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INTRODUCTION

It is an honor to welcome the readers to the eighth issue of Incantatio! This is not simply a scholarly journal, this is a scholarly institution, in the best sense of the word. First and foremost, Incantatio stands for academic authenticity, productivity and communication. It encourages vibrant research and establishes stable continuity in the field. The current issue fulfils this goals completely, providing a platform for presentation of both accomplished results and future projects.

In line with the previous years' tradition, this current issue of Incantatio is an outcome form the regular conference on verbal charms, which took place in Budapest, Hungary in December 8th-10th, 2017. It contains six articles, three book reviews, presentation of charms database and a report from the above-said conference. Unfortunately, the planned new section *Interview with Charms Researcher* turned out to be impossible to include, due to the responsible party's sudden inability to prepare it. Hopefully, this section will find its place in some of the future issues of Incantatio.

The articles discuss and analyze English, Dutch, Hungarian, Latvian, Medieval Germanic and Old Norse verbal magic. As a main common feature, all the studies examine the specific verbal charms as integral parts of a broader cultural context. The analyzed verbal magic texts and practices are linked to popular beliefs, everyday necessities, learned discourses, didactive and propaganda agendas, confessional backgrounds, institutional sanctions and individual opinions. Verbal charms, charmers and charming are studied as distinct cultural phenomena – a crossing-point between spirituality and practicality, a contact zone of belief, languages and emotions, a sphere of constant, contested and contesting interpretations and re-interpretations.

The current issue's contributors stand at various stages of their academic paths – from well-established names through accelerating careers to beginning studies. Regardless of age and rank, all the authors worked diligently and devotedly, and this is visible in their texts. I would like to cordially thank them all! Their contributions are all valuable pieces on their own accord. When collected together in Incantatio, they form an important corpus of secondary literature on verbal magic.

I also very thankful to Jonathan Roper, who again was of big help with wise advises and suggestions, and the persons who prepared the volume 8.

As the eighth issue of Incantatio heads to the press, I hope it is anticipated by the entire scholarly community. I believe this anticipation will be justified, that every colleague will find here a bright and relevant picture of the thriving scholarship on verbal magic.

Svetlana Tsonkova, guest editor

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THE FLYING CHARM: TO COLOGNE IN THE WINE CELLAR. ON THE HISTORY OF A SCHOLARLY LEGEND

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Abstract: The charm *Over Hedges and Bushes* (Dutch: *Over heg en haag*; English: *Over Thick and Over Thin*; German: *Oben aus und nirgend an*) primarily occurs within the legend *Following the Witch*. It is impossible to study the one without the other. The crux of the legend consists of the pendant charm *Through Thick and Through Thin* and equivalents, which ridicules the original charm. In this contribution, both the modern European distribution of the legend and its earlier history are investigated from a Dutch perspective. It is argued that the pendant charm is the modern version of calling on God during a witches' flight or a witches' banquet. This change made the legend, previously used to underline the reality of the witches' flight, into a joke. It transfigured the deadly fall from the air, which earlier was a warning against conversing with demons, into a hazardous undertaking which affected bodily apparel. It questioned the actions of men who tried to follow the superstitions of women. Yet the legend will not have been understood everywhere in the same way.

Keywords: migratory legends, witches' flight, charm, satire.

The twentieth-century Dutch-language versions of the charm *Over Hedges and Bushes to the Wine Cellar in Cologne* are embedded in two stories. The first is an adapted version of the Migratory Legend *Following the Witch*. The second story is the one about the lover discovering that his girl-friend is a witch and ending the relationship (De Blécourt 2017). In contrast to elsewhere in Western Europe, in Dutch the charm is supplemented with a destination, to Cologne in the Wine Cellar, which adds a third story, *The Ride With the Fairies*. The following is an example of the legend:

> On the heath in Genk lived a woman with her daughter, but they were ill-famed. People told a lot of things about that woman. A boy courted the daughter, but a friend of him warned him that the woman was a witch.

> The next time when he visited them the boy pretended to be drunk and saw that the woman took a jar out of the chimney. She put the ointment [out of the jar] on herself and then on her daughter and said:
>
> May the devil carry us over hedge and bush to Cologne in the wine cellar.
>
> Then they flew off, out of the fireplace. When they were gone the boy also wanted to go to the wine cellar. He copied everything he had seen and heard, but he made a mistake with the words and said:
>
> May the devil carry me through hedge and bush to Cologne in the wine cellar.
>
> The devil took him and carried him through hedges and bushes and thorns to Cologne. When he arrived he was not wearing anything anymore and bled everywhere. The woman was angry and to punish him she gave him two cow's legs. The black Friars brought the boy back home for he could not do that on his own. But he kept the cow's legs.

This story, which I have slightly abridged, was told to the legend collector Fernand Beckers in 1947 by an eighty-one-years-old man at Sint-Huibrechts-Hern, a village in the Belgium province of Limburg, about twenty kilometers due west of Maastricht (Beckers 1947: 137-138). It was the first of over a hundred stories about the witches' journey to the wine cellar which were collected by students in Flanders (Dutch-speaking Belgium) over the next fifty-five years (Van Effelterre 2005). For the most part these stories are indexed under nr. 511 (Sinninghe 1943: 84-85). They exhibit the usual variation; for instance, the devil is not mentioned everywhere as the actual carrier and the courtship occurs in only about one third of the stories. The destination can also vary: it may be a cellar in Aachen, in Amsterdam, Leuven or even Berlin. The story was also known in the Netherlands, but due to a different kind of field work the quantitative results amounted to less than a fourth of the Flemish texts, a difference explained below.

In this article, I will not speculate about the meaning of the cow's legs however enticing that may be (a horse's leg also figures), but instead discuss the abundant variants of the legend in the Dutch language (dialects included). I will then pay attention to the modern European distribution of the story, internationally known as *Following the Witch* (Christiansen 1958, ML 3045; cf. Thompson 1956, G242.7). Finally, I will delve into its history. It appears that the Dutch rendering with the lover following his girl friend is more or less unique within

Europe. In its latest incarnation the wrongly pronounced charm also appears relatively young; my estimate for its origin would be the first half of the nineteenth century or perhaps a little earlier, as the oldest notations date from the 1840s (Van Haver 1964: 381-385). Another reason for this relatively late date is that in the early modern period there existed a perfect alternative. Instead of the wrong pronounciation of the charm the name of God was mentioned. That, however, could only happen at the end of the story. As this concerns a specific charm within a narrative which was unlikely to have any meaning outside the narrative, it requires that both are studied together.

Another thing I would like to mention by way of introduction is that notwithstanding the story's twentieth-century presence in the memory of the elderly informants, who were as a rule living in the Belgium and Dutch countryside, I still consider this a "scholarly" legend initially transmitted by intellectuals discussing the witches' ability to fly. How it was exactly transmitted from one group to another can easily be the subject of another article; suffice to say here that the story circulated in popular print and that the early folklorists mined these for there collections (see: e.g. De Blécourt 2015). The legend is also very much fabricated, in the sense that its different parts were partly made up and partly combined. It was also, at least in the Dutch context, a Catholic legend which only in its later phases spread to non-Catholic people. On top of that one may also wonder why being inquisitive about the girl's status has to lead to such a severe result for the boyfriend and not for the girl. More importantly, flying was not an issue in Dutch witch trials until the late sixteenth century and by then the trials were practically over (De Blécourt 2016). It was the most contested subject in early-modern European witchcraft theory. Thus the early-modern notion of use of ointment, in the Netherlands but also in adjacent Flanders and Germany, derived from a demonological source, is restricted to that period; in Flanders it extends to the first half of the seventeenth century. The ointment was a narrative device and not actually used (Ostling 2016). The role of devil and ointment in the later legend are among the reasons I consider this particular legend a "scholarly" or academic legend.

THE VARIANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

The stories and charms catalogued by Jacques Sinninghe (1947) and Jozef van Haver (1964: 381-385) constitute the legend's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history and thus, given the scarcity and haphazardness of the research, reveal some of the legend's status before the much more thorough research of the 1950s and 1960s. The comparison makes one cautious of the substantial

gaps in the earlier notations (the same applies to the English and to a lesser extend the German research, see below) and any conclusion can only be tentative. At least as concerns the Netherlands, the endeavours in the 1960s can in some way be seen as supplementary to the earlier ones.

Nevertheless, the legend seems to have dwindled in the meantime: against the fourteen references in Van Haver which portray the existence of legend type 511– sixteen if one counts the Frisian texts which were omitted by Van Haver – there are only seven that have been encountered in the later research (WEV013105; Krosenbrink 1968:38, 109-110; Dinnissen 1993: 21-22, 139; ENGELS127; De Blécourt 2010 = Brouwers) – fifteen if the eight Frisian texts of Jaarsma are included, although only five of them feature something of a narrative. As the new research was much more thorough and systematic one would expect a substantial increase in the number of tales; since this did not happen, it can be interpreted as the story being in decline. Jaarsma's fieldwork in North-eastern Frisia was the most intensive in the Netherlands (Meder & Venbrux 2004) and because of its quantity any inclusion of his results distorts that of the other fieldworkers; it also skews a historical comparison. Heupers, after Jaarsma the second most prolific field worker in the Netherlands, did not come across the legend in Utrecht, the province in the centre of the Netherlands. The legend was thus, apart from eastern Frisia, primarily present along the Dutch eastern border. In that area it is mentioned eight times before 1950 and seven times in the 1960s. However, it mostly occurred in its simple form, namely without the extention of the lover travelling after his girl friend. This over-arching theme is restricted to only a few texts from the provinces of Groningen (Huizenga-Onnekes 1970: 47), Overijssel (Elderink 1937: 246-247) and Limburg (Kemp 1968: 192-194; De Blécourt 2010). The question is whether or not it was always incorporated in the legend. During the 1960s the theme of marrying a witch had apparently lost its power.

The 1920s version from Groningen (Ter Laan 1930: 183-184) contains the charm:

Duvel, neem mie op.	Devil, take me up
Over hegen, over stegen,	Over hedges, over alleys
Over ale wegen	Over all roads
Tegen baargen op	Against mountains

This is the only recorded instance where the transvection is incorporated in the charm. I will further discuss this in the section on Flanders.

