese adopted the plant's Arabic name *yabrûh*, as *ya-pu-lu* (see Zarcone 116; Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 19f.).

when cutting it and say as many things as possible about the mysteries of love” (see Simoons 120).⁹ This final precaution in particular hints at the widespread usage of the plant in matters concerning love and marriage. In modern Romania, the ritual of mandrake collection includes dancing and singing, as well as the undressing and prostrating of young girls around and in front of the plant – at least three times while facing east. Pliny additionally mentions that the digger had to face west and avoid having the wind in his face (see *ibid.*). Other descriptions specified and elaborated the procedure: it had to be either a night with bright moonlight, a Friday before sunrise, or a Tuesday in either December or March when the sun is shining; the dog was supposed to be black, and one needed meat or a ball to incite it (see Gassen/Minol 305; Taussig 113; Simoons 121).¹⁰

Flavius Josephus' *The Jewish War* (AD 78) gives an even more detailed account of the procedures: one additionally needs a certain mixture of secretions from the human body, mainly urine or menstrual blood. It has to be poured over the plant before one tries to pick it; otherwise, the plant would disappear (see Zarcone 117; Gassen/Minol 305). After a successful removal of the plant from the ground, mandrake root was usually bathed in milk, carefully dried, wrapped in cloth and placed in a chest. In some regions, for example Germany and France, mandrakes seem to be given extraordinary care:

It might be carefully washed or bathed on a regular basis, whether in water or red wine. It was clothed, with some accounts specifying such costly materials as silk and velvet. It might be provided with

⁹ According to Starck (1917), Theophrastus' plant is a deadly nightwish rather than a real mandrake plant.

¹⁰ Because of the death of the dog, the plant came to be known as *segken*: “dog-dug” in Iran (see Simoons 122).

food and drink twice daily. It might be stored in an upholstered box or casket, and more. (Simoons 125)

Apart from the elements of superstition included in the described procedure, mandrake was and still is – as has been mentioned above – one of the oldest medical plants.¹¹ Ancient Egyptians were already acquainted with its psychogenic powers and used mandrake as a soporific and analgesic as well as an aphrodisiac¹² (Gassen/Minol 303). In ancient Rome the plant was used in surgical operations as an anesthetic and painkiller (Thompson 3).¹³ In Christian tradition, it was considered to be the “Biblical love-apple eaten by Leah and Rachel as a pregnancy charm”¹⁴ (see Genesis 30, 14; Zarccone 115, and Thompson 3). Zarccone states: “The plant, which was already known to doctors in antiquity and ancient China for its narcotic and anesthetic qualities, had the reputation among magicians and sorcerers of arousing love due to its aphrodisiac characteristics and of curing sterility in women” (see *ibid.*). The stimulation of sexual passion and its ability to make barren women conceive are the two qualities for which the mandrake has been especially noted.¹⁵ According to Simoons, in ancient works an even broader role for mandrake is indicated, “including its use against specific health conditions and diseases, against all illnesses brought on by evil forces, and as protection against all

¹¹ For a general overview of the plant’s active agents, see Gassen/Minol 304.

¹² In the Ebers Papyrus (about BC 1550), which is among the most important medical papyri of ancient Egypt, the plant is called *dja-dja*. Additionally, mandrakes were found as funerary objects in pyramids and on depictions of Tutankhamun's garment (see Gassen/Minol 303).

¹³ The Greek Society of Anaesthetists uses the mandrake as its emblem (Stearn 108).

¹⁴ Gassen/Minol assume that this is the reason why in 16th century Germany the mandrake, among other names, was known as *Liebesapfel* (see Gassen/Minol 303; Zarccone 115).

¹⁵ For a general overview over the mandrake’s medical usage, see Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 129f.

grief, ruin, destruction, and bad events, including thievery and murder” (see Simoons 106). Other properties and powers ascribed to the root differ slightly from time to time and place to place:

There are also those that are said to render the wearer invisible or to indicate the spot where treasures lie hidden, and possess at the same time the valuable property of absorbing the disease of a wearer who may be sick. But there is a curious superstition that in the latter virtue lies [sic] danger, for the root can also transmit the disease to a new owner. (Thompson 126)

However, after the decline of the Holy Roman Empire, both the medical knowledge about and the superstitious beliefs in mandrakes were less widespread than in the centuries before the beginning of the Middle Ages. With the exception of detailed descriptions in texts by Hildegard von Bingen, the plant was virtually unknown in Central Europe until the general rediscovery of ancient knowledge, culture, and scholarship during the Renaissance.¹⁶ Even then the first mention of the plant-human, for example in Konrad von Megenberg (1481), only states the vague resemblance of the roots to a human – without giving account of any superstition surrounding the plant. Why, then, did the mandrake become especially popular in Germany? “In Germany in mediæval times belief in the powers of the mandrake became a universal cult, and throughout the country the plant was regarded with veneration for its magical properties” (Thompson 131; see Hävernick 22). According to Starck (1917), this sudden success of the cult surrounding mandrake is closely related to the efforts of forgers and tricksters. By selling fake mandrake roots as good-luck charms, they took advantage of bad times

¹⁶ Despite the existence of copies of Dioskorides plant book in the 9th century, which includes depictions of the mandrake, the plant-human and the stories surrounding mandrakes were not commonly known in Middle Europe before the 16th and 17th century (see Starck 30).

and situations. As a result, they not only sold the idea of the mandrake to the people but, moreover, superstitious and supernatural stories surrounding the plucking and care for the plant-human began to spread. Their intention was at least twofold: on the one hand to distract people from their criminal actions; and on the other hand as an attempt to keep others, ordinary people, from searching for mandrake themselves. (Starck 47). The spread of the superstitious beliefs surrounding mandrake were accompanied by a rapid increase of publications concerned with plants and herbs – so called “*Kräuterbücher*” (engl.: herbals) – in German-speaking areas at the beginning of the 16th century. In one of these books, Otho Brunfels mentions the superstition surrounding mandrake for the first time since Flavius Josephus and adds the idea of the “little gallows man”: the *Galgen-Männlin* (Starck 33). “One elaboration ... was the belief that the plant springs up under a gallows from the urine or semen of a hanged thief or other criminal (or one who has remained chaste) or of a man unjustly sentenced”¹⁷ (Simoons 121). Since antiquity, gallows and crossroads were seen as places where witches gathered mandrake leaves, flowers, and roots for purposes of magic (see *ibid.*, 122). Crossroads in particular had been associated with protective and exploitative magic, “for they have been perceived as places where supernatural beings tied to night, death, and the underworld congregate, most notably Hecate, that frightening chthonic goddess of ancient Greece” (*ibid.*). It therefore comes as no surprise that in the sixteenth century some held plucking a mandrake from underneath a gallows as the only way to be absolutely positive concerning its powers – because this location led to its most potent form (*ibid.*; Starr 260ff.).

¹⁷ According to Taussig, there is one source stating that the little gallows man could also arise from the froth that fell to the ground from the choking mouth of a hanged woman (see Taussig 122).

At this point in the study, it is helpful to sum up the indicated multitude of associations that have become related to the mandrake as a socio-cultural artifact:

1. Mandrake is among the oldest plants used for medical purposes.
2. In connection with other magical plants like Belladonna, it has, however, also always been associated with superstitious ideas, beliefs, and rituals.
3. The plant-human was part of mythological stories and religious beliefs in ancient Egypt, Arabia, Greece, and the Roman Empire.
4. As a mythological plant, it was and is in large part associated with love, marriage, wealth, and fertility.
5. Mandrake is a rich myth accompanied by an equally rich and complex ritualism. Myth and ritual are closely interrelated and testimonies are, especially in medical and historical writings, abundant.
6. Mandrake as plant, as myth, and the rituals involved when handling the former two, diffused and transformed over time and across cultural boundaries.¹⁸

As has become clear so far, the mandrake incorporates a wide potential to

¹⁸ In general, the relation between myth and ritual is a complex one. Following Kluckhohn, “their relationship is that of intricate mutual interdependence, differently structured in different cultures and probably at different times ... Both myth and ritual are symbolical procedures and are most closely tied together. The myth is a system of word symbols, whereas ritual is a system of object and act symbols” (Kluckhohn 39). In such a sense, myth and ritual are cultural products and therefore part of the cultural heritage of societies. Ziolkowski emphasizes, among other things, the Greek meaning of the German *Mythos*: myth originally meant *talk*, *language*, and *story* and was in the 19th century either regarded as (1) story of the (ancient) gods (mythology), or (2) an expression of a primitive, cultic way of thinking, as well as (3) a lie, a common misbelief (Ziolkowski 172). While the third connotation seems to dominate the meaning of myth in English and French, the term had, especially in the early 20th century, an additional meaning in German: “der Mythos gilt jetzt nämlich als ‘bildhafte, lebenerneuernde Idee’” (ibid. 176f.). However, myth as such, according to Chase, is always associated with the discovery and acceptance of preternatural forces. Preternatural in this sense refers to “whatever has impersonal magic force or potency and is therefore extraordinarily beautiful, terrible, dangerous, awful, wonderful, uncanny or marvelous” (Chase 70).

relate to a variety of mythological content and rituals. Following Barthes, a myth is “not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones” (Barthes 109). In conjunction with this assumption, the myths surrounding mandrake neither depend upon the original plant nor on a single correct version of the ritual and the myth. “In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations. ... It is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function” (ibid. 119). The myth of mandrake is hence ultimately – as, for example, the practice of forging shows – more about the potential of the myth than about the actual object, the plant, itself. From this perspective, myth relies on the potential of the sign: the form to become a new signifier for new concepts. Certain signifiers represent a higher potential to become associated with new concepts. However, “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely” (ibid. 120). Therefore, in the time of their existence they “must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning” (ibid. 118). For the purpose of the following analysis of the mandrake myth, this connection to meaning is to relate issues of the folkloric version of the myth in order to get an idea of the potential and the concepts that are associated with the plant-human in Germany.

