

DON'T SAY IT WITH NIGHTSHADES: SENTIMENTAL BOTANY AND THE NATURAL HISTORY OF *ATROPA BELLADONNA*

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The nightshades are, in fact, primroses with a curse upon them.

— John Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*

THE VICTORIANS' PASSION FOR plants has been well established as a defining feature of the period, and scholars from the humanities and the sciences – from literature, history, anthropology, botany, art, and religion – have lavishly documented how this obsession pervaded every aspect of nineteenth-century British life, creating what was truly the golden age for the “Culture of Flowers,” to borrow the title of Jack Goody’s ethnobotanical study tracing traditional and ceremonial uses of flowers through history and around the globe. As Brent Elliott argues, improvements in greenhouse design beginning in 1817 and the use of the Wardian case from the 1830s for transporting plants by ship led to an unprecedented number of plant introductions to England, especially those intended for ornamental purposes (8–13). Decorative plants either of the indigenous, old-fashioned varieties or exotic new species were now widely available and visible everywhere – in vast public garden beds or small cottage plots; in pots or cut arrangements in the homes and on the window sills of the middle class and the well-to-do; in theaters, meeting halls, and fashionable shops; in churches for weddings, funerals, and holidays; in the boutonnieres of dandies and at the wrists, bosoms, and in the hair of ladies; for sale on the streets in flower carts and stalls; and in the shops of the burgeoning florist trade.

By Victoria’s reign flowers were, among other things, a major commodity and status symbol, and it is no accident that the market for ornamental flowers coincided with the invention of a so-called “Language of Flowers” in early-nineteenth-century France (Goody 206–51). Beverly Seaton defines this particular kind of language of flowers “as a list of flower names and their associated meanings, most relating to the conduct of a love affair,” and argues that the popularity of books containing these lists and other works of “sentimental botany” in England reflected an attempt by the English bourgeoisie to imitate French elite society, whose interest in such works had reached its height in the early 1820s (68). The gift annuals and albums that decorated Victorian parlors were filled with illustrations of flowers, verses about flowers, and floral symbolism, along with the more formalized “language of flowers” lists. Though the latter claimed to be part of a tradition that could be traced to Turkey, the harem, and clandestine courtship, thus imbuing this supposedly “secret” language with all the

Oriental exoticism that such an origin implies, it is more likely that it sprang into existence, in its most familiar form, full-blown, as the foster child – if not the natural offspring – of one Charlotte de Latour, whose *Le Langage des Fleurs* was published in Paris in 1819 (Seaton 70; Goody 235). Latour's book was not the first, but surely the most frequently imitated of a genre so popular that it to some extent stabilized a floral vocabulary while at the same time expanding floral symbolism beyond familiar and traditional associations. As Seaton says, "The language of flowers attempted to make flowers capable of expressing a wide range of ideas needed to conduct relationships between the sexes leading to romance and marriage and, what is truly different from previous associations of flowers and romance, they are as expressive of women's perspectives on romance as they are of men's" (66).

Moreover, the idea that flowers purportedly could speak for themselves and did so about their favorite subject of love seemed to gain support from science. Linnaeus's system of botanical classification, developed in the mid-eighteenth century, was a sexual one, and Erasmus Darwin's popularization of it in his late-eighteenth-century poem *The Botanic Garden* represented the "Loves of the Plants" in erotic and sentimental terms. There is no question that in nineteenth-century discourse, women and flowers were connected more inextricably than they had ever been before, and that this connection had everything to do with sex – with mating and reproduction. As Ann B. Shteir has documented, from 1760 until 1830 when scientific professionalization took hold, botany was the science considered particularly suitable for women to study, but it also "put the topic of sexuality before those who studied plants," thereby creating "cultural tensions" that had as much to do with women's sexual knowledge as with their relationship to flowers (4–5). Amy King goes so far as to argue, in what she refers to as the "botanical vernacular" of contemporary fiction, that everyone understood the "bloom plot" – a narrative whose focal point is the marriageable girl – to be about "sexual courtship," since in Linnaean terms as well as in Victorian social expectations such conduct led to marriage and fulfillment in sexual experience. Thus for the English novel, as for Linnaean botany and the language of flowers, everything revolves around a "feminized figure (a flower, a bloom)" whose destiny is marriage and reproduction (King 9).