From the east of the Netherlands stems one of the most elaborate spells in which rhyme words are added and the journey is described in more detail:

Stip, stap, stoet,	[meaningless rhymewords]
Ut vorsgat oet,	Out of the hole in the roof
Deur ut sloep (slop),	Through the hole in the barn
Ovver de beume,	Over the trees
Met maone klaor,	With a bright moon
En stearne helder,	And sparkling stars
Naor Köln in 'n wienkelder.	To Cologne in the wine cellar

In this instance it is a witch who makes the mistake and says "deur" (=through) instead of "ovver" (Krosenbrink 1968: 38), but the story and certainly the charm seems to be a literary elaboration by the author (Blanken 1953: 303). A Frisian version which mentions forests, trees, mountains and rivers over which one should travel (Jaarsma CJ021302) seems more genuine. As in all the Frisian versions here it is significant that the charm appears in Dutch in an otherwise Frisian texts. This shows that the charm and therefore also the legend were imported there.

FLEMISH VARIANTS

The 115 Flemish legend variants of *Following the Witch* were mainly noted among men: 84 versus only 31 from women. Viewed by province, the differences are even more pronounced. In Limburg, the province that provided more than half of the legend texts, 46 were told by men and 13 by women. Only in the province of Antwerp, where a mere eleven legends were collected, was the number about equal between men and women: six versus five. In Vlaams-Brabant, the eleven texts from women were still sett against twice that amount of texts from men. It seems reasonable to conclude that this was a male tale, which occasionally was also remembered by women. I do not know the reasons for the particular geographical distribution, only that it corresponded with the

stories presence in the eastern parts of the Netherlands (and the few in Western Germany, as described below).

In contrast to the Netherlands, the Flemish fieldworkers only worked for a couple of weeks in their assigned area. The variants they collected show the whole range of oral transmission, from the barely remembered notion of the invisible witches flying through the air to Aken in the winecellar (Celis 1954: 131) and “the witches flew to the wineplaces in Germany” (Daniels 1965: 149) to the more elaborate stories about the lover following his girl-friend. Sometimes it is even a witch who mispronounces the charm (Princen 1965: 134; Callens 1968:100; Ooms 1968: 96) or the story is transposed onto the eighteenth-century goat riders, a male band of robbers (Beckers 1947: 343; Princen 1965: 69) or onto free masons (Van Wesenbeeck 1969: 57; Coremans 1977: 82). In one instance the boy became a witch himself since the girl told him the right formula afterwards (Smets 1965: 169). Twice the mispronounced charm is joined to the story about the hunchbacks (ATU 503), who in Flanders happened upon a meeting of witches rather than fairies (Jackers 1958: 218-218; Schoefs 1996: 432-433). This is just to show the kind of exceptions that occurred. I have not tried to make my display of them exhaustive although their numerical occurrence is below a handful each.

These slight variations nevertheless make it hard to conclude that the devil, who features in the legend about Genk quoted at the beginning of this essay as well as in a version from Groningen, makes more than a cursory appearance. The informants of Celis, for instance, left the devil out when they told about the witches flying to the wine cellars, but when they told about a goat-rider who botched the charm, they added that he was associated with the devil (Celis 1954: 227). In another instance, it is merely stated that the witch had sold her soul to the devil and he is not mentioned in relation to the flight (Kesteleyn 1964: 143). Dreezen, on the other hand, noted two flying legends in which the devil appeared: once in the charm (Dreezen 1967: 223) and once in an elaboration of the narrator, “then the devil brought them there” (Dreezen 1967: 225). In a legend recorded thirty-five years later, the devil again is part of the charm (Beerten 2003: 141-142). Although the devil occupied a regular place in intellectual theories about flying witches, little of it trickled down in the later stories. This appears in accordance with the position of the devil in popular witchcraft discourse.

The detail of the ointment, applied before the witch flies off, is more pronounced in Flanders. It is almost exclusively connected to the courtship variants: of the thirty-six texts in which the boy follows his girl-friend to the witches’ meeting, twenty five reveal that the girl has smeared herself – once with holy water kept in a jar (Deraemaecker 1977: 591-592) and once with face powder

(Smets 1965: 169), which I consider acceptable variations. Only twice a follower applies ointment outside the context of a courtship; once he is not specified (Beckers 1947: 142) and once it concerns the girl's father who spies on both his wife and his daughter (Jackers 1958: 215-217). This implies that the notion of witches applying ointment is transmitted within the narrative of the courtship story and not as a part of the narrative about flying witches in general. Since the courtship narrative is the youngest addition to the legend, and the greasing was not transmitted separately, it provides another indication of the constructed nature of the legend. Another regular feature, which I counted seventeen times, is the presence of the girl's mother. It may mean that witchcraft is considered hereditary, yet in every case it is a part of the courtship variant and it thus remains unclear whether it has any value beyond this particular legend.

Notwithstanding the relatively large amount of legend texts, especially compared to the adjacent countries, very little can be concluded about the flying charm. Mostly it is mispronounced and sometimes not even that, but it hardly exihibits any variation. People fly over the hedges and bushes, or through them, to the wine cellar. The emphasis lies on the "over" and "through" confusion, including in the few instances where the bushes are replaced by "everything" (Bohez 1956: 137; Mattheeuws 1963: 168, among others). The two words sound as different from each other in Dutch as they do in English. Only the destination of the journey varies, as well as the effect on the unfortunate follower. The legend does not elaborate on the relation between mispronouncing the charm and any worries the boy might have had about his girl-friend, at least it is nowhere mentioned why the boy (or anyone else) made the mistake. In six legends, however, the flyer is forbidden to pronounce the name of God. During the feast or on the way back the boy breaks this rule and everyone disappears (Princen 1965: 68, 69; Coremans 1977: 68-70) or he falls down because his vehicle is suddenly gone (Beckers 1947: 138-139; Vankerkhoven 1964; Deraemaeker 1977: 341-342). For some reason, the effect of this fall is less severe than the obstacle course to the wine cellar.

The Flemish folk narrative researcher Marcel van den Berg has interpreted the popularity of the legend in terms of its humor. In essence it is a joke and the follower of the witch (usually a man) plays a silly, ridiculous role (1993: 1681). There is much to say for this approach as the man's stupidity explains why the mistake is made and it gives the narrator the opportunity to elaborate on the effects on the man's body. In the Flemish texts this is done to some extent. It is told that the protagonist is "torn to pieces" (Beckers 1947: 142), that he was only wearing rags (Dreezen 1967: 223), "mauled and blodied" (Jackers 1958: 218-219), or without clothes (Van der Linden 1964: 121-122). This is the same in the legends from the Netherlands. There the witch's follower emerges "more

dead than alive" (Scolius 1853: cvii), or "not without pain" (Dykstra 1896: 155). Or as a Frisian informant put it: "They were hit and punched by branches and completely soaked and under the mud and their hands and faces were scratched and skinned" (Jaarsma CJ021302). As I will elucidate below, this reveals a crucial difference in relation to the earlier, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century versions of the legend. The question is, at what point in the story does the joke start? If the man is portrayed as stupid by mangling the charm, would he not already be considered daft by spying on a witch, or by courting her?

EUROPEAN DISTRIBUTION

The flying legend can be counted among the so-called "migratory legends", mainly *fabulates*; they can only be called *memorates* in their half-forgotten, truncated form. This specific notion of the legend is mainly popular among Irish, English, Scottish and Norse, Swedish and Finnish folklorists. Although Katharine Briggs included these legends in her *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales*, they have not made their appearance in the international folktale catalogue (Uther 2004). Only in Spain have attempts been undertaken to incorporate some of these legends into the folktale catalogues; the legend under discussion was given the type number *746, ensuring abiding attention. Yet also in the international context it only concerns a gradual difference from the other folktales, not more than for instance the one between Tales of Magic and Anecdote, or between Fable and Formula Tale. This omission of the Migratory Legend has not advanced its research. As an international (European) team of legend researchers is needed to access the regional variants, here I can only scratch the surface.

There are several Spanish variants of the tale, restricted to the attempt at flying; at least in the 1930 catalogue the destination is not given. The charm (or "formula") has more religious connotations here: a girl says "with God and Holy Mary" instead of "without" or "below rivers, mountains, with all the devils" instead of "above rivers" (etc.) (Boggs 1930: 84). Aragonese researchers classify the tale as *The Novice Wizard*; they generally concern a man following his wife and when, after saying "I believe in God and Saint Mary" and being bumped around the house, he finally arrives at the meeting place, he thanks God, and everyone disappears (Samper 2015: 21-22). In Spain, the humor is less evident (I think). There are huge stretches of Europe I do not have any information about, but apart from Spain the legend was also told in Croatia, where the formula was generally "not against tree, nor stone", which was then

pronounced without the negative (Bošković-Stulli 1992: 148-149). Again, this illustrates the need for more precise local research.

In Great Britain and Ireland, the flying legend is rare and the one with the spell is separated from the journey to the wine cellar, which is mostly conducted by fairies (ML 5006*). ML 3045 has not been encountered in Ireland (Almqvist 1991: 275) and England and Scotland both yielded only a few examples. In the case of England, where mostly the charm was recorded and was mispronounced by a fellow witch (Burne 1883: 158), this result can be ascribed to the poor state of legend research. This cannot be concluded for Ireland, however, with its abundant research. Scotland exibits three versions, albeit not in sufficient detail (Macdonald 1995: 40) (I have not consulted these texts in the Edinburgh archives). In a rather fantastic Scottish version dating from the early nineteenth-century, there is no charm that has to be repeated and the meeting is dispersed when the man refers to God (Briggs 1970: 751-754). It is not known to what extent the more recent Scottish stories are derived from this, if at all. The Scandinavian legends are better preserved, if not always accessible.

Under the type designation ML 3045, Reidar Christiansen has grouped a selection of Norwegian legends which correspond to the flight to the wine cellar in the Dutch-language legends. But in as far as the imitator is described, it is a servant and sometimes a discharged soldier. That it concerns a servant implies that he follows his mistress and not his girlfriend (Christiansen 1958: 46-48). The Swedish tale catalogue has five subtypes of the same story about a "man" without further specification. Subsequent types figure a soldier, a servant or a husband as the main character (Af Klintberg 2010: 275-279). If lovers are a theme in the Swedish legends, they remain invisible. It can be concluded that the Scandinavian folklorists did not notice any lovers. Witches do have daughters, which is also the case in the Netherlands and Belgium; only the specific Norwegian tale about the White Serpent, which is cooked and gives a girl the power of clairvoyance, does not occur in the Low Countries (cf. KHM 17). The adjacent type, in which someone discovers the daughter of a witch to have particular powers, would even better lend itself for a lover's story. In Norway, however, the minister discovers the girl's abilities (Christiansen 1958: 41-44; cf. Kvideland & Sehmsdorf 1988: 187-190). The Swedish legend catalogue has a separate section about how the owner of a milk-stealing creature is discovered. As far as can be seen, she is an old woman instead of a young girl (Af Klintberg 2010: 293). The theme, similar to that of the English familiar (de Blécourt 2018), is likewise unknown in the Dutch language area. Both tales have been recorded in Scotland (MacDonald 1995: 35-38).