Especially in German folklore, the potential of the mandrake myth for mystic, blurry associations and mythological communications seem to have fallen on fertile ground. For example, some Germans regarded the mandrake as a familiar spirit: it was believed to bring good fortune and prosperity to an individual and a household. There was also the belief that the owner of a

mandrake would have no enemies (see Simoons 106). Mandrake was regarded as very rare and obtainable only with great danger, which made them both costly and valuable. Additionally, mandrake was a protector of the family and as such had to be carefully kept and tended. If neglected, it would avenge itself by bringing misfortune and ruin: “There was no more powerful German magic than the *alraun* in German folk-lore” (Thompson 132). Despite numerous scholastic attempts to stem this problem, the cult and use of mandrake persisted in Germany during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Die ablehnende Haltung, die einige Gelehrte einnahmen, genügte nicht, um den Glauben zu erschüttern und durch die strafgesetzliche Verfolgung, die man gegen die Marktschreier einleitete, wurde er noch dazu verstärkt. Von ebensowenig Einfluss war die Bekämpfung des Aberglaubens vom christlichen Standpunkte aus. (Starck 47)

A first – although at this point of the analysis somewhat broad – answer to the question why mandrake and its myth became popular again in Germany in the 16th and 17th centuries can be found in the beginning decline of the Christian faith. According to one scholar “it might be suggested that it was in the Early Modern ... that people began to take a sympathetic interest in non-Christian mythologies and the explanatory or consolatory power which they might yield” (Thomas 6). Mandrake and its myth appear to resurface at a time when generally established order and belief began to be questioned, not just by a small, educated group, but also across broader classes of the population. Although this assumption does not provide any specific socio-historic explanations, it points to a crucial aspect when dealing with the mandrake myth: the questioning of belief, order, and – predominantly literary – language. The question of the appropriate language is especially important when dealing with mandrake, not only in the German tradition.

As described earlier in this chapter, the etymology of the word is complex. Generally, mandrake in modern German is known as *der Alraun* or *die Alraune*, which indicates the idea of a male and a female version of the plant.¹⁹ The names derive from the Middle High German *al-rûne* (Lexer 41), which became the Early Modern High German *alraun* (Anderson/Goebel/Reichmann 840). Tacitus links the plant with persons called *aurinia*, believed to be endowed with magical powers. Simoons points to evidence that among the early Goths there were wise women called *Alirûna*, who had skills in magic, writing, and divining the future. Prophecy, or divination, was an important task of these women. Over time, the term may have shifted from the denomination of such women with prophetic and diabolic spirits to the root (see, *ibid.*, 128f.). Additionally, Simoons states that Germans already had the word *alrûna* which could easily be extended to the mandrake when it was first grown in Germanic lands during medieval times. Its linguistic roots may be *ala*, meaning “to beget, to bear,” and *rûna*, meaning “secret” or “advice.” Although the context to which the word applied in prehistoric times is not known exactly, it was associated with fertility magic: the term may have referred to a charm worn by persons who wanted children or to a root or piece of wood. Roots of byrony and other plants may have been shaped into human form and used in Germanic magic related to birth and fertility long before mandrake came onto the scene (Simoons 128). In the same way, the root worked well with already existing, mostly superstitious, beliefs. Mandrake was well suited to a region in which cobolds, pucks, and lindworms supposedly dwelled. It therefore comes as no surprise that there

¹⁹ *Allruniken* or *Erdmannikin* are two other denominations, with *Erdman* being a shortened version of the latter.

were repeated attempts to link mandrake with older, Indogermanic plants and the superstitious beliefs surrounding them. Thompson suggests that the German *Alraune* can be read as a later form of the Gothic *allrune*, and that there is a relation to *rune* (see Thompson 131f.).²⁰ Although Starck convincingly rejects such a linguistic and cultural reading of *Allraune* as both a plant and a belief indigenous to the Germanic territories, anthropological attempts to group mandrake as one of the Germanic *Blitzpflanzen* were and still are influential and will prove insightful when approaching the depictions of mandrake in German literary works (see Starck 77).²¹

Koeman acknowledges the multitude of literary German texts that relate to mandrake and the cult surrounding its myth. “Der Alraunaberglaube ist ein in der deutschen Literatur vielfach dargestellter Sagenstoff. ... Die Mandragora kann als Wurzel (*Alräunchen*), als Männchen (*Galgenmännlein*) oder als Hausgeist (*Spiritus familiaris*) dargestellt sein” (Koeman 502). However, Koeman’s classification points to the fact that the appearance of mandrake and its myth was and is not limited to works of German Romanticism. Although there is, so far, no evidence of a conscious correlation by later authors to Grimmelhausen’s *Galgen-Männlin*, the latter is the first German text written and published by a non-academic author – who was (and still is) predominantly known for his works of fiction – that directly, at least according to its title, attempts to focus exclusively on mandrake and its

²⁰ Runes are Germanic characters that were based on Latin, other alphabets from the Mediterranean region and older Germanic symbolic characters from around 2000 years ago (see Simek 353).

²¹ As Koeman points out, the 18th and 19th century interpretations of the mandrake myth differ in exactly this question concerning the origin of the myth. While interpretations in the 18th century recognized the relation to other, non-german, mythologies, the 19th century favored a ‘interpretatio germanica’ (see Koeman 504).

myth.²² Additionally, as previously noted in the introduction, *Galgen-Männlin* combines both formal and linguistic elements of non-fictional and fictional writing. Therefore, the following chapter begins the analysis of the mandrake myth in German literature with Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* (1673).

2. Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin*: Mandrake Myth, Language Critique, and the Question of the Appropriate Faith

In 1673, Israël Fromschmidt von Hugenfelß aka Hans Jacob Christoph von Grimmelshausen published *Galgen-Männlin*. A skillful combination of different styles of writing and argumentation, the 35-page text comments on the increasing usage of, and belief, in mandrake among its contemporaries. Grimmelshausen's 1673 version of *Galgen-Männlin* describes in the beginning the folkloric, religious, and scientific associations related to the handling of mandrakes in Germany and Central Europe.²³ The detailed front page of Grimmelshausen's text seems to give a clear idea of what to expect:

Simplicissimi Galgen-Männlin / oder Ausführlicher Bericht / woher man die so genannte Allrängen oder Geldmännlin bekommt / und wie man ihrer warten und pflegen soll; auch was vor Nutzen man hingegen von ihnen eigentlich zugewarten. Erstlich durch Simplicissimum selbstn seinem Sohn und allen andern / so die Reichthum dieser Welt verlangen / zum besten an tag geben. Nachgehends mit nutzlichen Anmerck- und Erinnerungen erläutert

²² Earlier references to mandrake in German texts are in Johann Rist (1664) and Johann Praetorius (1666-67). However, both works are rather scientific in their formal structure and tone, and clearly address a much smaller, more elitist audience than *Galgen-Männlin*. In the 18th century, Christian Roth (1737) and Johann Samuel Schmid (1739) published their dissertations on mandrake in Helmstedt and Halle: both texts are in Latin.

²³ According to Koschlig there exists another version of the *Galgen-Männlin*, which is regarded as an unauthorized copy of Grimmelshausen's earlier text. Slightly, but inconsistently, modernized by Georg Müller, it was probably published in 1674 (see Tarot XXIf.)

durch Israel Fromschmidt von Hugenfels. In einer harten Zeit / So
das Geld wie einige Leuth clagten / Ohngleich getheilet: Doch allen
ihr Gebühr geben hat. (Gm 73)

Simplicissimus himself is declared author of the work, which is addressed to his son and anyone else who is interested in gaining a fortune. His letter to his son is a reply to the latter's imaginary question about the nature and effects of the mandrake, which, according to the father's reaction, implied the wish to possess such a plant-human. Although a decoded reading of the information might appear less necessary and obvious at first sight, the qualifier “eigentlich”, the slightly humorous if not ironical overtone, and the short epigram at the very end point to the disappointment of those who expect a positive manual in the style of “The Idiot's Guide to Mandrake”: from the very first page, *Galgen-Männlin* wants to be read as a critique of the mandrake myth. In case the reader misreads the front page and the first lines of the letter, which give a brief account of the handling of mandrake, the words at the end of the first part of the letter ensure that the reader understands its intentions: “Dis ists nun / liebr Sohn / was vom gmei-nen Hauffn des Galgn-Mänls halbr gsagt / und von denen die sich uff so ein ver-damm-lich weiß breichrn wolln / in acht gnommen und voll-bracht wird” (Gm 75).

Additionally, Hugenfelß' annotations and memories accompany Simplicissimus' letter and function as scientific support of the latter's assumptions.²⁴ Through a strategic combination of formally, stylistically, and

²⁴ Grimmelshausen's text is in this way an early example of an attempt to teach, to enlighten the reader. Enlightenment in such a sense is less a differentiated program but merely aims to criticize superstition. “Selbstbehauptung der Vernunft ... gründet zuallererst in der *Kritik*, und das heißt vor allem in der Aberglaubenskritik. ... Nur durch Kritik religiösen, weil falsch-moralischen Aberglaubens und nur durch Kritik physikalischen, weil widernatürlichen Aberglaubens erhält der Beginn der Aufklärung ... in den Gebieten Deutschlands seine eigentümliche Gestalt” (see Pott 3; italics in original).

linguistically different textual elements, *Galgen-Männlin* defines itself as an intermediary between fictional and non-fictional writing. In my understanding of the text, it seems that this elaborated combination of various narrative styles and forms is accompanied by a complex mixture of messages, which the text also attempts to portray throughout its discussion of mandrake. These messages are surrounded by questions of language reform, Christian faith, and the Judaism. In the following, I attempt to verify that these “additional” messages are more problematic and fundamental than they appear on the surface. Therefore, the chapter not only provides a closer look at Grimmelshausen's specific approach to the mandrake myth, but also exposes how he relates it to aspects of language, faith, and power.

From the beginning, the text condemns mandrake and its myth. It exclusively portrays mandrake as the offspring of a hanged criminal – moreover, a somewhat strangely autochthonous criminal who is a natural-born thief, a result of his mother's innate habit of stealing. Against mandrake's historico-anthropological backdrop it becomes clear that the text evokes a very specific aspect of the mandrake myth. This aspect points to one of the German versions of the myth. It furthermore constitutes a first sign that, despite Hugenfelß' constant attempt to appear as presenting the “full” picture of the mandrake myth, even the supposedly scientific annotations are less interested in tracing the mandrake myth. They use it as a vessel to communicate a particular opinion to the reader.

In the process, the text accomplishes two things: on the one hand it labels mandrake and its myth as originally German, while on the other, it transforms, via reinterpretation, the folkloric myth into a literary topic. By partially reinterpreting the signifier mandrake with new meaning, *Galgen-*

Männlin uses the mythological potential of mandrake for its own position concerning the current state of religious belief, social order, and national language. The content of mandrake's myth in Grimmelshausen differs from the folkloric version insofar as it turns into a signifier that refers to aspects formerly foreign to the myth. The way these issues relate to the mandrake myth, however, vary individually in their potential influence on the relationship between issue and myth, respectively. In order to better understand the interaction between the aforementioned issues of the folkloric mandrake myth, and the aspects of the myth in *Galgen-Männlin*, I continue with the examination of their relationship in the following.

The first issue is language critique. Hugenfelß' opening lines are concerned with stylistic: he comments and reflects on Simplicissimus' style of writing and speaking.