In what would seem to be an almost universally agreed-upon botanical code that not only equated women and flowers, but also linked the two to love, courtship, marriage, sex, and reproduction, it is interesting to trace the history of the *Solanaceae* or nightshade family of plants through the nineteenth century, and to consider the meanings attributed especially to its queen *Atropa belladonna*, or deadly nightshade, in the language of flowers, since with its quintessentially feminine common name "belladonna" (Italian for "beautiful lady"), it would seem to be directly allied to the themes of sentimental botany as outlined above. But the nightshades, certainly those native to Europe, could rightfully be considered edgy plants: not only are they plants of the hedgerows and waste places, but are also powerful medicines and poisons, high in tropane alkaloids that affect the central nervous system to cause hallucinations, delirium, coma, and sometimes death (Ebadi 244). In addition to deadly nightshade or belladonna (as it is commonly called in England as well as in France and Italy), the other notorious members of the family found in the Old World are mandrake, henbane, and datura, all of whose dangerous properties have been well known for centuries. Moreover, belladonna, mandrake, and henbane, along with aconite and hemlock, have long been associated with witchcraft, although it is less clear how common this knowledge was throughout Europe before the latter part of the Victorian period (Hansen 25–83; 91–94). In any case, in the five language of flower books for which

Seaton offers a “combined vocabulary” dating from 1810 to 1834 – which includes an earlier French book by B. Delachenaye and Latour’s book; two British books, one by Frederic Shoberl and one by Henry Phillips; and an American book by Elizabeth Wirt – there is no mention of belladonna, and the only “nightshade” so named is “enchanter’s nightshade,” which is not a member of the *Solanaceae* family (if the plant referred to is the one that ordinarily goes by this common name). Three of the lists associate enchanter’s nightshade with witchcraft (one of these gives the meaning as “spell”), as is appropriate for its common name as well as the scientific name of its genus, *Circaea*, which refers to one of the great witches of mythology, Circe (Seaton 186–87).¹ The nightshades included in the lists are bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*), which consistently means “truth” in the four European lists; datura (presumably *Datura stramonium*), consistently meaning “deceitful charms”; henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), meaning variously “defect,” “absence,” and “imperfection”; mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), consistently meaning “rarity”; and finally one of the edible New World nightshades, potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), meaning “charity” in Latour and “beneficence” in the two British lists (Seaton 168–97).

Considering that other members of the nightshade family are included in the early language of flowers books, one wonders why belladonna is omitted when its much more romantic name would alone seem to guarantee it a place in this very feminine and sentimental genre. It is possible, of course, that the reason has to do with misidentification, the compilers confusing enchanter’s nightshade with deadly nightshade – a mistake that occurs in at least one twentieth-century ethnobotanical study of “bizarre plants” (Emboden 53–55). Belladonna has also been confused with bittersweet, since another common name for the latter is woody nightshade (Grieve 2: 589); and prior to Linnaeus’s categorization of belladonna in the genus *Atropa*, both were considered Solanums.² But the fact that belladonna does appear in an important, if derivative later list suggests that misidentification does not explain its omission in the early language of flower lists.

Kate Greenaway’s *Language of Flowers*, originally published in 1884, is probably the most familiar of the Victorian flower books to twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers; and even though it may be “conventional and superficial, with more than a touch of insincerity” in comparison to earlier works (Seaton 93), its very ubiquitousness has helped to fix for later readers what were considered to be the Victorians’ floral associations. Greenaway lists alphabetically all the nightshades mentioned in the earlier lists, including enchanter’s nightshade (under “e”), and repeats definitions from the earlier lists, with a couple of exceptions: mandrake now means “horror” and potato has been slightly changed to “benevolence.” Bittersweet is explicitly identified as a nightshade in this list, appearing in both the “b” and “n” sections; and datura, still meaning “deceitful charms,” appears under “t” by its common name “thornapple.” Belladonna is the only new nightshade in the list and appears only in the “b” section, provocatively defined as “silence.” Strangely, as if to reinforce its meaning, it has no cross reference in the reverse dictionary that follows, which lists the qualities alphabetically followed by their floral counterparts. What, then, accounts for the late addition of belladonna and for the attribution of a meaning that undercuts the very notion of a “language”?