As far as conclusions can be drawn about Scandinavian flying spells, there is little that discerns them from their Flemish counterparts. Mistakes are made

by mangling the prepositions: "out here" becomes "down here" (Lindow 1978: 169-170), "up and out" is turned into "up and down", "bump against nothing" into "bump against everything". Even the "through" instead of "over" error occurs several times (Af Klintberg 2010: 275-276). This means that stories may have been translated from another language, perhaps Dutch or German, into Norse or Swedish. It also implies that a more thorough examination is necessary to establish the precise patterns of the tale's distribution. Although it should be possible to discover the year of publication or even that of notation of the Scandinavian texts, I have not undertaken this exercise here but have kept it for the German texts.

GERMAN VARIANTS

The tale about the witches of Menzing, near Munich in Bavaria, was probably not local. It contains one of the oldest examples of a courting boy, but as far as can be found out it is unique in southeastern Germany. There are only corraborating texts from the Upper Palatinate, about 150 kilometers to the north. In the Menzing text, the boy finds his girl-friend preparing for a journey to the Blocksberg on a sheaf of hay and is invited to come along on the condition that he should not speak. Near Vienna the boy cries out because of a dangerous manoeuvre and he is dropped in a wine cellar (Schöppner 1853: 341-342). Apart from an odd geography in the story (Vienna is definitely not on the way to the Blocksberg), the boy is not spying on his girl-friend and the wine cellar merely seems a place to fall into, not a destination. Above all: no charm needs to be pronounced and there is thus no opportunity for any mistake. These are all internal indications that the story was not local, or at least not very well remembered. The Palatinate legends concern a farm hand spying on his mistress, a wine cellar in Bohemia and a mangled charm: "touch everything" (*überal an*); there the legend is supplemented with a suspicious Apuleian ending (Schönwerth 1857: 372-374).

A legend from Cochem (Eifel) further to the west, published a few years later, does follow the pattern more closely: the boy spies on his love and her mother and imitates their actions, but says "through" (*durch*) instead of "over". This version ends with the boy waking up with a golden cup (Schmitz 1858: 47-48), which refers to another legend (ML 6045). In the early twentieth century a story with a similar beginning was found in the same Eifel area. In that instance, the boy had to walk for three years before he was home again (Zender 1980: 384). Texts from Xanten (Bodens 1937: 194) and Recklinghausen (Münsterland) (Henßen 1954: 48-49) confirm the legend's presence in the west of Germany,

adjacent to the border with the Netherlands. Legends were clearly exchanged accross administrative boundaries.

For the whole of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany I have found over thirty legend texts about people following a witch or witches. No doubt there are more, but they will have to do for a first overview. Typically they restrict the legend to one (at the most two) occurrences per area. The collecting of repertoires only began in earnest during the nineteen-twenties and most of the texts date from before that time. In the North of Germany the destination of the flight is often the Blocksberg (Kuhn 1859: 68-70; Bartsch 1879: 115; Jahn 1886: 340), a legendary meeting place of witches which by the nineteenth century had solidified on the Brocken in the Harz mountains. In Schwaben, the destination was the Heuberg (Meier 1852: 183). Sometimes the witches flew to a cellar (Baader 1851: 121-122; Colshorn 1854: 245-246); only in Saterland was the wine cellar's location (Bremen) made part of the spell (Siebs 1893: 391 = Van der Kooi & Schuster 2003: 229-230). In most cases the destination is not specified.

In the German legends too, the mispronounciation of the charm hinges on the "over" – "through" opposition (f.i. Woeste 1848: 45-46), or the similar "nothing" – "everything" one (Jahn 1886: 344). Yet the results seem to be less severe or less pronounced than what was found in Flanders. A man arriving at the witches' meeting place in the form of a bloody skeleton (De Cock 1921: 22) does not occur in Germany. In exceptional cases clothes are torn and travellers end up with bruses (Reiser 1895: 181), or are scratched and damaged all over (Meier 1852: 183). It may indicate that the joke was only understood in some places.

One of the earliest modern examples of the charm can be read in Wolf's *Niederländische Sagen*, but this is only the first part: *Over haeg en over heg, tot Keulen in den wijnkelder*. Instead of the mispronounced repeat spell, it features the farmer on a calf shouting: "God bless us all", whereupon the calf disappears and the man finds himself in a strange land, apparently after he survived the fall (Wolf 1843: 469). Something similar is reported from Northern Germany, where a boy on the return journey cries out: "What an efficient jump for a three-years old bull" and has to walk for more than a week to get home (Kuhn 1848: 134; also Siebs 1893: 391, goat). These legends can be grouped together with others in which the taboo of speaking, or more specifically pronouncing the name of God, has taken the place of the attempt to copy the witch's spell. Next to the fall on the return journey, this is expressed in the blessing during the witches' meal. In a legend from the Allgau a man sees the witches dancing around stark naked and giving homage to someone with goat's feet, upon which he cries out "Jesus, Maria and Joseph" and he is left alone in a swamp (Reiser

1895: 181). In the valley of Paznau a man proclaims that salt is a gift of God, whereupon everyone disappears (Alpenburg 1861: 200-201).

EARLIER HISTORY

Tracing legends back beyond the nineteenth century amounts to following thin threads of written or printed evidence. The motif of witches gathered in a wine cellar had a long history, going back to the thirteenth-century (de Bourbon; see: Broedel 2003: 111-112). In medieval times it mostly appeared in Latin texts, which could be read by intellectuals all over Europe. In the late sixteenth century both cellar and spell became connected to the German Blocksberg. The first instance of this connection appears in a pamphlet about the witches in Osnabrück, which was mostly a fictional report and not very accurate historically. In this pamphlet it is mainly stated that witches travelled to wine cellars after convening on the mountain (Behringer 2000: 210). In the seventeenth century the wine cellar motif became even more popular through pamphlets on witch trials and through its appearance in the several versions of the Faust story (Peuckert 1963). The story was also brought to England and Scotland; the 1590 pamphlet about the witches of Berwick even provided a woodcut.

The wine cellar story featured in the early seventeenth-century sermons on witches (*Hexenpredigten*) (Meder 1605: 80) and at the end of the seventeenth century in the "other part" of the German edition of Remigius (Nicholas Rémy). Now the story already has a number of elements which would resurface in the twentieth-century texts and it certainly has a man spying on witches. After annointing himself with cream he reached the wine cellar, where he was recognised by the inn-keeper's daughter. In this version the man himself and not the witch was put to trial (Remigius 1693: 443). Bartholomäus Anhorn in his *Magiologia* of 1675-76 claimed to have heard the story from a man whose stock of wine had been mysteriously depleted (Brunold-Bigler 2003: 226-227). Like the mountain motif, wine had a strong biblical connotation as it had always been part of the communion (Utz Tremp 2017).

The legend Following the Witch itself had a complicated history, starting with the Apuleius' tale of Pamphilë, book three of *The Golden Ass*, popular in the late Middle Ages (Scobie 1983: 176-187). North of the Alps, however, only the first half was used and the part of the man wanting to change into a bird but becoming an ass was dropped in favour of the flight with the of elves which could end in disaster. A first trace of the deviation from Apuleius can be found in the late thirteenth century collection of sermon exempla, *Historiae Memorabiles*,

by Rudolf von Schlettstadt in which the servant of a monastery takes shelter with a woman who he sees annointing herself and flying away on a vase. He finds himself merely sitting on an ass (instead of changing into one) and ends up at a green meadow (Montesano 2018: 112). The fall of the observer can be found in the early thirteenth-century *Otia Imperialia* of Gervais of Tilbury:

> .. they swiftly crossed the sea with the crowd of lamiae and traversed the earth; but, if in this crowd any one named Christ, he at once fell to the earth, wherever he was and to whatever danger. We have seen in the kingdom of Arles a woman of Beaucaire who thus fell into the middle of the Rhone, up to her navel, and escaped, not without terror (Lea 1939: 174).

The fall itself was derived from the story of Simon the Sorcerer, or Simon Magus. He was the first heretic and his fall is about what God allowed the devil to do and about the power of the Catholic church.

The Italian version of *Following the Witch* by Bartholomeus de Spina from 1523 featured a charcoal burner whose wife had the habit of disappearing at night. While the man pretended to be asleep, he saw his wife anointing herself and flying out of the chimney. He followed her and ended up in a wine cellar, where he was apprehended the following morning. In the middle of the sixteenth century *Following the Witch*, now without the wine cellar, circulated in Germany. The *Zimmersche Chronik* related the story about a companion of a wizard who flew with him on calves to the mountain of Venus, could not keep silent and fell into a stork's nest. In the version by Wolfgang Buttner of 1568, it was situated in the village of Poplitz (Anhalt). A woman used an anointed broom, and her servant copied her with his straw fork, ultimately arriving at the assembly of witches. He was warned not to speak on the return journey, but he noticed he was riding on a calf and made a remark about it. He was thrown off and became a cripple (de Blécourt 2016: 90-92). The version in Del Río, which has the advantage that it was translated into English (Maxwell-Stuart 2000: 95-97), stemmed from the letters of a Flemish physician Balduinus Ronsseus. Here the servant followed his misstress by touching a beam in the hayloft, participated in a meeting with witches and was dropped in a swamp on the way back. In all likelihood both the Dutch and the German versions were indebted to Spina's tale.