Daß der Autor sich eines ungewöhnlichen newen styli hierinnen
gebraucht / geschicht / weil er solches in seinem Gespräng mit dem
Teutschen Michel zu thun versprochen; mehr einige Sprach-helden
/ sonderlich seinen Sohn Simplicissimum damit zu schertzen / als
vor sich selbst etwas newes und seltzams auff die bahn zu bringen.
Massen ihm der jenige stylus wie er in den Teutschen Fürstlichen
und andern vornehmen Cantzleyen üblich / am allerbesten beliebt
/ er auch einen solchen zum Gebrauch zu haben wünschet. (Gm 75)

He refers to the promise Simplicissimus gave the Teutsche Michel to invent a new and strange way of writing and speaking. Hugenfelß thus mockingly mentions the way nobles and bureaucrats of noble ancestry use the German (written) language. According to Battafarano, the text here indirectly criticizes Martin Zeiller and his efforts to reform the German language of the time: "Für diese teilweise einseitige Sprachpolemik ... bedient sich Grimmelshausen der Weis- und Schalkheit des alten Simplicissimus und erfindet ad absurdum eine satirische Sprachvariante, eben ein nicht

aussprechbares Medium, in dem der Brief des alten Simplicissimus verfaßt ist” (see Battafarano 183). Although Battafarano's claim that the style of Simplicissimus is a satirical *invention* and is ultimately *unspeakable* seems questionable, her comment helps one to understand the second purpose of the *Galgen-Männlin*. While its first concern is the character of the myth surrounding mandrakes, the text is also preoccupied with the idea of the German language that is standardized, unified, and controlled by authorities in hierarchical positions. From the beginning of the 17th century onwards and under the influence of contemporary languages like French, Spanish and Italian so-called language societies (*Sprachgesellschaften*) were established in different places within German-speaking territories.²⁵ Johann Rist, who is extensively cited in *Galgen-Männlin*, was himself a founder and member of a language society, the Elbschwanenorden (1658).

Hugenfelß' aka Grimmelshausen's supposedly scholarly citations of Rist in *Galgen-Männlin* should therefore not just be read as a mere attempt to denounce the misbelief surrounding mandrakes but, moreover, as an indicator of his own position within the struggle for the use of the German language in the 17th century. According to Huber, all attempts to establish a general understanding of what the German language is capable of can be subsumed under two broad categories. The first one is centered around the idea of *Nützlichkeit*, or usefulness, and is rhetorically oriented, while the second one is concerned with grammar and best described by its objective of *Puritas* or 'purity' (see Huber 264f.). The position of usefulness understands

²⁵ „Die Bemühungen zur Standardisierung der deutschen Sprache werden von einem kleinen Kreis frühbürgerlicher Gelehrter unternommen, die sich in verschiedenen kulturpatriotischen Zirkeln und Vereinigungen organisieren, denen auch adelige Mitglieder angehören” (Stukenbrock 69).

sentences, passages, and oratories as its main subject of interest, while the position of purity considers letters, words, and compounds as the most basic and important elements of the German language. From this perspective, language is understood as an autopoietic and stable system, which should be standardized in order to objectify and to generalize. Unuseful or even non-fitting elements are neglected: language should be optimized for theorizing – a theorizing which takes into consideration all speakers of the language, and all speech situations. However, the position of purity is concerned with written and printed German rather than with spoken words or diction. It is the category of usefulness that is more related to oratories and the spoken word. Usefulness from this perspective means to use the language for a specific purpose in order to achieve a certain effect. Language and its usage go together and are individually grounded in a concrete speech situation. Despite their differences, both categories, and therefore both lines of argumentation, are faced with the increasing number of printed documents and texts in Germany in the 17th century (see Huber 264ff.). Hence, bureaucrats and philologists, as well as writers and poets, were naturally involved in the ongoing discussion concerning influences on the present and future development not only of the German language, but also of such concepts as German culture, arts, and ideas.

Der Vergleich des Deutschen mit den zeitgenössischen Kultursprachen Italienisch, Französisch und Spanisch zeigt, dass mit der Kultivierung des Deutschen neben der sprachlichen auch eine kulturelle und intellektuelle Emanzipation angestrebt wird, die es den Deutschen ermöglichen soll, sich als gleichwertig neben die Nachbarnationen zu stellen. (Stukenbrock 72)

At the time when Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* was published bureaucrats were the most powerful and most influential figures in this

dimension of society. „Das energetische Zentrum barocker Wirklichkeit ist also nicht der Monarch als Repräsentant einer exponierten politischen Institution, sondern der ordnungsmächtige Beamte” (Wiedemann 43). Consequently, the officially favored tendency in language usage was the pure. Combined with utopian elements about the early idea of nation states, loyalty to such a German state in particular, and the future influence of state institutions in general, it is this tendency that Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* seems to write and speak against. Wiedemann claims that Grimmelshausen's critique of the bureaucrats and their efforts to dominate language usage are first signs of a growing consciousness concerned with (future) conflicts between citizen and nationwide institutions (Wiedemann 43f.). Although this view toward Grimmelshausen's texts in general might be agreeable, in the case of *Galgen-Männlin* such an interpretation is for this specific text too close to what the voices of the narration try to convey to the reader. Of course, from the very beginning, Simplicissimus' father and Hugenfelß claim to be only concerned with two subjects of interest: the sinful superstition surrounding mandrake and language reformation. This, however, is questionable.

Describing mandrake in its special occurrence as Galgen-Männlein is for Grimmelshausen not solely a way to voice his opinion on attempts to reform and foster a German national language but, moreover, to give his opinion on who or who not should be part of a German national language, society, and culture.

The decisive factor of in- or exclusion once again concerns, language, yet more in the sense of a specific way of communication. The narration cites a speech of Johann Rist on the subject:

Glaube sonst festiglich / daß dieses Gedichte von den Alraunen nicht new / sondern für vielen hundert ja wol tausend oder mehr Jahren schon mag seyn im Schwang gangen / wie dann solches der Name zum theil bezeuget / dann das Wort / ein Ruhn / oder Allruhn ist ein uhraltet Teutsches Wort / und sind diejenige / welche bey den alten Teutschen zukünftige Ding verkündiget / Ruhnen genennet worden. Diese haben auch ihre eigene Sprach gehabt / welche die Rünische (gewiß ein recht herrliche Sprache) geheissen; ... wobey zu mercken / daß das Wort Rünen / so viel heist / als einem **heimlich etwas verkündigen** ... Ingleichem wer raunet der leugt ... (Grimmelshausen 102f.; bold in original)

At this point, both Rist and Grimmelshausen are falling into their own trap: although correct in their assumption that mandrake has been around for 1000 years or longer, they try to locate its origin etymologically within an old Germanic belief. In the process they strangely re-enforce what they try to eliminate: they acknowledge the belief that mandrake has always had its righteous place within the Germanic culture and language, and that it is now a remnant of a once beautiful tongue. The contradiction at work here is the following: by trying to dispose of mandrake and the practices surrounding it, they both contribute to the erroneous belief in mandrake as an indigenous Germanic artifact and therefore affirm its place among the Germans.²⁶ Moreover, they reduce and oversimplify the hybrid, rich history of *Allraune* by declaring it as rooted in Germanic traditions – at a time in German history and culture when the definition of “German“ became increasingly important in language, literature, and in the discourse of nationhood. Cleverly, however,

²⁶ In conjunction to zur Nieden, such a reading of Grimmelshausen’s *Galgen-Männlin* reveals the text’s intertextuality to German miracle plays from the 13th century. As in the case of mandrake, the plays ridiculed the devil as a loser against Christian dogma with its superiority morals. However, the play’s function was and is a different one: “Seine Lächerlichkeit bezeugt weniger seine völlige Desavourierung als vielmehr eine verborgene Zustimmung zu seinem Wirken, eine ‘geheime Zugehörigkeit des Ausgegrenzten, sprich: Paganen, zur ausgrenzenden, sprich: christlichen Lebensordnung“ (zur Nieden, 159). Through superficial, schematic indoctrination the formerly other becomes incorporated as the more than human, the lower equivalent of the Christian god. It becomes its inherent contradiction with the potential to undermine the officially aimed at message.

they both maintain their opinion about mandrake as something despicable, as something that is mendacious and cunning within the German community. According to Rist and Grimmelshausen, mandrake and certain modes of communication (for example: murmuring and lying) are connected with one another. In combination with the presentation of mandrake as originally rooted in German culture, this connection points to a particular problem of argumentation in the text: on one hand, mandrake is perceived as originally German and, therefore, potentially useful for establishing a culturally common ground, while on the other it is something of an evil within— the dangerous other along with its particular ways of living, speaking, and believing.²⁷

How does *Galgen-Männlin* handle this conflictual constellation? It ties the mandrake myth to the question of the appropriate belief. The rather problematic nature of how the text treats this combination becomes clear at the end of Hugenfelß' first annotations:

Wir sehen hier beim Josepho klar / daß die Juden durch diese Wurzel die Teuffel ausgetrieben. Christus aber / der Mund der Wahrheit / welcher solches ohne diese Baraas durch den Finger Gottes verrichtet / spricht zu ihnen Lucae am 11. capitel: **So aber Ich die Teuffel durch Beelzebub austreibe / durch wen treiben sie denn eure Kinder aus?** An welcher Frag leicht zu begreifen / wer entweder die Wurzel selbst: oder von wem wenigst ihre Krafft herrührig gewesen. (Grimmelshausen 77; bold in original)

By relating the nature or origin of mandrake to the devil himself, Hugenfelß' supposedly scientific and rational narrative connects in a polemic fashion the cult surrounding mandrake to Jewish belief and the biblical history of the

²⁷ In such a sense, Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* reasserts the status of the belief surrounding mandrake as myth, insofar as, according to Chase, „myth is a story, myth is narrative“ (Chase 68). From this perspective, the mandrake myth is a story *and* a way of telling a story. Again it becomes clear that Grimmelshausen's text is mainly concerned with the appropriate way of telling a story.

Jews.

Es kann keine größere Sünd begangen werden als die Abgötterey / und die allergrößte Abgötterey ist diese / wann man den Teuffel anbettet. Dannenhero hat dieser hoffärtige Geist auch bey allen Völckern / ihme so mancherhand Götzendienst anrichten lassen / ja bey den Juden selbst / die doch den wahren Gott erkanten / und sein auserwähltes Volck waren. (Grimmelshausen 79)

As Richard Chase points out, “myth must be recognized as the enemy of religion as soon as religion is understood as moral theism or dogmatic theology” (Chase 69). In *Galgen-Männlin*, however, this construction of an enemy is doubly problematic insofar as it is seamlessly combined with a negative depiction of the Jewish faith. By criticizing the cult surrounding the mandrake myth, the text also demonizes the Jewish belief and neglects Christianity’s own, inherent, relation to the image of the mandragora. During the Middle Ages early Christianity and Christians took mandrake for the plant which originally grew on the spot from where God had taken the first soil to form Adam. Adam and Mandrake were considered to be of the same kind (see Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 92). Moreover, the headless mandrake was the symbol for heathens who had to be rescued from demonic soil. “Die seltsame Zauberwurzel ist, so lange sie noch in der Erde steckt, dämonischen Kräften ausgeliefert und untertan. So muß auch die Radix des Menschen der Macht des Teufels entrissen und gleichsam neu gestaltet werden, um das Heil zu erlangen” (Forstner 196). In this sense, the headless root was the uncrowned bride of the true Christian.