The answer to these questions evidently lies in other areas of botanical investigation that were developing through the century, ones that – like the language of flowers itself – combined knowledge from wide-ranging sources, thus carrying forward old traditions as well as incorporating new discoveries about plants. To establish the traditional cultural reputation

of a plant, we must first look to the old herbals since they had for centuries been the major repositories of botanical information. Originally, their focus was on plants used in medical treatment, and belladonna was well known to have pharmacological properties of several kinds – as a sedative, antispasmodic, and mydriatic, among others. For example, Gerard, in the 1633 edition of his very popular *Herbal*, traces the medical history of *Solanum lethale* (as he calls belladonna) from Dioscorides and Theophrastus. Gerard notes that its Old English name is Dwale, and gives “sleeping,” “raging,” and “deadly” as synonymous epithets to distinguish this nightshade from other members of the family.³ Nevertheless, in spite of its efficacy in many kinds of treatment, Gerard anathematizes the plant, cautioning his readers about belladonna’s “furious and deadly” nature. As evidence, he cites an incident on the “Ile of Ely” in which two boys died after eating the berries while a third luckily survived, having been given an emetic of honey and water. Thus Gerard proclaims:

Banish therefore these pernicious plants out of your gardens, and all places neere to your houses, where children or women with child do resort, which do oftentimes long and lust after things most vile and filthie; and much more after a berry of a bright shining blacke colour, and of such great beautie, as it were able to allure any such to eate thereof. (341)

Such a dire warning is to be found nowhere else in the *Herbal*. Most importantly, Gerard makes it clear that this “vile and filthie” plant is responsible for the danger it poses to the unwary, who cannot help but to succumb to its obvious, if deadly, charms. The tone and the terms Gerard uses, especially his verbs “long and lust,” transform the ordinary appetite of belladonna’s victims into sexual appetite; and by this appeal to the language of courtship and sexual desire, the plant is concomitantly transformed into a wicked *femme fatale*, a dark lady and a whore, from whom the innocent must be protected. Eradication from all civilized places is the only way to control this evil threat to society.

Gerard’s warning about the beautiful and tempting but deadly berries of belladonna sets the tone for English herbals published up until the nineteenth century, especially for *Culpeper’s Complete Herbal and English Physician*, which was like Gerard’s *Herbal* a product of the seventeenth century, but was still being reprinted as an up-to-date *materia medica* in 1826. That this herbal should have had such long-lived popularity is a mystery, since it comes out of a medieval tradition of the “astrological school of medical botany,” associating plants with their governing planets and assigning them temperaments suggestive of the old theory of humors (Anderson 186). Thus deadly nightshade “is of a cold nature: in some it causeth sleep; in others, madness, and shortly after, death” (Culpeper 104). These qualities suggest that Saturn is belladonna’s ruling planet, which is consistent with what Culpeper says of its relative, common nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*) (104), thus linking both plants to the melancholy humor. Culpeper obviously shared to some extent the ideas of his contemporaries, for the connection between nightshade and madness is reinforced in Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. In his catalogue of various causes of melancholy madness, Burton comments, “Many men catch this malady by eating certain meats, herbs, roots, at unawares; as henbane, nightshade, cicuta [*Conium maculatum* or hemlock], mandrakes, etc.,” and follows with an example whereby a company of young men in a Sicilian tavern, after consuming (presumably adulterated) wine, “began to be so troubled in their brains, and their phantasy so crazed, that they thought they were in a ship at sea, and now ready to be cast away by reason of a tempest” (372). Similarly, Culpeper

cites an “instance of the direful effects of this plant,” one taken from “Buchanan’s History of Scotland,” in which the Scots (other sources note they were led by Macbeth [Grieve 2: 584; Pratt 2: 218]) defeated an invading army of Danes by mixing the juice of belladonna berries in the drink they served as part of a feigned truce: “this so intoxicated the Danes, that the Scots fell upon them in their sleep, and killed the greatest part of them” (104–05). And although Culpeper’s herbal recommends the use of bitter-sweet (here called “Amara Dulcis”), henbane, mandrake, thornapple, and common nightshade for a wide range of complaints, he has nothing good to say about deadly nightshade. His warning to readers echoes Gerard’s: “This plant should not be suffered to grow in any places where children are, as many have been killed by eating the berries” (104).