The first half of the charm turns up in accounts from trials in Rostock. A man from Güstrow on trial in 1583, who had been to the Blocksberg four times, had been transported there by the devil in the form of a black horse. When he mounted it, he said:

ich hebbe my glath gesmeret,	I greased myself smoothly
dat my niemand begripe	So that no one can grasp me
help mi düfel in dießer pipen	Help me, devil in this pipe [?]
auf und darvan	Up and away
und nergends ahn.	And into nowhere

They had eaten and danced and at the side of the mountain there was a lake with little fish swimming and the longer you looked at them the bigger they became. There were also red apples, but you should not take (eat) them, otherwise you had to remain there (Bartsch 1880: 15). In 1584 a woman repeated the spell; she had put black ointment on her body and also said: Auf und darvan und nergens an (Up and away and into nowhere) (Bartsch 1880: 19). The spell re-emerged in 1623 a trial in Konitz (today's Chojnice) (Grässe 1871: 593-594), but there may be some more examples still hidden in the archives. This German equivalent of the Dutch "over bushes" spell was known earlier in the sixteenth century, but at that time it had very little to do with witches. In the later records of the witch trials there is no sign of any reported mispronounciation by an observer. There is also no independent corroboration from popular printed sources. The annointment, as well as the presence of the devil, occurred in both the pamphlets and the trial accounts. Both the spell and the story were in all probability separate translations from the Italian, as an Italian version of the spell already appeared in the 1428 trial of Matteuccia da Todi (Montesano 2018: 159):

cum aqua et vento	over water and wind
ad nucem de Benevento	towards the walnut (tree) of Benevento

Or in a more extended version (Montesano 2018: 175):

Unguento, unguento	Ointment, ointment
mandame a la noce de Benivento	send me to the walnut of Benevento
supra aqua et supra ad vento	over water and over wind
et supraad omne maltempo	and over any tempest

If any version of the mispronounced charm would have existed in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, it would be something like "God bless you". This motif also appeared in the sixteenth-century Italian sabbat stories in which whole feasts disappeared when the change participant pronounced a blessing. The story was taken up by Bodin in 1580 and by del Río about twenty years later. It was also translated and reprinted in several seventeenth-century German volumes meant for entertainment.

CHANGES

Thus, an earlier version of the flight through the bushes or other obstacles was that concerning a tumble on the return flight from a meeting of witches. The latter did not cause as much harm to the follower as the former because it was meant to implicate the witch rather than to ridicule the observer. The older texts are still preserved among the modern legends, if only to a limited extent. It seems higly unlikely that the joke of the foolish man circulated earlier; at least, I haven't found it amoungst the other witchcraft jokes that were current in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It is therefore to be presumed that its distribution took place rather quickly, possibly during the early nineteenth century or slightly earlier. Such a rapid distribution was certainly not unheard of, as can be seen in the case of other jokes, but also with fairy tales.

The joke's character as a male tale with a male protagonist of a young age indicates that it was told by older men, partly to warn their younger listeners that they should not marry a witch and partly to make fun of them if they showed too much interest in a particular girl. In the nineteenth century, courting a witch was certainly still an issue, at least in the eastern parts of the Netherlands (de Blécourt 2017). The mispronounciation of the charm was crucial in this plot, not because the charm was easily mangled as "over" and "through" did still sound completely different, in whatever language. The only reason for the boy to make the mistake was therefore that he was stupid, and it is a wonder that he managed to remember the rest of the charm correctly. This stupidity extended through the rest of the legend. At the same time, however, the overall message was still serious. It did not just serve to underline that young men should not include witches among their marriage candidates, but also to proclaim that some women still (wrongly) believed that by applying ointment- they would be able to fly to a witches' meeting, in this case to a wine cellar.

As far as I am able to see, this analysis applies specifically to the Dutch-language legends. Elsewhere in Europe, the *Following the Witch* legend did not address marriage prospects and the results of pronouncing the charm wrongly

were slightly less severe. I leave it to my colleagues to come up with a reasonable explanation for these differences.

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BIO

Willem de Blécourt is a historical anthropologist specialized in the study of witchcraft, werewolves and fairy tales in Europe from the Late Middle Ages to the twentieth century. An Honorary Research Fellow at the Meertens Institute (Amsterdam), his books include *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print. On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm* (2012), and the edited book *Werewolf Histories* (2015). He is currently putting the last touches to: *The Cat and the Cauldron. A Cultural History of Witchcraft in the Low Countries.*

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WICKED DREAMS, TEARY EYES, AND SALTY NOSES: ELVISH PATHOLOGIES AND FOLKLORIC EXORCISMS FROM MEDIEVAL GERMANIC EUROPE

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Abstract: Medieval sources preserve a significant number of verbal remedies against elves and comparable beings. Similarly, a substantial number of manuscripts include references to pathologies named after elvish entities. The argument presented here explores the multivalent relationships between folkloric afflictions and performative texts that claim to expel folkloric characters. Specifically, this article concentrates on unpacking the various interpretative implications of elf exorcisms, and it refers to several newly discovered medieval sources. The most significant conclusion it presents is that the lexicon that past individuals used to designate elvish pathologies emerged from complicated linguistic and literary processes and that the variability of symptoms and conditions for which texts *contra elphos* were used seems to have been inspired in part by the fact that people did not always conceptualise the behaviour of elves in the same way. The argument also considers the views of medieval individuals who commented on contemporary beliefs regarding folkloric illnesses and ailments, as well as some sources that shed light on the relationship between popular beliefs and Christian worldviews.

Key words: elves, exorcisms, medieval charms, folklore, manuscripts, disease names.

INTRODUCTION

Elves are popular subjects among medievalists. Karen Louise Jolly and Alaric Hall have done much to enrich our understanding of Old English and Old Norse elves (Jolly 1996, 1998; Hall 2004, 2006a, b, 2007a), and Richard Firth Green has recently presented an extensive study of elves and fairies in Middle English literature (2016). Equally, James Wade has explored the literary and

narratological resonances of elvish entities in his book *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, while Diane Purkiss has described the way in which similar characters feature in Early Modern sources (2011; 2007). In addition, there are presently two bundles available in print that offer a broad range of perspectives on the various cultural manifestations of "the good folk". Peter Narvaez compiled the first of these volumes in 1991; Simon Young and Ceri Houlbrook edited and published the second in 2017. Finally, it is worth noting that elves and associated beings have also been discussed in languages other than English. The most prominent studies are Laurence Harf-Lancer's *Les Fées au Moyen Âge* (1984) and Claude Lecouteux's *Les Nains et les Elfes au Moyen Âge* (1988). Additional useful publications are Catharina Raudvere's *Föreställningar om Maran i Nordisk Folktro* (1993), Evgen Tarantul's *Elfen, Zwerge und Riesen* (2001), and Stamatios Zochios' *Le Cauchemar Mythique* (2006).

Despite the evident scholarly interest in elves, some Latin and German exorcisms which mention such otherworldly entities have remained underexplored. These incantatory texts have survived in a variety of different formats. The specimens that have been handed down to us in manuscripts most frequently constitute smaller entries in more extensive collections of religious, medical, and magical writings. For the most part, such texts appear to have functioned as referential transcripts.[1] However, elf exorcisms also survive on medieval parchment strips and lead tablets.[2] These were not drafted for referential purposes; rather, they were at one time written down and deposited in order to execute exorcistic performances. The most significant feature which sets all these texts apart from other exorcisms is that they include some variant of the phrase "Conjuro vos, elves".

This article hopes to redress in part the current imbalance in the state of research concerning elves and the various verbal cures associated with them, and it accordingly explores the meaning and interrelation of a number of elf exorcisms from medieval Europe. Focusing specifically on Latin and German material from present-day Germany and England, it provides an insight into the ways in which charms *contra elphos* were transcribed and transmitted during the Middle Ages. In addition, it sheds light on how the folkloric attitude towards infection and contamination that we encounter in some medieval elf exorcisms engages with contemporary notions about the possible causes of sickness, impairment, and disability.

The following argument includes a number of references to newly discovered elf exorcisms, but it does not focus explicitly on these documents. Instead, it considers the new material alongside a range of related verbal remedies and other contemporary sources. It thus hopes to offer a vista of how stories about elves may have contributed to popular notions concerning the aetiology of spe-

cific forms of adversity. In the same way, the following discussion deliberates how the interaction between beliefs about the causes of some forms of hardship and interpretative ambiguities related to the folkloric designations of symptoms and illnesses may have encouraged the proliferation of stories about malignant elvish entities.

We begin our investigation in Gotland, sometime before the year 1683. It is at this time that Brigitte, a woman from "een Bondegård i Bro sokn, kallad Stora Aby" (a farm in the district of Bro called Stora Aby), appears to have attempted to cure her cows from certain lactation issues. In order to improve the physical condition of her cattle, she seems to have used the following text:

> Conjuro vos Ellvos et Ellvas et omnia Cætera genera vestra Cujuscunq. Status vel Conditionis estis, omnes incantatores et incantatrices et omnes Dœmones per Deum Patrem + per Deum Filium + per Deum Spiritum Sanctum […] ut non noceatis huic famulæ Dej […] in vaccis aut lacticinis […] (Spegel 1901: 178).

> I conjure you, *Ellvos* and *Ellvas*, and all other kinds of you, of whatever status or condition you are, all enchanters and enchantresses and all demons, by God the Father +, by God the Son +, by God the Holy Spirit, not to harm the cows or dairy of this servant of God.

We know of Brigitte's dairy dilemma because Haquin Spegel (1645-1714), a Swedish clergyman and historiographer, transcribed her "breef" sometime before 1683 and appended it to his work *Rudera Gothlandica* (Gotlandic vestiges). Spegel's decision to preserve the text was not motivated by his ambition to provide an edifying ethnographical insight into the efficiency of local veterinary practices. Rather, it appears he reproduced the document in the hope that it could help to convey the backward customs of the rural population (Spegel 1901: 53).

In spite of the slightly patronising intentions of its first editor, the Gotlandic lactation charm is noteworthy as a historical source because it rehearses some linguistic formulae that also appear elsewhere in the written record. A ninth-century prayer book from Anglo-Saxon England contains an exorcism that includes the line "adiuro te satanae diabulus *aelfae*" (British Library, Royal 2 A XX, fol. 45^{b})[3]; Sloane MS 962, a medical miscellany from fourteenth- or fifteenth-century England, contains a text that runs "Coniuro uos elues et omnia genera demonum nocturna siue diuturna" (fols. 9^{v}-10^{r}, edited in Kieckhefer 1998: 153); and a parchment strip from Ingleby Arncliffe written in a hand from the early thirteenth century documents an exorcism that uses the phrase "Coniuro nos [sic] elphes & demones & omnia genera fantasmatis" (for full text and plates, see

Wordsworth 1903: 402-403). Equally, Uppsala C 222 (c. 1200-1300) preserves a text with the line "adiuro elphos elphorum" (fol. 97v, edited in Gjerløw 1960: 21) and Clm 849, a German vernacular manuscript from the fifteenth century, features a document that runs as follows:

> daz mentsche daz mit der krangheide befallen ist, daz sall dem jhenen mit syme nagkenden libe uff syme nagketen beyne siczin eyne gude wile; wan dan daz geschehin ist, so sall der gsonde mentsche dem krangkin mentschin mit synere czongen fharen ubir sin naßen: smagkit dan dy naße gesalczen, so sint es dy elbe. […] man saill es also besweren: […] By dem heilgen Pater Noster, by dem heilgen Ave Maria unde by dem heilgen glouben, […] da by beswere ich uch, alp unde elbynnen […] (Schönbach 1893: 43).
>
> One shall place the naked body of the person who is suffering from the illness on one's bare legs for a good while [the text specifies in an earlier section that the designated person can be the patient's mother, father, wife, or husband]. When this has happened, the healthy person shall go over the sick person's nose with his tongue. If the nose tastes salty, then it is the elves. One can charm the condition as follows: by the holy Pater Noster, by the holy Ave Maria, and by the holy faith, by these I charm you, *alp* and *elbynnen*.

