Wine before Swine: Circe’s Anticholinergic Potion

England’s Anne Pratt depicted (ca. 1860, right) the intoxicating beauty of the Nightshades Family, or Solanaceae, such as (1) Thornapple (Datura), and the (2) Stinking (henbane), (3) Woody (bittersweet), (4) Black (common), and (5) Deadly (belladonna) Nightshades. One or more plants like these and/or Mandrake (Mandragora) likely supplied deliriant anticholinergics for the wine-laced potion that J. M. Waterhouse painted (1891, left) witch-goddess Circe feeding to the shipmates of Odysseus (Ulysses). In high doses, such tropane alkaloidal mixtures of hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and atropine can kill; in low doses, these deliriants can induce hallucinations of flying or of transforming into animals. According to Homer’s Odyssey, each drugged sailor (believed that he) was transformed into a pig (left, at Circe’s feet) by the witch-goddess’ anticholinergic potion. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

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