Aber der Kopf der Mandragore wird abgeschnitten, wenn der Antichrist getötet werden wird. [...] Ihr nun setzt der Bräutigam ein goldenes Haupt auf, indem er seine Gottheit [...] im Glauben zu erkennen gab. So wird sie mit Ehre und Glorie gekrönt, und er wird sie sich vermählen im klaren Licht seiner Schau (Müller-Ebeling/Rätsch 97f.).

However, this part of the mandrake myth is not mentioned at all in *Galgen-Männlin*. The citations Hugenfelß uses later in the text completely give the impression that mandrake originated from the Jewish handling of the ark of the covenant (Grimmelshausen 80). By having the intended message repeatedly reformulated by Simplicissimus, the voice of the father, it is no longer an exegetical whispering hidden between scientific annotations. The narrative's perspective toward at least two religions should be clear by now: Only Protestantism, Christianity, is good while Judaism is evil due to the mandrake.²⁸ At this point it should be clear that Grimmelshausen's treatise, despite lengthy examples and "scientific" citations that try to give a different impression, is ultimately more concerned with the choice of the appropriate faith than a critical investigation into the nature of mandrake's myth. By relating the notion of evil within German culture to the history and idea of Judaism, devilish superstition is not just placed outside Christian faith but rather problematically associated with Jews. In this regard, *Galgen-Männlin* aims with its polemic and propagandistic overtone at the self-assurance of the righteous Christian faith and manages to tie the potential evil of mandrake's myth to an enemy within the region of Germany. The text hereby eliminates the evil associated with the mandrake myth without entirely divesting itself and the imagined German community of true Christian believers of the myth as the enemy within. The text discards the Germanic interpretation of mandrake and shifts the evil potential to the Jewish faith, history, and religion. The mandrake myth is hence applied to the image of an "other" who

²⁸ Moreover, one of the hopes when caring for a mandrake is to make a fortune – which interestingly seems to fit with some very problematic stereotypes concerning how Jews had to make a living in medieval Germany: "also lockt er hie / durch das verdammende Geld" (see Grimmelshausen 84).

is not a total stranger, but rather a figure and a myth that can be dealt with. In combination with its style, the text itself insofar exhibits a form of rhetorical power: the power to analyze and to persuade. Insofar, Grimmelshausen's text tries to establish itself and its views as superior on the basis of the supposedly inferior other.

However, the way the text establishes its rhetorical power resembles stylistically what its narrative aims to condemn: the actions and hopes related to a real mandrake. In the process of criticizing, the text increasingly mimics its object of critique. Its intention to create a new way of writing and speaking becomes, on a rhetorical level, increasingly close to the mandrake's whispering and murmuring of evil messages. In the same way that Hugenfeß warns about the wicked combination of "Runen" and "Allraunen," Teutonic myths and origins, and a sly way of speaking, the text repeatedly whispers into the ear of the reader its hatred for the combination of supposedly inappropriate ways of writing, believing, and living. The text itself uses the same mode of communication it attempts to criticize.

As this chapter shows, Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* constitutes a first attempt to deal with mandrake's myth in German literature. The text presents itself as strangely situated on the boundaries between fictional narration, non-fictional report, memoirs, and epistolary writing. In this sense, the new language that the "Teutsche Michel" receives is a rhetorically and thematically problematic mixture of an overall dubious analysis of mandrake's myth. It initially depicts mandrake and its myth, as the title indicates, as a "little gallows man", which is a specific German interpretation of the myth insofar as it locates the plants origin within Germanic history and culture. In this sense the text draws intertextually on the content of the folkloric

mandrake myth and shares a certain amount of similarity with regard to its content. In the course of the argumentation, however, the mandrake myth presented in *Galgen-Männlin* differs from the version found in folkloric beliefs in that it uses its associative, mythological potential for reinterpretations or adds new issues that were not just foreign to the folkloric mandrake myth but are problematic in themselves. On the one hand the text tries to discard the plant and the myth, while on the other the text itself configures it as the other within.

3. Christianity, the Self, and the Uncanny: The Mandrake Myth in Tieck's *Der Runenberg*

According to Zarcone, it was German Romantic literature that transformed the mandrake of the occultists into a literary theme. It is therefore no surprise to read the following in Boulloumié:

Mais c'est surtout la littérature allemande du XIX siècle qui a fait de la mandragore des occultistes un véritable thème littéraire. ... la mandragore est entrée dans la littérature où elle semble au carrefour des thèmes fondamentaux du fantastique. (see Boulloumié 188)

Even if, as I have argued in the previous chapter, this claim is dubious with regard to the earlier *Galgen-Männlin*, the amount of Romantic literary works featuring references to mandrake is abundant. Wilhelm Tieck's *Der Runenberg* (1802), Friedrich de LaMotte Fouqué's *Eine Geschichte vom Galgenmännlein* (1810), Ludwig Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten* (1812), and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober* (1819) are the

best-known romantic works that deal with the myth of mandrake.²⁹ The crucial question at this point is: after *Galgen-Männlin*, what is mandrake and its myth in German literature?

Although Koeman correctly doubts any direct reference on the part of German Romantic writers to Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin*, the texts of Tieck, Fouqué, Hoffmann, and Grimm clearly show intertextual relations to the superstitious beliefs surrounding mandrake and Grimmelshausen's treatise of the mandrake myth. At the same time, each text adds new and. What, at first glance, appears to be exclusive dimensions to the mandrake. The following chapter analyzes mandrake's description in Tieck's *Der Runenberg* (Rb). In general, the proposed interpretation of the readings that follow focus on mandrake's status within the text in relation to plot and form. The following analysis of Tieck's tale, based on the role of mandrake as a myth in *Der Runenberg* not only elucidates the action on the level of the plot but moreover discusses the relation between myth, literature, and German Romanticism.

In *Der Runenberg*, the young hunter Christian sits alone and gloomy in the woods far away from his family. While feeling lost as the sun sets, he does not know what direction to take – neither in the woods, nor generally in life.

Gedankenlos zog er eine hervorragende Wurzel aus der Erde, und plötzlich hörte er schreckend ein dumpfes Winseln im Boden, das sich unterirdisch in klagenden Tönen fortzog, und erst in der Ferne wehmütig verscholl. Der Ton durchdrang sein innerstes Herz, er ergriff ihn, als wenn er unvermutet die Wunde berührt habe, an der der sterbende Leichnam der Natur in Schmerzen verscheiden wolle. Er sprang auf und wollte entfliehen, denn er hatte wohl ehemals von der seltsamen Alrunenwurzel gehört, die beim Ausreißen so

²⁹ This embrace of the mandrake myth is, however, not particularly unique for the relation of myth and German Romantic literature. "Es ist der Verdienst der deutschen Romantik, daß sie die Mythenfeindschaft des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts endgültig überwunden hat" (Ziolkowski 173).

herzdurchschneidende Klagetöne von sich gebe, daß der Mensch von ihrem Gewinsel wahnsinnig werden müsse. (Rb 88f.)

Christian plucks a mandrake, and this encounter immediately proves to have the greatest impact on his life – both immediately and in the long run. First, it triggers all of the strange events he experiences that same night; but this moment is a defining one for his later life as well. One reason for this is that together with the plant, the text introduces at the same time the ritual of plucking it, as well as its myth, within which it is encompassed. The mandrake as an original artifact and its myth are hereby closely interrelated. The text presents the myth as rooted in an existing, original plant, the plucking of which has an immediate effect. While the ritual of plucking the mandrake is, aside from Christian's action, less emphasized in the course of *Der Runenberg*, mandrake continues to be present throughout the text in a twofold way: as an actual plant that grows in a region with characteristics that are not unfamiliar to areas in Central Europe, and as the mythical plant that “stands out.”³⁰ While the references to the first representation are limited to two situations (when each of the principal characters, son and father, separately find a mandrake), the aspects and features commonly associated with the root in myth are present throughout the entire text: the plucking, the shriek, the gold, the fortune in life, and the estrangement from the Christian community. This presence of mandrake and its myth, however, correlates with a strange absence of the signifier itself: with the exception of the previous cited passage, mandrake and its myth are not mentioned in *Der Runenberg*.

³⁰ Here, “hervorragende Wurzel” connotes two meanings: the plant that stands out (a) in contrast to the rest of its surroundings, and, (b) because of its mythical powers. The latter reading of “hervorragend” also strangely implies possible positive aspects of the mythical mandrake for Christian, while at the same time it reminds him of the dangers when dealing with the plant.

How, then, is its presence readable?

Immediately after Christian plucks the mandrake, the plant-human is present as a shapeshifter who transmogrifies within mythical boundaries and takes on roles that are associated with the mandrake myth. The wood hag, the black-haired woman, and the stranger(s) are embodiments of the anthropomorphic mandrake. In this sense, the text obviously draws on the aforementioned Germanic version of the mandrake myth that associates the plant with the wise women *Alruna*, who murmurs their messages (see my first chapter). Additionally (also as mentioned in my first chapter), the name *Runenberg* alludes to the Norse myth surrounding the sign characters known as runes. In the 19th century, this etymological connection between *Rune*, *Alruna*, *Alraune* dominated the interpretation of the mandrake myth and related the plant-human to the origin of the Norse writing system, as well as to mythological women. However, Tieck's text also includes a reference that relates the black-haired woman to Diana, the Roman version of Artemis, goddess of the hunt (see Rb 88). In Christian's song, he calls her the best bride a hunter can find: she is the most beautiful image that can burn itself into a hunter's heart. Against the backdrop of this information, the text emphasizes the German version of the mandrake myth without neglecting its relation to other, non-German mythologies. In *Der Runenberg*, Christian encounters three different women: the one on top of mount Runenberg, his wife Elisabeth, and the wood hag. All three of them are associated with plants. Elisabeth is the young woman whose face is "in den zartesten Farben blühend" (Rb 97), while the black-haired woman and the wood hag represent the kind of wise woman who is linguistically and culturally associated with secret knowledge and a sly way of speaking. They are *Alruna*, the wise women of the

norse mythology.