Brigitte's text is thus not just a quixotic textual artefact, commemorative of a woman's struggle to improve the welfare of the cattle placed under her care; it also bears testimony to a long-lasting and widespread interest in a particular register of therapeutic language. In a medieval context, this register is most closely associated with Christian exorcisms. It merits considering, however, that official liturgical manuals such as the Roman-Germanic Pontifical (10th cent.) do not prescribe texts against elves. Medieval incantations that do seek to banish such beings using exorcistic phraseology can, therefore, best be understood as unofficial responses to an official tradition (Young 2016: 83; Kieckhefer 1998: 147). Such an observation is further supported by the fact that vernacular charms and other more popular incantatory texts from a broad range of periods occasionally employ analogous linguistic constructions in order to drive out similarly designated folkloric pests. In consequence, most medieval elf exorcisms appear to provide evidence for a "dual transference" between traditional folklore and Christian rituals; they attest to specific processes of "textualisation" that assisted in the continuous renegotiation of official and unofficial attitudes towards common beliefs and practices (Jolly 1996: 116).

ELVES AS DISEASE DEMONS

Some scholars have preferred to associate elves mostly with ailments such as "shot", fever, or epilepsy (see, for example, Simek 2011: 40; Dalgarno 1892: Kittredge 1929: 133-134; Davidson 1956, McGowan 2009). However, if we take a closer look at the historical record, we notice that both medieval and post-medieval sources associate elvish entities with a broad range of different symptoms and conditions (Závoti 2013; Thun 1969; Hall 2005a, b, 2007a). We have already observed that the Gotlandic incantation's *raison d'être* is to prevent lactation problems in cattle, while the fifteenth-century German text from Clm 849 associates an "alp unde elbynnen" with a condition characterised by a salty nose. Similarly, a fifteenth-century English manuscript contains a text with the formula "Coniuro vos demones et latrones, elphos et morbum caducum" (Sloane MS 2584, fols. 73v-74r) and a Middle Dutch manuscript from the same period links *aluen* to speech impairments. In a recipe for "Hoemen een mensche sijn tale benemen sal" (how one can rob a person of his speech), we come across the advice to make a powder out of "saet van cenien ende sauelboem" (seed of senna and the savin juniper). As the text explains, it is "daer mede dat die aluen benemen dat die lieden niet en spreken" (with these that the *aluen* prevent people from speaking) (Braekman 1987: 283).

Meanwhile, the lexicons of various Germanic vernaculars include terms that either denote or appear to denote elf-inflicted ailments. Anglo-Saxon leechbooks contain expressions in the order of *ælfcynn, ælfsiden, ælfsogoþa*, *wæterælfadl*, and *ylfa gescot* (for a discussion and references, see Hall 2004: 106-131); Middle English sources add *elve-inome*, *elf-iblowe*, *elfe y-take*, *elf cake*, and *elve bleine* (Blake 1972: 106-107; Way 1853: 138; Norri 1992: 261). Equally, a thirteenth-century annotation in a German manuscript glosses the illness "malus malannus" with "alpe", while an incantation from a century later associates an *alb* with noxious respiratory assaults (Steinmeyer and Sievers 1895: 664; Schulz 2000b: 153). Middle Dutch uses the terms *alf bedrogen*, *alfsgedroch*, and *alfsgedwas* to describe forms of delusion and demonic possession; later sources in the same language include the idiomatic phrases "van den alf geleed zijn" (being misled by the *alf*) and "rijt jou den elft?" (is the *elft* riding you?), whereas modern English has the saying "to be away with the fairies" to convey a closely related idea (van Veerdeghem 1899: 37b; Verwijs and Verdam 2018; Coetsem 1949; Oudemans 1857: 83). Finally, some Germanic expressions also reference folkloric entities in order to offer an aetiological context for non-bodily symptoms. In 1563, for instance, William Fulke ridiculed a folk etymology concerning fairy rings, "those round circles, which are seen in many fieldes", when he declared "that ignoraunt people affirme [them] to be the rynges of the fayries danses"

(69). The association between elves and naturally occurring ring growths dates back to at least the twelfth century, as is attested by the Middle English word *elferingewort*, which describes a circle of daisies (Hunt 1989: 87).

The terminology outlined above evokes an alluring and multiplex range of perspectives concerning the pestilential behaviour of elves. Old English sources occasionally associate the concept *ælf* with the general disease term *adl*, but they also combine it with more specific conditions such as *siden*, *gescot*, and *sogoþa* (Hall 2007a: 96-156). Subsequent terms in additional Germanic languages increasingly appear to confirm the impression that elves were widely believed to be malignant anthropomorphic agents that could inflict various forms of impairment through the use of foul breath, trampling feet, and oppressive bodyweight. The later medieval and post-medieval disease names, moreover, characterise elves as illusionists and pranksters, and the developments in the names for elf diseases, therefore, appear to accord well with developments in contemporaneous narrative traditions regarding the supposed behaviour of these supernatural characters. In Middle High German romances, for instance, we frequently encounter rhymes along the lines of "daz ist harte wunderlich / Ich wene die elber trigēt mich" (that is very strange / I believe the *elber* are deceiving me) (Frommann 1837: 9). Likewise, some sources from medieval England comment on the habit of elves to mislead and misdirect people: the *Fasciculus Morum*, a Franciscan preacher manual from the early fourteenth century, associates them with "fantasmata", and the A version of Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle* (c. 1260–1300) opines that they are "wightes" that can adopt the "forme" of both men and women whenever they please (Wenzel 1989: 579; Wright 1887: 196). The former work also draws on what appears to be contemporary fairy lore to characterise what "in nostro vulgari dicitur *elves*" as otherworldly abductors. According to the author of the *Fasciculus Morum*, there are some who believe "quod tales possunt tam homines quam mulieres in alias naturas transformare et secum ducere apud *eluenlond*" (that these [entities] can change both men and women into other beings and carry them with them to *elvenlond*) (Wenzel 1989: 579; also see Saunders 2010).

Given the close association between delusions and dreams, as well as the partially synonymic relationship between the Latin term *incubus* and the Middle High German term *alp*, it is perhaps not surprising that a recipe book from Heidelberg includes "ein segen fur den alp" (which uses the phrase "Adiuro vos Elphos + Et Elphos") in a section dedicated to sleep disorders (Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 271 [c. 1526-1544], fol. 229r; also see Blöcker-Walter 1985; MacLehose 2013; Riviere and Wallace 2013).[4] Nevertheless, despite the apparent overlap between certain medieval disease names that

reference elves and selected medieval narratives about the behaviour of such beings, there are also several interpretative difficulties that prevent us from concluding that the elf exorcisms that survive from the medieval period were transcribed and composed to assist in the remedying of specific elf diseases.

To start with, the pathological descriptions that accompany ailments named after elves in medieval leechbooks are frequently counterintuitive. The Anglo-Saxon medical work that lists a remedy against *wæterælfadl*, for example, does not describe this condition as an illness caused by water-*ælfenne* (a term which does appear elsewhere in the Old English written record, as a gloss for *hamadryades*) (Hall 2007a: 78-79, 87). Instead, it appears to treat the term *wæterælfadl* as a cutaneous subcategory of *ælfadl* and it thus relates that "Gif mon biþ on *wæterælfadle*, þonne beoþ him þa handnæglas wonne and þa eagan tearige and wile locian niþer" (if someone suffers from *wæterælfadl*, the nails of his hands will be wan and the eyes teary, and the person will look down). The relevant entry recommends two incantations, both of which "mon mæg singan on wunde" (one may sing on the wound), as well as a herbal recipe, but it includes no unambiguous references to corrupting animate influences (Hall 2007a: 106-107; cf. Schneider 1969: 295). Correspondingly, the Middle English words *elfe y-take* and *elve-inome* are in the contexts in which they survive not, as speakers of modern English may expect, characterised as conditions whereby patients are abducted "apud *eluenlond*". In a footnote of the 1843 edition of the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, an English-Latin dictionary that was completed around 1440, we read that a "curious medical MS. of XVth cent. in the possession of Sir Thomas Phillipps" contains a remedy "For a chylde that ys elfe y-take, and may not broke hys mete, that hys mouthe ys donne" (Way: 138). In the same way, a treatise on the fall in the Vernon Manuscript, which dates to around 1400, relates that "Yf eny mon is elve-inome other elf-iblowe, he hit hath of the angelus that fellen out of hevene" (Blake 1972: 106-107). Accordingly, it is evident that *elfe y-take* and *elve-inome* do not denote a process of otherworldly abduction, but one of pathological contagion. The expression "taken" has been used in English to denote "diseased" or "afflicted" since at least 1387, as demonstrated by such phrases as "he was i-take with sikenesse and deyde" (Lumby and Babington 1876: 157), and because we most frequently encounter the word as a descriptor for non-folkloric symptoms it is probable that terms such as *elfe y-take* and *elve-inomen* have their roots in contemporary medical idioms rather than contemporary folklore (also see Green 2016: 133).

A closely related problem concerning the nature of elf ailments is that it is not always possible to determine the extent to which diseases named after folkloric and demonic entities constitute fossilised expressions (Doyle 2008: 117). In modern English, the term nightmare is mostly used to describe a bad dream,

even though the lexeme *mare* looks back to an Indo-European term that once appears to have denoted an encumbering disease demon (Höfler 1900; Riegler 1935a; Riegler 1935b; Siefken 1935; Roscher 1900; Hall 2007b; Raudvere 1993; Forsblom 1927; Zochios 2006). Modern variants of the lexical root feature in several languages besides English, but the geographic spread and persistent oral currency of these variants are not serviceable statistics for estimating whether beliefs associated with the root's historical meanings have survived to the present day (for area studies related to mare beliefs, see Zochios 2006; Kunze 1977; Raudvere 1993, 1995).