It is clear, then, that belladonna’s reputation as an evil plant had been well established by the nineteenth century. We need only compare the entry from *Johnson’s Gardeners’ Dictionary and Cultural Instructor* (1846) to confirm how the herbal tradition had influenced the horticultural one in the floral discourse of the Victorian period:

ATROPA. Nightshade. (Named after Atropos, one of the three Fates, in reference to its poisonous qualities.)

We introduce this native weed (*A'tropa Bellado'mna*) for the purpose of warning country people from eating its berries, fatal accidents frequently occurring in consequence. The berries are at first green, but become black and juicy.

A. Belladonna. Known as the Deadly Nightshade. An indigenous plant, the berries of which when ripe, are black and juicy, but are deadly poison, and many fatalities have occurred through eating them. (s.v. “Atropa” 88)

The dictionary includes belladonna only for cautionary purposes, lists none of its properties except that it is a “deadly poison,” and situates it in the plant hierarchy at the lowest level, as a “native weed.” The plant here has been stripped of all its fascination and cast on the botanical junk heap. There is not even a mention of the beauty of its berries – only that they are “black and juicy.” The dictionary, of course, as a resource for gardeners, would naturally tend to privilege horticultural species; but this does not fully account for its rough treatment of belladonna. Indeed, the other highly dangerous nightshades native to Europe – *datura*, henbane, and mandrake – are presented with more objectivity, and the entries even include planting instructions. Moreover, that the editors of the dictionary feel compelled to give the same warning about belladonna twice suggests the importance of their message: belladonna is England’s noxious weed, a plant to be banned from Victoria’s garden. The temptation posed to innocents (children and pregnant women in Gerard’s time, “country people” in Johnson’s) once again seems to make the plant especially heinous, as if its attractiveness is irresistible to the naive and ignorant. This assumption discounts the possibility that the properties of an indigenous plant are likely to be more familiar to “country people” than to their presumably sophisticated urban contemporaries; but *Johnson’s Gardeners’ Dictionary* undoubtedly reflects the horticulturist’s bias, just as Gerard and Culpeper reflect the bias of the early modern herbalist. And it must be remembered that the language of flowers was a by-product of nineteenth-century horticulture, one that considered flowers as not just literary but especially commercial currency. Thus by the nineteenth century, it was just good gardening to avoid – even eradicate – belladonna: to erase it from the book of cultivated nature as it was erased from the language of flowers.

In short, commercial uses of plants tended to set their cultural value in the Victorian period; and sentimental botany – as a “feminine” discourse – preferred ornamental flowers just as it preferred ornamental women. The most popular flowers could be indigenous species like members of the rose, lily, and poppy families or new exotics like the American sunflower; but the aesthetic appeal that they held for the Victorians – whether in the language of flower lists or in gardens and vases – seems to have had as much to do with their identification with women as with their natural beauty. Ruskin’s comment in *Sesame and Lilies* that the English girl “grows as a flower does” typifies what had become an unquestioned assumption in the furthest reaches of nineteenth-century sentimental discourse (18: 131); and this feminized and sentimental view of flowers accounts for the general confusion involving plants, morals, and females that is characteristic of the era. Ruskin’s description of the nightshade family as “a tribe set aside for evil” in *The Queen of the Air* now seems curiously condemnatory for such a lover of plants, but Ruskin accurately reflects the flower/female identification that was the received opinion of the period (19: 369). Plants like belladonna were anathematized not only because of the danger they posed to innocents, but also because in their association with the female they violated the moral expectations for the girl of the period. Like fallen women, they might rouse the sympathy of a compassionate naturalist, but they were to be generally regarded as a threat to society.

Nevertheless, two other areas of discourse were working to revise belladonna’s wholly evil reputation in popular culture as a botanical scourge and *femme fatale*. The persistence of the old herbal tradition notwithstanding, medical science maintained an interest in belladonna especially for its mydriatic properties, and in 1819 a chemist named Brandes isolated from a belladonna root the alkaloid atropine, a medicine that (after further experimentation through the century) became indispensable in various ophthalmic procedures and surgery for its ability to dilate the pupils (Niederhorn 4). Although in England indigenous belladonna plants were evidently being destroyed, in America the Shakers (who were originally emigrants from England in the late-eighteenth century), specialized in raising medicinal herbs for sale to physicians and cultivated belladonna for treatment of “convulsions, neuralgia, rheumatism, mania, gout, and painful conditions of the nervous system” throughout the nineteenth century (Miller 135). Thus as a medical drug, belladonna could be viewed as a handmaid of science, but this originally wild and dangerous plant had to be domesticated by botanical experts and professionals before its “charms” could be appreciated. Belladonna was one of the earliest plants to be considered a “controlled substance.”