Although Christian perceives Elisabeth as “in bloom” and “plucks” (marries) her, the happiness of this life within the Christian community is limited due to Christian's earlier and repeated encounter with mandrake as the woman he really loves. Even during his wedding night, he says to Elisabeth: “Nein, nicht jenes Bild bist du, welches mich einst in Traum entzückte und das ich niemals ganz vergessen kann” (Rb 99). Although Christian perceives Elisabeth also as an attractive plant, she is second to the pagan goddess, and so is his new life, despite all its comfort, success, and peace it offers him and his family. It falls to pieces, as soon as his external surroundings remind him again of his night atop the Runenberg, a logical effect of his inner state: he is already promised to the preternatural mandrake in its appearance as a mythological woman. As the text describes her: “Sie schien nicht den Sterblichen anzugehören” (Rb 93f.). What or who is she then? She is a combination of mandrake as the bride of (the) Christian and Diana, the goddess of hunt, as well as of Christian himself. When he observes her and she finally hands him the plate, this double goddess merges with Christian's internal landscape: “Er faßte die Tafel und fühlte die Figur, die unsichtbar sogleich in sein Inneres übergang ... Er sah eine Welt von Hoffnung und Schmerz in sich aufgehen“ (Rb 95). Before his final disappearance into the woods, Christian tells Elisabeth “dort im Walde wartet schon meine Schöne, die Gewaltige, auf mich, die mit dem goldenen Schleier geschmückt ist“ (ibid. 111). Christian finally disappears to his wedding with the mythological goddess mandrake. In this sense, *Christian* vanishes from his *Christian* family and community; not only because he returns into the woods after his final farewell from his wife and daughter, but also because he goes

back in time in order to unite himself with aspects of Christianity that, even at the somewhat late medieval time of in which Tieck's text is set, are no longer part of the official dogma of the Christian faith. At this point, the second, broader connotation of the young hunter's name becomes clearer. Originally, he is the young Christian, an adherent of the Christian faith, who is confronted with the re-occurrence of what Christianity tried to forget. The mythical, headless plant-bride that was part of early Christianity, as described in the first chapter, is still – or possibly once again – present in Tieck's text. The non-mortal god-woman on the Runenberg embodies mandrake as Christian's lover and bride. She is the bearer of a knowledge and wisdom that was once considered the true Christian's knowledge but appears to be no longer considered part of the Christian life as the text describes it.

The implied notion of a revengeful return of something no longer wanted is also present in Christian's story of his childhood and upbringing. His father was a gardener who forced his son into garden work, although Christian initially did not find pleasure in it. His father's attempts to force him into liking it fueled his bias against plants and husbandry (see Rb 90). From this perspective, Christian's plucking of the plant can be read as much more problematic. Although it is represented as happening accidentally and unconsciously, it is ultimately Christian who takes revenge on the things and persons he does not like and that are at hand in the woods: plants. His plucking of the plant is a bodily expression of disgust against plants, his father, and his upbringing. He plucks a plant, which, willfully or not, usually triggers the beginning of its decay. By "symbolically" acting against his father's position as the one who must take care of the plants, he tries to kill his father's work and perspective. At a moment when even his love for nature,

Waldeinsamkeit (engl. woodland solitude) and the act of singing about it no longer brings him relief, and nothing else is able to free him from his state of desperation, he finds a way to release the negative energy that is fueled by his father and his upbringing. He looks for a way out of his contradictory dilemma, and it comes as no surprise that he coincidentally plucks the contradictory plant-human. The mandrake's shriek is Christian's key to overcoming the unsatisfying state of his life and world via a knowledge about nature and existence that is outside the father's Christian horizon as depicted in his poem (Rb 108f.). When the former tries to convince his son – with his version of Christian's childhood, nature, and upbringing – about an even more pious life to prevent Christian from falling prey to his inner nature, the latter completely disagrees with his father's explanations and gives his own insights into the historical nature of the interaction between humans, plants, and nature. "Nein, sagte der Sohn, ich erinnere mich ganz deutlich, daß mir eine Pflanze zuerst das Unglück der ganzen Erde bekannt gemacht hat" (Rb 106).

In *Der Runenberg*, mandrake is the mythical, preternatural, plant that, as in the case of Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin*, represents knowledge and messages that contradict and undermine the official version of an established order. Christian believes in the plant and its message. Moreover, he presents himself as the one who understands it. He becomes its translator, a messenger of the unperceptive shriek; therefore the plant-human in form of the goddess attracts Christian not only as a beautiful bride but also as a unique source of knowledge.³¹ He claims to have gained insights into the

³¹ Although the text is not as clear in the case of the father's relation to mandrake, Christian's father shares this ability to a certain degree. He is a gardener, and the one who wanted Christian to learn about plants, albeit in their domesticated state. However, he also is the one who told him about mountains and life in the woods. It is not unlikely that he is the

relation between, and the meaning of, nature, humans, and life superior to that of his father's knowledge of how the world works. Christian's brief speech silences the father; the wisdom of the son's experienced myth trumps the father's knowledge. Christian's complete dismissal of his father's allegoric poem with its educative overtones marks the end of the latter's patriarchal rule over Christian – and his life. Christian does not even bother to respond any longer to his father's lay sermon. Although the father is able to guess the meaning of the tablet his son rediscovers, it is Christian who understands and follows the meaning of the tablet's message. He is eventually able to live his dream and reconcile his inner longing with his external actions. His recognition of the limitedness of his life with his family in the village south of the mountains causes him to regret that he did not choose to live with the goddess right after the night on mount Runenberg.

In combination with mandrake, Christian finally appears to be happy and in tune with himself and his external surroundings. On the other hand, however, it is also clear that he becomes someone who no longer has a place within the lifestyle of the Christian community. Moreover, he, in love with the image of a mythological goddess, is no longer human, or at least not fully so, as evident in his words "ich bin dir so gut wie gestorben" (Rb 111).

This transformation into a stranger of Christianity, however, does not occur at the end of the story but rather takes place right after the night in which he

one who introduced Christian to the mandrake myth; especially since the father later looks for a mandrake, finds one, and tells Christian that it was the plant that told him he would find his son in this region (see Rb 100f.). The father is also able to communicate with plants, especially mandrake, in a more than natural way. Furthermore, he understands Christian's behavior and pressures him to rescue himself by returning to the Christian ideals. Is it because mandrake talked to him, too, but he is not able to understand the entire message?

plucks the mandrake.³² Yet still, he chooses to live in the village for at least five years before he vanishes into the woods, the underground. Furthermore, at the beginning of his life in the village, the text depicts him as content. How, exactly, can this contradictory situation be understood?

From a structuralistic perspective, this contradiction can be understood as an opposition that is common to the narratives of myths in literature. Birgit zur Nieden claims that binary oppositions are generally characteristic of myths in literary texts (see zur Nieden, 143), while according to McCort, the coincidence of opposites – which is typical of German Romanticism – is a case of the so-called *coincidentia oppositorum*: “the metamyth of the overcoming of difference” (Mc Corth 3). Although I am skeptical about the implied possibility of the existence of a single “übermyth” à la archetype, Mc Corth’s concept of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is, in the case of Tieck’s text, insightful in regards to Christian’s quest for his true self. According to McCorth, in Romanticism the “true self is not to be found in any ‘self’ so-called, but in the connections (*coincidentia*) between ‘selves” (ibid., 166). From the outset of the text, Christian has problems concerning himself, his upbringing, as well as the people and surroundings he finds himself faced with. As a child, he wanted to go away from home, and now that he finds himself there he dreams of the missed opportunities of his childhood, as we learn from his conversation with the stranger. He is constantly in search of something and someone: his present self in relation to his former self. In the course of the search, he perceives his reality in a mixture of the common and

³² After Christian's encounter at the Runenberg, he perceives everything as foreign to him. When he casts his gaze down upon the village's cornfields, he feels pity with poor “humankind“. A few moments later, the text uses “Menschengeschlecht” again: this time in the priest's harvest festival sermon. The implication is clear: Christian gazes godlike, since he merged with a goddess' spirit.

the extraordinary, the real and the ideal. Christian is “mißvergnügt und in sich versunken” (Rb 88), because his quest for his true nature and self has been unsuccessful thus far. The next moment, however, he is plucking the mandrake, and, at the end of his encounter with the image of the black-haired, naked goddess of the Runenberg, he eventually leaves his old life behind: “Sein ganzes voriges Leben lag wie in einer tiefen Ferne hinter ihm: das Seltsamste und das Gewöhnliche war so in einander vermischt, daß er es unmöglich sondern konnte” (Rb 96). After the night’s experiences, he is strangely “reborn,” not as a new self, but he undergoes a transformation through the mandrake in relation to the black-haired woman. However, this new state of self is not clear to Christian just yet.

Erstaunt und verwirrt wollte er sich sammeln und seine Erinnerungen anknüpfen, aber sein Gedächtniß war wie mit einem wüsten Nebel abgefüllt ... Nach langem Streite mit sich selbst glaubte er endlich, ein Traum oder ein plötzlicher Wahnsinn habe ihn in dieser Nacht befallen, nur begriff er immer nicht, wie er sich so weit in eine fremde entlegene Gegend habe verirren können. (Rb 96)

Christian is confused because he has lost the connection, as reified by the tablet, not just to his old existence but also to the situation and surroundings that allow him to conduct his new existence with mandrake. Christian struggles with his confused inner state and is unable to resist the Christian version of a new life. He thinks that he falls in love, but this time, his heart remains strangely calm. The moment the priest issues the blessing, Christian feels “wie von einer unsichtbaren Gewalt durchdrungen, und das Schattenbild der Nacht in die tiefste Erinnerung wie ein Gespenst hinab gedrückt” (ibid.). Christian is not yet able to accept the familiar side of the uncanny mandrake woman he encounters on mount Runenberg. He is, once again, doing

something that, in Freudian terms, can be described as repression. He represses his images and his desires for a different kind of life, woman, and knowledge. With regard to Freud's idea of the uncanny as something familiar from the past that returns as something haunting in the present, the text presents the reader with at least two varieties of the uncanny: on the one hand the uncanny as embodied by the mandrake myth and, on the other, Christian's own uncanniness.³³ In the course of the text, Christian's encounters with the mandrake, the strangers, and the women turn him into someone, indeed something, uncanny. Right after the night with the black-haired woman, he appears different from the others with whom he is familiar: the villagers, his family, and his father. His father is surprised to find him counting gold at night, while his wife sits scarred from his horrifying looks and mutterings during the night. Scariest for her, however, are Christian's apparent efforts to disguise his gloomy otherness. "Am schrecklichsten sey ihr seine Lustigkeit am Tage, denn sein Lachen sey so wild und frech, sein Blick irre und fremd" (Rb 104). His father makes the same discovery: "Sie gingen schweigend zurück nach Hause, und der Alte mußte sich jetzt ebenfalls vor der Lustigkeit seines Sohnes entsetzen, denn sie dünkte ihm ganz fremdartig" (Rb 106). The uncanny in *Der Runenberg* is something familiar that is already somewhat distant, closer to the unfamiliar. It is an unfamiliar uncanny that becomes the familiar uncanny. After his first direct encounter with the unfamiliar uncanny,

³³ In the case of the former, the text even adds, in my reading, to Freud's model of the uncanny. Freud defines the uncanny as the return of the familiar as horrifying. In *Der Runenberg*, however, Christian perceives things and situations as uncanny which are not described as ever having been familiar to him. Christian has neither found a mandrake nor has he met the woman before. Still, he perceives them as somewhat familiar. If we, however, consider the role of what he has heard about the mandrake and the what he sings about Diana, the uncanniness of the situation becomes clearer: the text shows the transition from the slightly familiar and potentially uncanny that one encounters in various oral and written modes into an embodied uncanniness that one experiences in real life. The text, thus, blurs the boundaries between the familiar and the uncanny as well as between the occurrence of the uncanny in dreams and in reality.