To gain a clearer insight into the various ways in which language change can influence the popular etymological (mis)understanding of a disease term, we may briefly deliberate Johann Heinrich Füssli's (1741-1825) oil canvas called *The Nightmare*. This painting from 1781 portrays a woman who suffers from sleep paralysis and it includes representations of two demonic agents that German speakers at the time commonly associated with this condition (Moffitt 2002: 178; Schneck 1969). The first is a horse, the second a chest-riding monster. Yet, eighteenth-century folk belief did not necessarily link both these figures to bad dreams because established literary traditions characterised both equids and encumbering demons as nocturnal pests. Instead, it appears the phonological resemblance between the words for, respectively, a female horse (*Mähre*) and an oppressive evil spirit (*Mahr*) was apparent enough to encourage an alteration in the latter creature's narrative tradition (for additional etymological considerations, see Stewart 2002: 282; Frayling and Warner 2006: 11; Davies 2003: 183-184; cf. Feingold 1982, 54-55; for more general studies, see Gordon 2015; Schneck 1969; Sharpless and Doghramji 2015a; Cox 2015; Milne 2017).

Moreover, we should be careful not to dichotomise disease vocabulary into fossilised and non-fossilised groups automatically, as such a routine misleadingly presupposes that the rationale for naming a specific condition after a supernatural entity needs to be governed by the conviction that the being in question genuinely exists. While such a line of reasoning is not improbable as far as some historical disease terminology is concerned, it is helpful to consider that using a popular story to describe an illness does not necessitate believing in the factuality of that story. For example, when the French psychiatrist Benjamin Logre (1883-1963) coined the term "Elpenor's syndrome" to refer to deranged, hung-over behaviour, he did not do so because he believed the Homeric narrative wherein Elpenor falls to his death after a night of heavy drinking was based on historical events. Instead, he believed the reference to the *Odyssey* was appropriate because it could help to convey the nature of the pathology he was researching, as well as its associated hazards. The term Elpenor syndrome is thus an analogical expression that derives from traditional

knowledge, rather than traditional beliefs (Olry and Haines 2006). We cannot exclude the possibility that the popularity and currency of some of the elvish disease vocabulary we find in medieval sources were sustained in part by the tacit understanding that fictional narratives about folkloric disease demons appropriately captured the symptoms of specific real-life conditions.

In order to make sense of the shifting and multivalent relationships between medieval elves, ailments, and exorcisms, it is beneficial to acknowledge that fossilisation constitutes a gradual, negotiable, and reversible socio-linguistic process. Speakers of the same speaker community can use identical folklorically-inspired expressions in identical contexts and still disagree about their precise meanings, connotations, and etymologies. A medieval anecdote about the extent to which separate sections of society can differ in their views about the nature of illnesses named after demons appears in the writings of Bernard of Gordon (fl. 1270–1330). This professor of medicine, who taught at the university of Montpellier at the turn of the fourteenth century, wrote the following synthesis of *au courant* opinions about a medical condition he called "incubus" but which most modern physicians would probably recognise as sleep paralysis:[5]

> Incubus est phantasma in somnis, corpus comprimens et aggrauans, motum et loquelam perturbans. Incubus nomen est daemonis et ideo volunt aliqui quod quando ille incubus directe est supra corpus humanum et potissime quando iacet dormitque resupinus ratione corruptae influentiae, aggrauat corpus, ita quod videtur patienti quod suffocetur. Et si aduenit pueris lactantibus, frequenter suffocantur, quia tantam corruptionem sustinere non possunt, et est opinio theologorum. Vulgares autem dicunt quod est aliqua vetula calcans et comprimens corpora, et hoc nihil est. Medici autem melius opinantur.
>
> Incubus is an apparition that presses on the body and weighs it down during sleep, disturbing both movement and speech. Incubus is the name of a demon and that is why some people think that when the incubus is directly above the human body—especially when a person lies on his back—he presses the body down by his corrupting influence, to such an extent that the patient thinks he is going to suffocate. When this happens to babies, they often do suffocate, because they cannot bear so great a corruption. Such is the opinion of the theologians. But the common people believe that the incubus is an old woman who tramples on and presses down the body. This is nonsense. The physicians have a better opinion (Gordonensis 1617: 269; translation based on van der Lugt 2001: 176).

As Bernard explains, *theologi*, *vulgares*, and *medici* disagree about the aetiology of the symptoms that the term "incubus" designates, and one of the reasons for this controversy is that the condition shares its name with that of a demon. The cited section thus suggests that people tend to interpret the etymology of disease terminology so that it accords with their preconceived convictions regarding the way the world operates. Bernard oversimplifies the socio-linguistic situation of his day when he subdivides people's primary belief systems into three distinct categories—folk knowledge, theology, and medical science—but he appears to be accurate in his observation that a divergence in cosmological views encourages disagreement concerning the aetiology of the same phenomena.

The premise that governs Bernard of Gordon's explanation of various incubus interpretations is that medical conditions that are named after characters from popular folklore are narratologically productive: the fact that concepts such as "incubus" and "elf" are simultaneously interlocked with religious, folkloric, and medical discourses not only complicates their interpretation, it also encourages their re-interpretation. The English Wakefield Play conventionally called the *Second Shepherd's Pageant* (c. 1500) provides an illustrative example of how medieval authors could use the hermeneutic plasticity of demonic diseases to add literary dimensions to their work. The performance constitutes a humoristic spoof of the biblical Adoration narrative and describes a situation whereby three shepherds discover that their treacherous companion's newborn baby—to which they have generously decided to bring gifts—is in actuality one of their own sheep, dressed up as a human child and placed inside a cradle. The thieves responsible, who are husband and wife, give various excuses as to why their offspring looks so ovine: one of the shepherds affirms that "I know hym by the eere marke / that is a good tokyn", but Mak, the husband, retorts "I tell you, syrs, hark! / hys noyse was brokyn" (ll. 611-12 in Cawley).

The situation soon turns sour, and the wife decides to step in when one of the shepherds concludes that "This is a fals wark" and that his companion should "Gett wepyn" (ll. 614-15). In need of a *deus ex machina*, she resorts to elvish lore in order to explain why her child has such a "long snowte" under "the clowtt" (ll. 584-85):

> He was takyn with an elfe,
> I saw it myself;
> When the clok stroke twelf
> Was he forshapyn (ll. 616-619).

We observed earlier that "takyn with an elfe" etymologically means "sick with elvish symptoms", rather than "kidnapped" or "transformed" by an elf. Yet, the double meaning of the participle "takyn" appears not to have been wasted on

the author of the *Second Shepherd's Pageant*, as the section cited above seems to exploit the term's folkloric and medical implications. On the one hand, the passage employs the participle to denote a physical condition, utilising it to contextualise a mother's personal statement regarding the transformation of her child into a "forshapyn" sheep. On the other, it recalls contemporaneous lore that characterises elves as abductors, changelings, and, to recall the *Fasciculus Morum*, entities that "possunt tam homines quam mulieres in alias naturas transformare" (can transform both men and women into other beings). The pertinence of the latter observation is underscored by the fact that the plot of the play revolves around disguising a sheep as a human baby (also see Green 2016: 133; 2017: 394).

The multivalence of the word "takyn" also helps to explain why elves and elf diseases are predisposed to engage in what Cyril Edwards has described as "lexical and conceptual shape-shifting" (2004: 115). In essence, elvish entities feature in a great number of medieval narratives, with their precise predispositions and attributes differing from time to time and place to place (Goodrich 2015). At the same time, numerous historical sources typify elves as both pestilential and liminal, and for this reason they consider them as either analogous to or synonymous with figures that demonstrate the same characteristics. Thus, an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon inscription on the flyleaf of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F. 3. 6 advises to write words such as "thebal guttatim" on three wafers "wið þone dworh" (against the *dworh*) (fol. ii^r^). A German annotation from roughly a century later, meanwhile, lists a nigh-identical verbal sequence (Thebal Gut Gutani) as a remedy "contra alpes" (against *alpes*) (Clm 536, fol. 89^v^; also see Tille 1895).[6] In the same way, *Leechbook III*, a ninth- or tenth-century medical manuscript from England, offers a description of a condition that it identifies as "ælfsogoþa" but for which it prescribes a verbal remedy that expels "omnem impetum *castalidum*" (every attack of the *castalides*) (see remedy 62 in Olds 1984); an Anglo-Norman medical manual from the thirteenth century labels an exorcism that begins "Conjuro vos, elves" as a text "Pur faies" (Cambridge, Trinity College, 0.1.20, fol. 10^r^, edited in Hunt 1997: 224-225); and a contemporaneous German fabliau records a conversation wherein a student tells his companion that the latter's strange behaviour is due to the fact that "dich hat geriten der mar, ein elbisches âs" (you have been ridden by the *mar*, an *elbisch* spirit) (quoted in Grimm and Grimm 1826: lvi). Scribal intentions to vernacularise foreign terms certainly account for some of the variations in the terminology of demonic diseases related here. Yet, a widespread conviction among medieval individuals that entities from different cultural and narratological traditions could be superficially different while having the same fundamental characteristics also appears to have contributed considerably to

the nomenclatural flexibility (for a more elaborate synthesis of geographical terminological differences, see Goodrich 2015).

Post-medieval sources provide more extensive examples of how the same bodily symptoms could be attributed to entities with different names. For instance, when asked the question "Wie nennt man das Alpdrücken" (how do we call the nightmare), twentieth-century Germans from the Rhineland answered *Mahrreiten*, *Mahrdrücken*, *Todsmahr, Mahr, Druckmännchen*, *Druckmäuschen*, *Heimchen, Heimelmaus*, *Himpermäuschen*, *Timpermäuschen*, *Himpermännchen*, *Timpermännchen,* and so on (Müller et al. 1928-1971: 747; Cox 1989/1990: 61). Likewise, the term for a fairy ring, which we observed was *elferinge* in Middle English, is *Hexenring* or *Feenring* in German, while French uses the phrases *rond de sorcière* or *cercle des fées* (here also see Brøndegaard 1968). The implication that comes forth from some of these lexical variations is that the same beings could not only be conceptualised as the cause of various problems, the same problems could also be attributed to various analogous characters. The appropriateness of the analogy appears to have depended mostly on the time and the place, as well as on the cosmological views, the folkloric traditions, and the linguistic knowledge of the implicated speaker communities.

