Mandrake was and still is one of the best-known plants. It is regarded as one of the oldest and most powerful plants used for medical purposes, in religious ceremonies, and superstitious rituals. At the beginning of the 16th century the mandrake cult became popular in Central Europe, and especially in the area that is now Germany. Therefore, this study approaches mandrake and its myth in German literature and culture from 1673 to 1913.

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. 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?

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 platiitudes of life but literature as well. 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.