Christian himself becomes gradually, but inevitably, uncanny. In the context of Freud's notion of the uncanny and Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816), Christian is the unpolished predecessor of Hoffmann's human automaton Nathaniel; the text describes him "als wenn ein andres Wesen aus ihm, wie aus einer Maschine, unbeholfen und ungeschickt heraus spiele –" (Rb 106). For Christian himself, the uncanniness of the situations after the encounter with mandrake, seems to be decreasingly based on their horrifying nature as on their power to influence the way he perceives himself and his life in the village. While he initially is scarred by nature and the images that remind him of his encounter with the goddess, he gradually gives into the inner voices that remind him of his night with mandrake and the goddess. He comes to understand that he was, and is, no longer able to be an obeying son, loving husband, and pious member of a Christian community. The aforementioned relation between myth and the uncanny allows for a closer analysis of Christian's nature after the encounter with mandrake. As described in the first chapter, myth is related to the preternatural and its potentially uncanny quality. However, this uncanniness of myth is not necessarily primitive or negative in the sense of something less. Quite the contrary, "myths do not show us what is *less* than ordinarily natural; they show us what is *more* than ordinarily natural" (Chase 70; italics in original). From that perspective, Christian becomes, although in a somewhat strange fashion, more than human. He is more than human because of his longing for the mythological and relational i.e. – the Romantic self.

Christian eventually accepts his initial merging with the pagan goddess as the defining moment of his life. His coalescence with the goddess is what Schlegel conveys by his call for the Romantic blending of individuals

(McCorth 166). It is the quest for a state that is superior to what it regards as the deluded egoistic or subject-object level, “a state that can only emerge to the extent that the ego surrenders its conventional psycho-spiritual hegemony” (ibid.).

Christian eventually surrenders his ability to distinguish between dream and reality, the real and ideal. Moreover, he gives up his mortal way of living in order to experience his immortal, eternal idea of what his life already is, and ultimately could be. Mandrake as bride, message, and the familiar uncanny is hereby the key to combining and uniting contradictory longings, dreams, and ideas. In a traditional Christian sense, the plant-human as plant-woman exemplifies the mythological hope to unite Christian(s) with himself and themselves, as well as with their understanding of nature and life.

A hundred years after *Galgen-Männlin*, mandrake as a myth in German romantic literature problematizes the boundaries between nature, myth, and human forms of life. From this perspective, Tieck's text critiques social, cultural, and religious features of the – somewhat unspecific – setting of the text. Nature, humans, and Christian communities are unable to harmonize their longings in accordance with their internal and external nature. Christian has to become a tragic character, one that finally vanishes from sight, in order to find a place outside ordinary life. Since he is able to go underground, he becomes an in-between being: half-human, half-god, half-myth. At the same time, myth and mythology in *Der Runenberg* show first signs of what later can be described in modern psychoanalytic terms. The mandrake, as in the case of *Galgen-Männlin*, is present as a Romantic myth, while the plant itself vanishes. Mandrake becomes a shapeshifter, closely related to dangerous women. In this sense, Tieck's text keeps, and at the same

time adds to, the potential meaning of the mandrake myth. In this way, the text ensures and enlarges the place of mandrake as a myth within German literature. What is, then, the status of the mandrake myth in German literature at the beginning of the 20th century?

4. The Mandrake Myth in Modern German Literature: Döblin's *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume*

Alfred Döblin's *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* (1913) is, to all appearances, the story of a man who tries to come to terms with his relation to nature: the external one surrounding him, his own human nature, and the interactions between the two. "Der schwarzgekleidete Herr" (Bb 102) swings his walking stick over the heads of flowers while he is taking a walk uphill to St. Ottilien. Not really paying attention to his surroundings, he is surprised when his stick gets stuck in the sparsely growing weeds. He turns around and tries, at first without success, to dislodge his walking stick with both fists firmly grasping it. His second attempt to free his stick is successful, but his tranquility of mind and his walking rhythm are gone. For a moment, he breathlessly stares at the ground before he starts to beat the silent plants to a pulp. After having slaughtered them all, he tries to continue his walk but at the moment when he seems to resume his accustomed pace he becomes nervous and begins to see himself back at the scene of his frenzy:

Diese eine lockte seinen Blick, seine Hand, seinen Stock. Sein Arm hob sich, das Stöckchen sauste, wupp, flog der Kopf ab. ... Plump sank jetzt der gelöste Pflanzenkopf und wühlte sich in das Gras. Tiefer, immer tiefer, durch die Grasdecke hindurch, in den Boden hinein. Jetzt fing er an zu sausen, in das Erdinnere, daß keine Hände ihn mehr halten

konnten. Und von oben, aus dem Körperstumpf, tropfte es, quoll aus dem Halse weißes Blut ... (Bb 104)

The bewildered Michael Fischer loses his grip on reality. “Was ist geschehen?” fragte er nach einer Weile.” (ibid.) His memories, speech, and body gestures get mingled in an almost insane way. While he tries to continue his walk, he is haunted by the image of the falling and now probably rotten head, the stump, and the foaming blood. Even his sense of taste and sense seem to be affected: “Der Wald roch nach der Pflanzenleiche.” (Bb 106)

Caught in his strange perception and the image of what might have happened, the text describes how Michael’s body appears to him as if he acts on his own and against his will. His legs begin to carry him off in an unwanted direction. Mr. Fischer’s mind appears to be deeply disturbed by this observation and, while soliloquizing, he starts to punish his rebellious legs with a stab of his pocketknife. Eventually he is stabbing his knife into a tree that he is hugging, while at the same time he is seized by a desire to return to the crime scene and cover with earth the head of the buttercup. Fearing that he might be watched and noticed by others, he pretends to act normal while giving in to his desire and returning to the place of the incident. During his walks, he tries to remain in control of his movements and thoughts but eventually is caught by the idea that the buttercup could still be alive and healed: “Ihm huschte durch den Kopf, daß er die Verletzte wieder heilen könnte, wenn er sie mit Hölzchen stützte und etwa ringsherum um Kopf und Stiel einen Klebeverband anlegte. ... Er fing an schneller zu gehen, seine Haltung zu vergessen, zu rennen. Mit einmal zitterte er vor Erwartung.” (Bb 107). When he is unable to find her, Mr. Fischer believes that Ellen – the name he has given the flower in the meantime – is dead, murdered by him. He

begins to imagine his punishment:

Man würde über ihn herfallen, von allen Seiten. ... Sie würden ihm den Kopf abschlagen, die Ohren abreißen, die Hände in glühende Kohlen legen. ... Er wußte, es würde ihnen allen einen Spaß machen, doch er würde keinen Laut von sich geben, um die gemeinen Henkersknechte zu ergötzen. (Bb 108f.)

He perceives the surrounding nature as if “they” were reacting toward his action; he especially perceives the trees as if they were trying to make him fall and hinder his return to the village. Eventually he makes it back to the local church, he and his clothes all bruised and battered, and his stick broken.

Through this detailed summary of the plot thus far, it becomes clear that *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* tries to tell the story of an encounter between the somewhat strange character of Mr. Michael Fischer and nature, to be more precise: a buttercup named Ellen. The way the character of Mr. Fischer is introduced in the text and is portrayed in the course of events further illustrates that he, his body movements, thoughts, and speech, are deeply influenced and disturbed by the effects of his slaughter of the plants and the images related to it. His image of himself is split and his sense of coordination distorted while his thoughts and words escape his usual rational control. In the same way that Mr. Fischer finds his words and actions increasingly difficult to control, the nature surrounding him seems to slide out of its usual state. He is haunted, not just by himself and his body, but by an anthropomorphic state of nature that seems to be more than eager to hold him responsible for his wrongdoing(s). Slithering out of the woods back into the village constitutes his attempt to leave behind the unprecedented horror of being a stranger to himself and nature. Yet the hope for an immediate solution is destroyed immediately: “Es war etwas geschehen, es war etwas geschehen.

... Dann muß es Dinge geben, die unglaublich sind" (Bb 110f.). What could be a possible explanation for the strange events of the story?

Past readings of the text are quick to point to its psychological or psychoanalytical dimensions and thereby propose a reading based on categories of insanity, literature, and psychopathology. All interpretations of the story, albeit to varying degrees, similarly base their approach on Döblin's background as a studied medical practitioner and his intention to link literary and medical discourse (see, for example, Reinecke 2008, Cowan 2007, Tewarson 2004, Reuchlein 1991, and Stegemann 1981).

Freilich ist es in der Literatur zur *Ermordung* häufig bei einer derart pauschalen Behauptung geblieben, ohne daß ein wirklichker Nachweis erfolgt wäre, worin denn die Korrelation von Literatur und Psychatrie in dieser exemplarischen Erzählung bestehe und wie sie sich im einzelnen niedergeschrieben und ausgeformt habe. (Reuchlein 14f.; italics in original)

Even though Reuchlein calls for an analysis based on textual evidence and, therefore, doubts if not criticizes former readings of the text, he nevertheless retains the idea of referring to the discourse established and favored by the author of the *Butterblume*. Only recently have scholars tentatively begun to point out the problematic nature of such approaches: "This is not to say, however, that he [Döblin] simply transposed medical knowledge into literature or used literature as a forum for medical discourse" (Cowan 497). Still, even in Cowan, the tendency to rely on Döblin's own interpretations and explanations of his more literary works remains pronounced.

Although the afocited interpretations of Döblin's *Butterblume* certainly allow for insights into the description of Mr. Fischer's actions as well as his mental and somatic state, they tend to focus on his character while neglecting the interaction between plant(s), humans, and nature. In this

manner, they generally also neglect the mythological dimensions of the text, not to mention the way it comments on the nature, role, and function of the myth in German literature of the early 20th century. In the following pages, I attempt to focus on precisely these relations in order to allow for a reading of Döblin's text that opens up the somewhat limited and repetitive explanations of what is at stake here. My main approach toward the text is therefore based on the assumption that it consists of a literary description of an encounter with mandrake at the beginning of the 20th century, while at the same time it constitutes a literary attempt to comment on the status of myth, man, and the role of modern German literature before the 1920s.