The inherent narratological productivity of ailments named after elves and the propensity of folkloric beings to engage in lexical and conceptual shape-shifting are not only interesting from a linguistic perspective. It also helps us to understand the structure and stylistic choices of some medieval elf charms and exorcisms. The Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm *Wið Færstice* makes the claim that "þis ðe to bote esa gescotes, ðis ðe to bote ylfa gescotes / ðis ðe to bote hægtessan gescotes" (This [works] for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ese*, this [works] for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ælfe*, this [works] for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *hægtessan*) (ll. 23-24, edited in Dobbie 1942), while an English document from the first half of the fourteenth century runs "coniuro uos fauni […] et strige et elfes" (I conjure you *fauni* and *strige* and *elfes*) (Harley MS 273, fol. 213^{v}).[7] In order to acquire a greater understanding of how and why elves engage in such nebulous semantic relationships with other supernatural characters, it is useful to take a closer look at a vernacular text commonly called the *Münchner Nachtsegen*. This fourteenth-century German charm is composed of a long list of rhyming exorcistic motifs and seeks to dissuade a complete host of ill-willed entities from perpetrating various forms of mischief:

> alb vnde elbelin
> ir sult nich leng*er* bliben hin
> albes svestir vn*d* vatir

ir sult zu varen obir de*m* gatir
albes mutir trute vn*d* mar
ir sult uz zu de*n* virste vare*n*
[…]
alb mit diner crummen nasen
ich vorbithe dir aneblasen
ich vorbite dir alb ruche
cruchen vn*d* anehucchen
albes kind*er* ir withelin
lazet vwer tastin noch m*ir* sin
vn*d* du clage mutir
gedenke min zu gute
herbrote vn*d* herbrant
vart uz in eyn andir lant
du vngetruwe molken stellen
du salt minir tur vor velen
daz binir vn*d* daz vuz spor
[…]
du salt mich nich beruren (ll: 23-47, edited in Schulz 2000b).

Alb and *elbelin*,
you shall not stay around for any longer;
alb's sister and father,
you will go out over the fence;
alb's mother, *trute*, and *mar*,
you will go out by the roof-ridge.
. . .
Alb with your crooked nose,
I forbid you to blow [on me];
I forbid you, *alb*, to smell,
to creep, and to breathe on me.
Alb's children, you little wights,
cease your groping after me.
And you, *clage mutir*,
think of my wellbeing;
herbrote and *herbrant*,
go to a different land;
you, treacherous *molken stellen*,
you will pass by my door;

the *binir* and the *vuz spor*,
. . .
you will not touch me.

One of the first things we notice about the text, aside from the fact that it uses the phrase "alb vnde elbelin", is that it catalogues a prodigious number of noxious characters. In a fairly systematic manner, the document first addresses a specific pest and then exiles it to a remote location. The charm explicitly corroborates the liminality of the disease demons it hopes to banish by associating these with archetypal border zones. An *alb*'s father and sister should go out over the fence; an *alb*'s mother, a *trute*, and a *mar* should disappear via the ridge of the roof; a *herbrote* and a *herbrant* should go to a different land; and a female milk thief—here we may remember Brigitte's Gotlandic exorcism—should stay away from the front door.

The text also illustrates the propensity for disease names to generate new narrative content. In Middle High German, the words *herbrote* and *herbrant* are designations for a *hordeolum* or stye, an inflamed swelling on the edge of an eyelid (Schulz 2000b: 131-143). In the context of the *Nachtsegen*, however, we encounter them as animate disease agents who should depart for "eyn andir lant". It thus appears two similar words for the same ailment have here been envisioned as the appellations of conscious pathogenic beings. The fact that the German charm characterises the terms *herbrote* and *herbrant* as a pair of evil-minded lexical twins suggests that it views these dermatological conditions as comparable to verifiable disease demons such as mares and elves.

Finally, we can see conceptual and lexical shapeshifting at work in the way the *Münchner Nachtsegen* describes the conduct and company of the elvish family it means to exorcise. The *alb*'s mother is grouped together with a "trute vn*d* mar", while the *alb*'s children are told to "lazet vwer tastin" and, therefore, deemed capable of the same behaviour as the conditions *binir* and *vuz spor*, which are mentioned a few lines later (for a possible explication of these terms, see Lessiak 1911: 157-158). Consequently, it is the pluralistic relationship between cause and effect, disease agent and symptom, etymology and aetiology, which helps to explain why the elf exorcisms under discussion treat such wide-ranging bodily and non-bodily problems and reference such extensive communities of supernatural beings. In a world where the same entity can cause different symptoms, different entities can cause the same symptoms, and words for symptoms and entities are prone to contaminate one another's meaning and produce new narratives in the process, one can only counteract harmful influences if one is willing to adopt an inclusive and comprehensive curative strategy.

TRANSMISSION AND PERFORMANCE

It is difficult to determine how representative the *Münchner Nachtsegen* or Brigitte's "breef" are as manifestations of the multifaceted incantatory culture that we presume to have existed throughout the medieval and early modern period. Nevertheless, the written- and the material record do provide clues about a few of the transmission patterns that we may associate with exorcistic formulae against elves. Haquin Spegel furnished his edition of Brigitte's document with the comment that it that it was "funnit" (Spegel 1901: 178), which suggests that the text he re-edited was a performative incantation rather than a referential transcript. Likewise, a parchment strip from England and a number of lead amulets from Germany and Scandinavia suggest that some medieval individuals believed the powerful words of elf exorcisms could be activated by writing them down.[8]

Transcribing rather than vocalising verbal formulae had the additional advantage that texts could be deposited in ritually significant objects or locations. Thus, the slip of parchment from Ingelby Arncliffe that was mentioned earlier was found in "an enamelled crucifix of great age (now unhappily lost to sight)", while a lead strip from Romdrup —which adjures "eluos uel eluas aut demones" not to harm "huic famulo dei nicholao in oculis nec in capite" (this servant of God, Nicholas, in the eyes or in the head"—was retrieved from the altar of a church (Wordsworth 1903: 401; Simek 2011: 28-29). The artefact, which was found wrapped around three small parcels of relics, appears to have been placed in the altar intentionally sometime after the construction of the building (c. 1200). Finally, the Halberstadt tablet—a lead amulet dated to 1141 that conjures an "Alber" to stop troubling an individual called "TADO"—was retrieved from the grave of a young child (Siebrecht 1989; Simek 2011: 30-31). While "TADO" might be the name of the infant, it is more probable that it is the name of an individual who believed a child's grave was an appropriate place to deposit exorcisms (Düwel 2001: 237-239; also see Gilchrist 2008: 125-128).[9]

The manuscript Uppsala C 222 offers an evocative explanation for the interrelation between the textual and material sources. On the verso side of folio 97, alongside yet another exorcism, we read "contra elphos hoc in plumbo scribe" (Gjerløw 1960: 21). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that some of the exorcisms that researchers have found in medieval buildings, cemeteries, and artefacts were transcribed using templates from manuscripts (Simek 2011: 31-33; also see Spegel 1901: 53).[10] At the same time, however, some of the texts that we encounter in manuscripts may initially have been copied from performative documents. For example, the template preserved in Uppsala D 600 seems to have been based on an exorcism that was once used to protect a certain Bernard

from demonic influences. The preservation of Bernard's name in the template appears to have been the result of a scribal oversight, as the manuscript uses the letter N (an abbreviation for "nomen") to indicate all other instances where the user should supply a personal name (Ohrt 1921: 68). Finally, it merits taking into consideration that Sloane MS 963 labels an elf exorcism as a "carmen" (fol. 15r), while the German text from Clm 849 equally appears to advocate an oral recitation in order to drive out an "*alp* unde *elbynnen*".

We acquire additional insights into the performative dimensions of elf incantations from a passage in the *Miller's Tale* (c. 1380-1390), where Chaucer appears to employ the multiplex associations of elvish entities to reinforce the satirical and ironic qualities of his fabliau. In the relevant section, we read how John, a senior carpenter with a younger, promiscuous wife, enacts an incantatory "nyght-spel" against "elves" and "every wikked wight" (ll. 3479-3484, edited in Benson, Robinson, and Cannon 2008). He does so because he wishes to alleviate the supposedly delusional symptoms of Nicholas, a scholar living at his residence. The narrative's humour derives in part from John's failure to realise that his resident is actually planning "with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye" (l. 3273).

Chaucer's use of elvish lore is pertinent here for several reasons: it assists in underscoring the carpenter's gullibility and ignorance (cf. "He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude [l. 3227]); it helps to describe the extent to which John believes Nicholas is "away with the fairies"; and it helps to articulate a particular subtextual conceit that serves to reinforce the work's structural irony. Chaucer sporadically identifies elves with nocturnal, erotic pests such as incubi throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, and it is, therefore, comical that the ritual John decides to enact is supposed to rid domiciles of entities that have a proclivity for deception and sexual assault (for Chaucerian perspectives on incubi and elves, see Hall 2006b; Green 2003; Burrow 1995; Heiden 1994; Kiessling 1972; Petrina 1994). As it happens, John does not place a curse on non-existent folkloric entities by casting his "nyght-spel"; instead, he achieves precisely the opposite effect, placing a proverbial blessing on an elaborate ruse that his own tenant has devised to cuckold him (also see Thoms 1878).

It is evident that Chaucer's description of John's ritual is governed by a literary ambition, and the specific words the carpenter uses to "crouche" Nicholas from evil spirits (Jhesu Crist and Seinte Benedight / Blesse this hous from every wikked wight [ll. 3483-84]) convey an overarching interest in rhyme and prosody as much as they communicate an interest in contemporary charm practices. Nevertheless, Chaucer does seem to have provided us with a glimpse of the possible rituals that we may imagine to have been performed alongside some

of the surviving anti-elf texts. After attempting to bring Nicholas to his senses by seizing him "by the sholdres mightily", shaking him, and crying "spitously", John proceeds to say his charm "anon-rightes / On foure halves of the hous aboute / And on the thresshold of the dore withoute" (ll. 3480-82).