The most important area of discourse that assisted in redeeming belladonna’s reputation participated in the sentimental tradition, but expressed a burgeoning interest in plants for plants’ sake. Anne Pratt’s many and very popular books on English botany were pioneers in this new direction of botanical discourse whose project was – as Shteir says of Pratt’s works – “to blend botanical information with the romance of nature,” not only offering a more objective and thoughtful consideration of indigenous species like belladonna, but also serving as compendiums for all sorts of plant lore and “repositories of folk customs and remedies” (Shteir 203–04). Pratt’s work was no doubt instrumental in bringing belladonna back into popular discourse and perhaps for its finally being deemed worthy of inclusion in late-nineteenth-century language of flower lists. In her three-volumed *Flowering Plants of Great Britain*, Pratt begins the entry on Deadly Nightshade with the obligatory warning: “This is a rare plant, and, as its name imports, is so poisonous that we cannot wish it more frequent” (2: 217). She describes belladonna’s appearance,

summarizing with “the whole plant has a dull gloomy appearance,” before citing its dangers thusly:

Even within the last few years a man was prosecuted for selling these berries in a basket about London, and though it appeared he was unacquainted with the dangerous nature of the fruits, yet several persons suffered in consequence. Children have sometimes died through eating these sweet berries, and doubtless accidents would be more frequent but for the rareness of the plant, which has probably been in a measure extirpated by botanists and herbalists of former years. Its chief place of growth is in old quarries, or among ruins; but it is sometimes to be found in woods and hedges. (2: 218)

Evidently the mobilization of herbalists and horticulturalists against belladonna since the early modern period had taken its effect, and the plant had been appropriately confined to desolate places, ones as gloomy and uncivilized as the plant itself. The fact that belladonna can be found “among ruins” reveals that it was a victim of a morality that anthropomorphized plants, attributing to them human virtues and vices, and thus rejecting and destroying what did not fit comfortably into this human-centered world view. Indeed, belladonna had fared much better in medieval times as its proximity to ruins indicates. In a chapter on “Medicinal Plants of the British Flora” in her history of medicinal plants, Edith Wheelwright says of belladonna: “It is often found in the neighborhood of the ancient abbey where it was once cultivated, such as Furness where the neighboring valley, Bekansgill, was called the valley of the Nightshade. This plant together with perhaps its relative, the Henbane, is thought to be commemorated in the seals affixed to the title-deeds of Furness Abbey” (181).

Pratt continues her discussion of belladonna by listing its various names, and in detailing further its poisonous nature, offers what may be one reason for its association with “silence” in Greenaway’s *Language of Flowers*. Pratt comments:

Nor is the poison confined to the berries. A few grains of the dried leaves, or a small dose of the infusion of these leaves, will shortly cause dryness of the throat, and a most extravagant delirium, often accompanied by uncontrollable fits of laughter, sometimes with incessant talking, but in some instances by a total loss of the voice. The state of mind induced by taking it somewhat resembles somnambulism and a case is mentioned by Morehouse, in his work on “Intoxicating Liquors,” of a man who was for fifteen hours speechless and insensible to external objects, but who, meantime, went through all the operations of his trade with great assiduity, and moved his lips as if in conversation. (2: 218)

The trancelike state and loss of voice that accompany belladonna poisoning not only demonstrates that ingestion is not always fatal, but reveals that there was continued experimentation with the plant in England despite the ominous warnings of the herbalists and horticulturalists and the absence of the plant from the language of flowers. Pratt’s interest in the plant is evident from her wealth of sources, contemporary as well as traditional. She refers to Buchanan’s history as Culpeper did; quotes Chaucer as well as Gerard; cites a method for catching birds by feeding them belladonna; and finally ends with a comment on belladonna’s medicinal properties. She mentions (but then discounts) its usefulness as a preventative in scarlet fever, and then praises its mydriatic and analgesic properties:

Its power of dilating the pupil of the eye renders this plant very serviceable to the oculist in his delicate operations on that organ, and this Nightshade is often applied externally in painful maladies. No part of the plant possesses any odour indicative of its poisonous nature, though this might be inferred

from the lurid hue of its flowers. The juice of the ripe berries gives to paper a beautiful and durable tint of purple; and a cosmetic made in former days by the Italian ladies from its juices, procured for the plant the name of *Belladonna*. The Germans probably used it in the extermination of wolves, for they call it *Wolfskirsche*, wolf's cherry. (2: 219)

This conclusion to Pratt's commentary on belladonna reveals that even though she shares the biases of the old herbalists and feels compelled to repeat their warnings, she also wishes to give a more balanced – and certainly more inclusive – account of belladonna's properties. Her description of the “lurid hue” of the flowers recalls Linnaeus's name for the nightshade family – the *Luridaceae*, a term that suggests not only something gruesome and horrible, but also something alluring, reminiscent of Gerard's description of the berries. Pratt focuses close attention on the plant's natural features, its appearance and structure; but most importantly, she treats it as a natural rather than as a moral being. And even if Pratt's regard does not lead her to lament the programmatic effort to eradicate belladonna from cultivation, there is no blaming of belladonna here: on the contrary, there is for the first time a hint that the plant has cultural value.

Further, of the botanical sources I have cited, Pratt's is the first to mention the wonderfully romantic and well-known legend that the belladonna “procured” its name from the Italian ladies who used it in a “cosmetic.” More specifically, these ladies supposedly made a tincture of belladonna to dilate their pupils so as to be more sexually attractive (Heiser 153). Thus no name and legend could have been more appropriate than “belladonna” for a sentimental botany and feminine discourse specializing in courtship; but a bad press since the seventeenth century had so ossified cultural opinion about this plant that, by the nineteenth century, there was nothing sentimental about it. At its best it was a medicine and a dye, but its value did not extend to an appreciation of the plant in its living, natural state. Like other victims of Victorian respectability, belladonna was, in sentimental botanical discourse, a censored plant. Pratt's new kind of botany, however, helped to bring belladonna into popular discourse by combining the scientific with the sentimental, so as to insist on the plant as the thing itself, while still providing readers with its romantic associations. By bringing two discourses together, Pratt and other botanical writers helped to foster the new interest in flower lore that flourished in the last decades of the nineteenth century and was generically predisposed to be sympathetic to the *Solanaceae* because they provided such good stories. Works like Hilderic Friend's *Flowers and Flower Lore* (1883) and Thiselton Dyer's *The Folk-Lore of Plants* (1889), which must now be considered as forerunners in the field of ethnobotany, delight in nightshade lore, and both note belladonna's role in witchcraft, describing it as a “favourite” of the devil” (Friend 531; Thiselton Dyer 73). Friend even offers a possibly apocryphal but romantic etymology for belladonna's genus: “One of the names of this plant, Fair Lady, refers to an ancient belief that the Nightshade is the form of a fatal enchantress or witch, called Atropa” (531). This legend could be considered as just another example of the Victorian tendency to anthropomorphize plants and to identify them with women, but it also conveys an older sense of the mystery and magic that surrounded plants, especially ones with dangerous properties. By way of this renewed interest in traditional plant lore, belladonna could once again be associated with romance and thus restored to its rightful and fascinating place in nineteenth-century sentimental botanical discourse.

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NOTES

1. The scientific names given in the text are consistent with *Johnson's Gardener's Dictionary and Cultural Instructor*, originally published in 1846. Seaton does not attempt to attribute scientific names to the flowers in the combined vocabulary, offering the caveat that "The makers of the plant name lists were not botanists or even horticulturalists, but producers of sentimental gift books" (167).
2. This mistake is likely made by Keats in "Ode to Melancholy," lines 2–3: "Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed / By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine." He probably meant to suggest belladonna, when the redness of the berries identifies the plant as bittersweet.
3. In Chaucer, "dwale" means a sleeping potion, and is perhaps derived from the Scandinavian word *dool* meaning "delay" or "sleep"; but some botanical sources claim the word derives from the French *deuil* meaning "grief" (Grieve 2: 584).

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