The incredibility of what has happened becomes clearer with regard to mandrake and the myth related to it. Mr. Fischer's delayed vision of his slaughter and the resulting effects on his mind and body are not arbitrary. Although the text describes moments of strange behavior on the part of Mr. Fischer before his walk to St. Ottilien, the crucial features of his actions are "rooted in" the specific encounter with the plants. This encounter was inappropriate on two levels: it threw him out of his routine and resulted in an inadequate handling of the plant. The consequences are impressive, and Mr. Fischer, as other readings of the text have remarked, shows clear symptoms of incipient insanity. What is now the relation between the slaughter of the plants and Mr. Fischer's disorientation? The answer proposed here is, at this point, simple yet far-reaching: the beheaded buttercup was and is a mandrake. Although this assumption may seem initially as though it could easily be dismissed as somewhat obscure and minor, the evidence in the text is abundant and the consequences are crucial for an understanding of the

aforementioned relations between plant, myth, and human. After attempting to return to his normal life, Mr. Fischer notices the changes in his daily behavior. While he is calculating, something inside him insists on transferring money to the dead flower – an urge he cannot resist. In the afternoon, he puts money in a special box and, later that day, even opens up an account for the dead plant-human, now called Ellen. Shortly thereafter, he feels an urge to worship Ellen. He furiously commands his housekeeper to set up an additional small plate for her. Mr. Fischer performs all the ritualistic actions that are/were often associated with the superstitious myth surrounding mandrake. He donates money and food to her and she becomes mysteriously part of his daily life, sharing his living space, his work, and his thoughts with him. Moreover, he is tyrannized by his thoughts of her while she becomes part of him: “Wie ein Gewissen sah die Blume in seine Handlungen, streng, von den größten bis zu den kleinsten alltäglichen” (Bb 111f.). She becomes his conscience. Mr. Fischer is possessed by the voice and the gaze of the undead, mandrake-like buttercup Ellen that lives in his mind. He shows all the features that are commonly associated with the treatment of a mandrake root from the perspective of the mandrake myth: worshipping and providing for a headless, anthropomorphic plant-human. Of course, the question now is: what does he gain from it?

Initially, thinking of Ellen and his situation seems to have a negative effect on him. It drives him crazy, and he contemplates committing suicide: “Ja, an Selbstmord dachte er, um diese Not endlich zu stillen” (ibid., 112). Yet, at the same time, Mr. Fischer starts to take strange pleasure in his relation to his plant-human. Despite the ever-increasing level of ridiculousness that he displays, he enjoys both the torment and shame of his actions, as well as his

fantasy of treating her badly. “Ununterbrochen schwebte er zwischen Todespein und Entzücken; er labte sich ängstlich an ihrem wütenden Schreien, das er manchmal zu hören glaubte” (Bb 113). Ellen and Mr. Fischer find themselves in a symbiotic state of existence from which the human derives a conscience and pleasure. He is in a state of rapture because of the past encounter with the plant, while at the same time he takes pleasure from his private war against her, as his conscience. He cannot live with or without her. “Die Blume gehörte zu ihm, zum Komfort seines Lebens. Er dachte mit Verwunderung an die Zeit, in der er ohne die Blume gelebt hatte” (Bb 113). He is changed by the plant, or, to be more precise: he is changed by the power of the plant-human to trouble human life. In the same way that a buttercup was transformed into a beheaded, bodiless plant-human that controls Mr. Fischer’s life, he was transformed into someone else, a somewhat friendlier yet slightly somber figure. Furthermore, both figures are connected through an implied decapitation: the beheading of the plant is described as a never-ending fall through soil while Mr. Fischer is at the brink of losing his head figuratively.

At this point, the description of the buttercup’s effects on Fischer’s daily life come to a head and depart from the superstitious descriptions of the relation between mandrake and humans described in the first chapter. While Döblin intertextually shows the aforementioned aspects usually related to the handling of mandrake root from the perspective of a myth, he dispenses with the material body of the plant. The plant itself no longer exists as an artifact but becomes a bodiless part of man’s life. The myth is turned into an obscure belief that no longer needs a material body of its own in order to have an effect on the human. “Jeder Mensch habe seine eigene Religion; man müsse eine

persönliche Stellung zu einem unaussprechlichen Gott einnehmen” (Bb 113).

Mr. Fischer’s God is a beheaded plant that has taken over his physical as well as mental faculties.

However, at this point, the text exemplifies and goes beyond the difference between mandrake as a plant and the myths surrounding it: although the materialistic, human-shaped body of the root might have been important as a support for the belief in the myth, it is ultimately unnecessary in order to achieve its perturbing effects. It is possible to speculate whether the buttercup that Mr. Fischer's walking-cane slaughtered might or might not be an unrecognized mandrake or whether a mandrake is growing among the buttercups.³⁴ The important point is that the consequences of the slaughter are described as decisive for Mr. Fischer's following observations and actions and that they show the features that are ascribed to mandrake’s myth. In this sense, *Butterblume* reaffirms Barthe’s analysis of myth as not centered around an original, true version or object. Oddly enough, Döblin's text is interested in the idea of an original state of human nature that seems to oscillate between the absence and presence of the lost object of “natural” desire. Although described as being happy with his internal/external plant-human Ellen, Mr. Fischer finally figures out a way to get rid of her. By digging out another buttercup and taking “her“ home, he fantasizes about replacing Ellen with one of her daughters and in this fashion preempting Ellen from requesting further tribute. This kind of double domestication – the daughter and Ellen are supposed to be tamed – seems to be a viable step for Mr. Fischer to free

³⁴ The basis for such a speculation becomes even greater when one considers that the term buttercup itself is somewhat blurry and generic: it is more of an umbrella term for various flowers sharing the same characteristic features than a precise name referring to a singular plant. In other words it is not really clear what kind of plant the text is referring to.

himself from Ellen and his distorted self-perception. Eventually, the pot with the daughter plant falls to the floor and is thrown away by the housekeeper. He grows excited, dresses correctly, and disappears into the woods – with murder on his mind: “In Gedanken schwang er schon sein schwarzes Stöckchen. Blumen, Kaulquappen, auch Kröten sollten daran glauben. Er konnte morden, so viel er wollte” (Bb 115). He disappears into the darkness of the wood – like a madman. Mr. Fischer did not escape his first encounter with the plant-human Ellen. By divesting himself of the image of her crying, speaking, and commanding, he simultaneously got rid of his conscience, the mystic relation which kept him going. This is the nature of mandrake: when trying to eliminate it, it only becomes stronger.

As in the case of Grimmelshausen’s text, the interaction with mandrake undermines any attempt to establish a single hierarchy, a secure and fixed order. By trying to discard the aspects described to mandrake, its features are formally re-inscribed into the text. In Döblin’s tale, mandrake no longer needs to be present as an artefact; the question whether or not it is a real mandrake ultimately becomes obsolete. Mandrake has disappeared and at the same time has spread. Even a common buttercup possesses now the power to disturb deeply the everyday life of modern, rational man. What happened to mandrake?

From the perspective of the text, the beheaded plant-human Ellen rotted away while her head is falling, continually falling toward the center of the earth. The crucial aspect here, however, is the idea that the plant as plant-human only exists within the mind of Mr. Fischer. He has internalized it/her. This internalization is described in terms of devouring: “Als man Herrn Michael fragte, was er am liebsten esse, fuhr er mit kalter Überlegung heraus:

‘Butterblumen; Butterblumen sind mein Leibgericht.’ ... Er fühlte sich als scheusäliger Drache, der geruhsam Lebendiges herunterschluckt, dachte an wirr Japanisches und Harakiri” (Bb 112f.).³⁵ In conjunction with Theodore Ziolkowski, this internalization of a plant through consumption is characteristic of the way that the late 19th and early 20th century tried to deal with the idea of the myth: “Erst diese völlig neue Auffassung des Mythos als eines blühenden Organismus, von dem die Gesundheit des Volkes abhängt, ermöglicht wiederum das gastronomische Motiv” (Ziolkowski 182). The myth turns into something edible, a strange kind of “food for thought.” Mr. Fischer’s rationality needed to be fed, and reached outside to find the myth of mandrake. All he had to do was to knock off her head to gain access to the fearsome yet strangely thrilling root. He needs the “lowly“ other to feed on, to find a playground for this irrationality. “Der nahrungswütige, mythosfressende, rastlos nach eßbaren Wurzeln wühlende Deutsche” (ibid.) is Mr. Fischer. “Und nun steht der mythenlose Mensch, ewig hungernd, unter allen Vergangenheiten und sucht grabend und wühlend nach Wurzeln.” (Nietzsche 229).

Through Mr. Fischer, Döblin’s text offers a first look into the problematic nature of this combination of myth, human, and rational/irrational longing to find and overcome one’s nature in the context of German philosophy and culture at the beginning of the 20th century. Myth

³⁵ In Wagner, the strange mixture of things Mr. Fischer fantasizes about when thinking of consumption becomes related to the nature of the myth: “Begriff früher im Mythos das Volk nur das Heimische, so sucht es jetzt, wo ihm das Verständnis des Heimischen verloren gegangen war, Ersatz durch immer neues Fremdartiges. Mit Heißhunger verschlang es alles Ausländische und Ungewohnte: Seine nahrungswütige Phantasie erschöpfte alle Möglichkeiten der menschlichen Einbildungskraft” (Wagner 41). Mandrake embodies, as I have shown in the chapter on *Galgen-Männlin*, both the strange[r] and the familiar in German culture. Mr. Fischer becomes both the familiar as well as the strange[r], which he later devours.

(“Mythos“) is perceived as a kind of remedy that helps the modern [Ger]man deal with the feeling of deracination and hunger. From this perspective, Mr. Fischer’s encounter with the plant is positive in a twofold sense. From a philosophical, Nietzschean perspective, mandrake in the guise of Ellen forms the long-awaited myth of the root that will re-establish an organic relation between nature and man, external nature as well as man’s own. As buttercup, image, and voice, mandrake represents the [re]discovery of the myth and of modern man himself. On the level of the narration, this discovery provides Mr. Fischer with a conscience, superstitious, but nevertheless god-addressing notion of belief, which he takes comfort in: “Die Blume gehörte zu ihm, zum Komfort seines Lebens” (Bb 113). The act of replacing this belief with the faith in the justice of the juridical system thus results in the elimination not only Mr. Fischer’s superstitious confusion but also his conscience.³⁶ His decision to get rid of the plant is surprising, and contradictory to the comfort gained through the relationship. How can we read this sudden turn of events?

