



Mandrakes – a source of much fascination in the Renaissance, the mandrake, like Friar Lawrence's herbs, was understood to be both poisonous and medicinal. As a medicine, it was attributed soporific and aphrodisiac powers, linking it with Juliet's sleeping potion as well as with the love that necessitates it. As the name suggests, mandrakes were also considered quasi-human: popular lore held that the plant sprung from the seed of a hanged man, and that when the root was dug up, it would emit screams that would kill or madden anyone within hearing distance. Simultaneously animate and inanimate, fertile and fatal, medicine and poison, the mandrake that haunts Juliet's imagination on the verge of her sleep suggests the suspended play of oppositions... Bullein writes, "Many ... doe affyrme that this herbe commeth of the seede of some convicted dead men," and goes on to describe "the terrible shriek and cry of thys Mandrack. In which cry, it Doth not only dye it selfe, but the feare

thereof kylleth the Dogge or Beast, which pulled it out of the earth. And this hearbe is called also Anthropomorphos because it beareth the Image of a man" (Bulleins Bulwarke, 41v).

Bulleins *Bulwarke of Defence* (1579) claims of poppy that "it causeth deepe deadly sleapes." Similarly, in 1580 the physician timothy Bright warned that opium must be taken in very small doses, least it cast the patient into such a sleepe, as hee needeth the trumpet of the Archangell to wake him." Philip Barrough echoed, in 1596, that with these drugs, "you may cause him to sleepe so, that you can awake him no more." And lastly, in 1599 Andre Du Laurens wrote, "in the vse of all these stupefactiue medicines taken inwardly, wee must take heed to deale with very good aduise, for feare that in stead of desiring to procure rest vnto the sillie melancholie wretch, wee cast him into an endlesse sleepe."