Once again Nietzsche’s ideas about the nature of the German relationship between myth and man are helpful: “Wir halten so viel von dem reinen und kräftigen Kerne des deutschen Wesens, daß wir gerade von ihm jene Ausscheidung gewaltsam eingepflanzter fremder Elemente zu erwarten wagen und es für möglich erachten, daß der deutsche Geist sich auf sich selbst zurückbesinnt” (Nietzsche 232). Against this backdrop, *Butterblume* comments on the ambiguous nature of the relationship between modern man and myth as described by Nietzsche at the turn of the 20th century. While

³⁶ His strange idea of getting rid of his plant-human conscience named Ellen is a typical case of an irrational self-deception. By applying the abstract law of compensation to “his case”, he is turning his guilt and behavior into a cryptic meta-language and meta-perspective solely understood by him. Ellen and the reader are excluded from this irrational logic.

Döblin's text depicts the influence of the mandrake myth as partially positive – in the sense of a conscience that forces modern man to reflect on the potentially cruel effects of his everyday, unconscious, and “rational” actions – the text reveals the problematic nature of the pleasure derived from such an imagined and internalized relationship to myth. Such a pleasure and comfort are actuated by images of ill-treatment and everyday torture of the lowly other. Even more, Mr. Fischer is at war: “Und so heimlich verlieb dieser Krieg, und niemand wußte darum” (Bb 113).

“Heimlich“ here points to another aspect of Mr. Fischer that is part of mandrake's myth and relates him to Christian in *Der Runenberg*: as similar to Christian's transformation into someone, something uncanny, Mr. Fischer himself becomes uncanny. His body, his words, and his gestures undermine the alleged secrecy of his relation to Ellen and expose him, finally, as an uncanny madman, who vanishes into the woods in order to kill. The parallels to Christian's fate are obvious. Moreover, Mr. Fischer is what Christian, when he still was a child, wanted to become: “Ich wollte Fischer werden” (Rb 90). Mr. Fischer completes this strange circular intertextuality when he becomes what Christian is: a hunter. In the case of the former, the idea of hunting, however, differs: although Mr. Fischer also hunts to satisfy both his lust and hunger, his way of hunting reads more as a rampage against “lowly” creatures. Christian, in contrast, disappears into the woods in order to live a life based on the hidden knowledge he became aware of and gained from nature through a phantastic love relationship with a “lowly” mandrake bride. From this perspective, mandrake's myth becomes radicalized.

After having imagined, tormented, and devoured the other, the disposal of the plant-human (a.k.a. his conscience) finally allows him to enjoy his lust

and appetite for more slaughtering of “lowly creatures” without restraint. In a Nietzschean/Zarathustrian sense, Mr. Fischer has seemingly overcome the “nauseating“ elements in the relationship between modern man and myth. As a result, he, on one hand returns to his old lifestyle, while at the same time he reaches a new level of consciousness: he is not only aware of his desire to kill “lowly others, ” but, moreover, he himself is able to satisfy his needs immediately and without the assistance of others.

In this sense, Mr. Fischer turns into a myth himself. Via the relation to a mythological root, he becomes a mystic Nietzschean [Ger]man who [re]discovers his true inner core and calling. The encounter with another myth eventually enables Mr. Fischer to become a new myth: the cured and finally reinvigorated German who is determined to subdue lowly others. This new man is a physically weak and fat bureaucrat without a conscience whose past and future killings are supported by the idea of a juridical system and the sense of doing the appropriate thing. As such, this literary figure, according to Ziolkowski, is later omnipresent in literature as well as historic everyday life. “Denn ein Volk, das einmal diese gastronomische Rhetorik akzeptiert hat, erblickt kein allzu großes kulinarisches Wunder darin, wenn in der Hexenküche der Zwanziger Jahre die mythischen Wurzeln à la Rosenberg zubereitet werden – das heißt, mit den ebenso mythischen Soßen des Bluts” (Ziolkowski 183f.).

What, now, is the status of the mandrake myth? In my reading, Döblin’s text comments on the myth of mandrake in two ways: by incorporating and transporting aspects of the myth into a literary plot but without mentioning it. In a similar way that Mr. Fischer treats the image of the plant, the text handles the mandrake myth. Without ever mentioning or

naming it once directly, *Butterblume* intertextually relates to, and uses aspects of, the myth. It is absent on the level of the signifier, yet readable on the level of plot and narration. The plant-human has disappeared and reemerges transformed at the beginning of the story, only to repeat this transformation instantly. The potential mandrake-buttercup disappears and is lost to Mr. Fischer, the text, and the reader. It reemerges with a certain delay, and a peculiar relation of closeness to, and distance from, the human. The myth reemerges as a mental image of Mr. Fischer, who suddenly sees himself from the outside while he is slaughtering the plant. It turns into a stream of thoughts and voices, and finally becomes his conscience. It is close to Mr. Fischer, and at the same time distant. It is not he himself who sets up the bank account for her, just as it is not he himself who prepares the saucer for her food. Moreover, the food does not exist, it is only imagined. In accordance with Barthes, the objects of the myth are discarded and the plant is finally dumped both literally and physically.

However, this dumping of the plant-human as myth is an illusion. As I have explained before, the myth of mandrake is not done away with in Döblin's story. By not directly signifying or trying to discard it on the level of the plot, Döblin transforms and reestablishes the myth, updating and making it suitable for literary myth at the beginning of the 20th century. Furthermore, the common notion of being "entwurzelt" (to be uprooted, to feel cut off from one's roots, history, or land) in modernity acquires an additional meaning here: "entwurzeln" (to uproot) as the act of eliminating mandrake myth in order to clear it of its former, historical content, and to allow the emergence of the new myth of the modern [Ger]man. Reminiscent features guarantee a transition, but are becoming increasingly undetectable. Just as the idea of the

myth in German literature becomes separated from a specific mythological tradition in its content, the myth of mandrake becomes devoured and dissolved in order to support the aforementioned idea of a blurry, organic, myth-based unity with oneself that hungers for destruction. Dealing with the preeminently contradictory mandrake, however, always means dealing with the limits of life and death, and what is acceptable within a certain framework, either given by society or religion:

Mandrake is proof of the continuity of life at the precise moment when life is being taken by the state; it is the life—the excess, if you will—that escapes death as the noose tightens; it is the life that is created by death—the perverse, magical, turned-around life that only state violence could create. (Taussig 128f.)

Döblin's *Butterblume* reverses this creation: it is the mythological mandrake that lays the basis for – as the supporting mythos for the myth of the reinvigorated new modern [Ger]man – individual and national state violence. It is in this specific and broader sense that Mr. Fischer embodies the uncanny, modern [Ger]man, whose relation to myth represents the shifting problematic aspects that were earlier outlined in German culture and philosophy around the turn of the century.

Conclusion

Since more than 2000 years, mandrake and its myth draws interest to itself as both a medical and a mythological plant. My study is an explorative attempt to analyze the representation of mandrake and its myth in German literature from 1673 to 1913 against a broader, historico-anthropological backdrop of mandrake and its myth in various cultures. As a myth, mandrake

is rooted in ritualistic, superstitious folk traditions as well as in literary works. The interpretation of mandrake and its myth reveals a considerably common ground of topics associated with the plant-human. In general, it is regarded as a preternatural object whose powers are potentially dangerous for humans, especially its shriek when being plucked. Other aspects of the superstitious folk belief include ritual, worship, and, especially in the region of Germany, the idea of the transformation of the plant-human into an actual living being, a “little gallows man”. Grimmelshausen's *Galgen-Männlin* draws explicitly on this Germanized version of the myth and uses its associated potential of interpretation to construct a problematic recombination and reinterpretation of mandrake myth with regard to language reform, faith, and the German nation at the end of the 17th century. Grimmelshausen's work thereby uses an elaborate structure and rhetoric that places *Galgen-Männlin* (the first German text that, as indicated by the title, exclusively deals with mandrake) between fiction and academic, and non-fictional writing.

Some 130 years after *Galgen-Männlin* came *Der Runenberg*, a text that was written during what is commonly referred to as German Romanticism – a time when depictions of mandrake are abundant, yet not exclusive to German literature alone. In Tieck's text, the mandrake's myth is mentioned on the level of the signifier only once, however both plant and myth are present throughout the Christian's quest to understand his external and internal world. Mandrake is once again the mythological plant and plant-human, that crosses and disturbs the boundaries between plant and human, nature and culture, and different forms of knowledge about life, nature, and faith. As an uncanny familiar, the plant-human turns (the) Christian into an uncanny lover of an erotic, internalized image of the plant as hunting goddess.

Intertextually, Tieck refers to both the mandrake myth in folklore as well as to Grimmelshausen's interpretation of the plant.

In *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume*, the absence of mandrake on the level of the signifier is obvious, while at the same time the myth is nevertheless present at the level of interpretation. Mandrake has disappeared and reappeared as the image of a beheaded buttercup that haunts Mr. Fischer with its internal presence as Ellen. Mandrake and its myth are described as a normative force that helps the modern, deracinated [Ger]man to gain a conscience and to find his place in relation to nature. This place, however, ultimately serves as the launching pad for the quest to kill “lowly creatures.” Against the backdrop of philosophical ideas concerning the relation of man, myth, and nation at the turn of the century, *Butterblume* is the story of the mythological reappearance and disappearance of the mandrake myth and its role in the creation of a new individual and national myth: the new, modern [Ger]man. Döblin's text hereby marks a recess, because it excludes aspects that were related to the mandrake myth in the other two works (for example: the presence of the myth on the level of the signifier) while adding, at the same time, new associations, as in the case of the mythological plant-human's presence despite the absence of its object, i.e. the plant itself. Yet, despite these differences to earlier representations of the plant-human, *Butterblume* also includes well-known aspects of the myth: mandrake is perceived as woman, through whom man gains insights into [his] nature, the world, and faith, all of which ultimately lead man to discover and live his problematic desires.

Mandrake thus is the root of all evil: less because of its agents and more because of its mythological potential. Located between heaven and earth;

nature and culture; official medicine and forbidden drug, mandrake disturbs not only the platitudes of life but literature as well. As a myth, its potential for malignity undermines the messages and common readings of literary texts throughout three centuries.

As I have attempted to show in this study this ill nature of mandrake's myth does, however, allow for insightful, new readings of "canonical" texts. Mandrake's "vicious" position thus offers an analytical perspective worthy of consideration for future analyses of literature and film, for example Ewers' novel *Alraune: Die Geschichte eines lebendigen Wesens*. An analysis of Ewers' text, as well as of its filmic adaptations, are beyond the scope of this study but promise to be insightful with regard to the relationship of the mandrake myth to such themes as "the making" of modern woman (specifically the femme fatale) as part of the medical discourse on the creation of new forms of [super-]human life. Henrik Galeen's film *Alraune* (1927) in particular depicts a complex concept of the interaction between modern societies' understanding of human nature, artificial life forms, and Germany during the time of the Weimar Republic, which certainly allows for further insights into the modern configuration of myth, nation, and [super-]human forms of existence. Moreover, a comparative analysis of mandrake and its myth amongst the various national literatures would certainly afford valuable insights into the relation of plants, humans, and literature.

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