The idea of safeguarding specific spaces from pests and demonic influences through the performance of apotropaic rituals at corners and entrances appears frequently in the medieval record, and it is possible, therefore, that the just-discussed section from the *Miller's Tale* provides a minor insight into the way in which some medieval individuals performed charms against elves (also see Giraldo 1957). In the Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm *For Unfruitful Land* (11th cent.) we encounter a fertility ritual "wið ealra feonda gehwæne" (against each and every enemy) (l. 61, edited in Dobbie 1942) that involves the deposition of crosses on "feower healfa þæs landes" (four sides of the land) (l. 4), and a thirteenth-century charm "ab omnibus muribus et ratonibus et ab omnibus malis" (against all rats and mice and against all calamities) advises the placement of sanctified stones in the corners of infested barns (Storms 1948: 182). Similarly, Cyril Edwards relates that in British folk belief "Elves, witches, and devils were feared as intruders, threshold-crossers", and he gives several examples of practices on which recent generations of Welsh and English people relied to deter such unwanted infiltrators (Edwards 2004: 115).

In addition, the manner in which specific manuscripts merge textual and non-textual elf remedies suggests some individuals believed that verbal remedies against elves and other demonic entities could or should be recited in tandem with the wearing of amulets or the enactment of rituals. MS Rawlinson C. 506 (c. 1445-1475) from the Bodleian Library thus gives a remedy "ffor the nyȝthe-mare" that involves three steps: the performer needs to find a piece of flint "þat hath an hole thorow of hys owen growyng" and hang it either "ouer þe stabill dore, or ell ouer horse"; he or she should write out a "charme" that describes how St. George slays "þat fowle wyȝth"; and afterwards the finished "bylle" should be hung "in þe hors' mane" (Robbins 1952: 61). Likewise, an Anglo-Saxon text "Wið ælfadle" (against ælf-disease) does not only prescribe the concoction of a herbal remedy and the recital of specific masses; it also includes the instruction to "Gang on þunres æfen, þonne sunne on setle sie" (go out on Thursday evening, when the sun is setting) and to locate a spot where elecampane (elf-dock) is growing. After finding such a site, the performer needs to intone several popular prayers, stick a knife into the herb, and not speak to anyone before returning to the same place the next morning (for the full ritual, see Storms 1948: 222-225). Consequently, there is some reason to assume that medieval incantations that claim to work *contra elphos* should be associated with a multi-dimensional transmission climate; it is likely that if we wish to

understand how elf charms and exorcisms were communicated and performed during the Middle Ages we should account for the possibility that textual and non-textual apotropaic strategies were frequently executed alongside one another and that such a practice may have exerted an influence on the diffusion and the format of the surviving material.

RELIGIOUS MENTALITIES

Having accounted for some of the socio-linguistic complexities, as well as some of the problems related to transmission, it is now serviceable to consider how elf charms engaged with contemporaneous religious mentalities. In the opening stages of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* (c. 1390), Geoffrey Chaucer describes the relationship between elves and the Christian faith as follows:

> In th'olde dayes of Kyng Arthour,
> Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
> Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
> The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
> Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.
> This was the olde opinion, as I rede;
> I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.
> But now kan no man se none elves mo,
> For now the grete charitee and prayeres
> Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,
> That serchen every lond and every streem,
> As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
> Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
> Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
> Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes —
> This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.
> For ther as wont to walken was an elf
> Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
> In undermeles and in morwenynges,
> And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges
> As he gooth in his lymytacioun (ll. 857-877, edited in Benson, Robinson, and Cannon 2008).

There are no more elves in contemporary Britain, the Wife of Bath explains, because "lymytours and othere hooly freres" have long since staked out the area and decontaminated it with devout behaviour. Elves and fairies are defenceless

against "hooly thynges" such as "grete charitee", "prayeres", and "matyns", and this has caused that presently "kan no man se none elves mo".

Just as the "nyght-spel" passage in the *Miller's Tale*, the introduction to the *Wife of Bath's Tale* does not offer us an unambiguous insight into medieval English elf-beliefs. Intriguingly, the Wife of Bath openly confesses that her knowledge is not predicated on her personal experience, but on an "olde opinion" that she has encountered in a book somewhere. More significantly, however, her decision to rehearse a number of popular folkloric themes appears to have been inspired by an ulterior motive: she compares the Arthurian realm of "th'olde dayes" to the Christianised here and now not to comment on the disenchanted state of her personal surroundings, but because she means to take a sideswipe at her fellow traveller, the Friar.[11] As she explains, the earliest officers of the church did not purge ancient Britain of its lecherous demons for religious reasons. Rather, they sought to exorcise the libidinous "elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye", because this afforded them the opportunity to occupy the traditional living spaces of these folkloric molesters themselves and to claim a monopoly on sexual harassment in the process. The Wife is quick to eliminate further doubts about the intended meaning of her anecdote when she concludes with the idea that "In every bussh or under every tree / Ther is noon oother incubus but he" (ll. 879-880; also see Kiessling 1972; Taitt 1975; Yamamoto 1994; Petrina 1994; Heiden 1994).

The Wife of Bath's idiosyncratic perspective on ghostbusting clergymen aside, it is clear from the state in which some elf exorcisms have survived that these documents were not unanimously considered "hooly thynges". A fifteenth-century specimen in Sloane MS 2584 (fols. 73v-74r) presently has a big cross through it, and the elf exorcism that was added to an empty space in MS Uppsala D 600 (fol. 149r) was also at one point stricken through by a (presumably) dismayed reader. Because some medieval authors condemn believing in elves as heretical, it is possible that acts of bookish vandalism are demonstrative of religiously motivated attempts to purge texts of unnecessary vernacular superstitions (Green 2016: 42-75).

Complicatedly, exorcised elves do make an appearance in the works of authors that demonstrate a greater interest in exploring appropriate forms of piety than Chaucer in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. In a Middle Dutch translation of Lutgard's *Vita*, we hear about "ene nonne die metten viant beseten was ende ene andre die die alf bedrogen hadde" (a nun, who was possessed by a devil, and another who had *alf* delusion) (van Veerdeghem 1899: 37). The same text also provides some lexicographical information about the dualism that governs phrases such as "elvos et elvas":

> […] het en ware mensche nit
> Die hem so wonderlic gelit
> Te hare wert, mar een viant
> En drogenere ende een triwant, –
> Een van din valschen losengiren
> Die hen bi wilen plegen kiren
> In menschen vormen ende sijn
> In didsche, na din wane mijn,
> Genoemet alve ende oc elvinnen,
> Na din dat si hen doen bekinnen
> Din lieden ende laten schowen
> In manne vormen ende in vrowen;
> Want daer si mannes wise toegen
> Ende om der vrowen lachter poegen,
> Daer sijn si alue; mar daer si
> Din mannen willen comen bi,
> Daer sijnt eluinnen [. . .] (ll. 3647-3663, van Veerdeghem 1899).

> It was not a human being
> who led himself so strangely
> towards her, but a fiend,
> an imposter, and a trickster;
> one of those false double-dealers
> who occasionally turn themselves
> into human forms, and who are
> in Dutch, I believe,
> called *alve* and also *elvinnen*,
> since they make themselves known
> to people and present themselves
> in male and female forms;
> because when they show themselves in the form of a man
> and try to bring women to shame,
> that is when they are *alue*, but when they
> wish to disgrace men,
> that is when they are *eluinnen*.

Thomas of Cantimpré's (1201-1272) *Vita Lutgardis Virgine*, of which *Het Leven van Sinte Lutgart* is an adaptation, does not mention elves, but incubi, and it is thus evident that "[i]n didsche" the words "alve" and "elvinnen" were regarded as appropriate designations for specific Latinate demons (see Henschenius et al.

1867: 198). Indubitably, Christianity and local folkloric beliefs were not instantaneously and universally compatible. It nevertheless appears as if occasionally the potential religious controversy could be reduced when disease demons such as mares and elves were rationalised as vernacular misnomers for evil spirits that occupied a safer position within an "official" Christian worldview. In this instance, the ability of elves to perform feats of lexical and conceptual shapeshifting could again be used to smooth over definitional discrepancies. As a Middle Dutch work explains: "Cobboude, nickers, aluen, maren […] dit sien duuelen alle / Die ons gherne brochten te valle" (*Cobboude*, *nickers*, *aluen, maren*–these are all devils / who wish to make us fall from grace) (ll. 719-724, Jansen-Sieben 1968).

CONCLUSION

The discussion offered above leaves us with an interpretative inconsistency: elf exorcisms utilise religious symbols and phraseology, and some sources show that the performance of devout behaviour was considered an appropriate method for foiling the potentially demonic and pathogenic conspiracies of folkloric nuisances. Yet, some of the surviving texts that adjure elves or other beings were at one point vandalised or defaced. Charms that claim to work *contra elphos* thus evoke a diverse spectrum of interrelated folkloric and religious beliefs. Specifically, they attest to a formulaically consistent, yet socioculturally malleable incantatory culture.

It is clear that past individuals disagreed about whether elves or similar beings existed, and it is equally evident that people had diverse and wide-ranging beliefs about how the activity of folkloric characters related to bouts of illness and misfortune. Correspondingly, the historical record offers conflicting opinions about whether elf-like entities and the conditions that they supposedly spread should be treated seriously or not. Still, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that at least some medieval and post-medieval individuals viewed charms against elves as appropriate media for engaging with life's most immediate and intimate problems. Some believed elf exorcisms could facilitate such macabre activities as establishing some form of connection with recently deceased children, while others merely saw them as useful documents for treating bodily or even bovine infirmities.

NOTES

[1] For manuscripts containing Latin exorcisms against elves, see British Library, Royal 2 A XX, fol. 45^{b} (9th cent.) (Storms 1948: 294); MS Uppsala C 222, fol. 97^{v} (c. 1200-1300) (Gjerløw 1960: 21); MS Uppsala D 600, fol. 149^{r} (15th cent.) (Ohrt 1921: 68); Linköpings Stiftsbibliothek M. 5, fols. 179^{v}-180^{r} (16th cent.?) (Klemming 1883-1886: 394-395); British Library, Sloane MS 962, fols. 9^{v}-10^{r} (14th-15th cent.) (Kieckhefer 1998: 153); British Library, Sloane MS 963, fols 15^{r}– 16^{v} (15th cent.); British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fols. 73^{v}-74^{r} (14th cent.) (partly edited in Olsan 1992: 133); Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 271, fol. 229^{r} (c. 1526-1544); Cambridge, Trinity College, 0.1.20, fol. 10^{r} (Hunt 1997: 224-225); British Library, MS Harley 273, fol. 213^{v} (c. 1300-1349); Bodleian MS Douce 84, fol. vi^{v} (15th cent.); Haquin Spegel, *Rudera Gothlandica* (1683) (Spegel 1901: 178). For examples of texts in other genres that utilise exorcistic techniques and phrases to combat elves, see München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 849, fols. 131^{r}-132^{r} (15th cent.?) (Schönbach 1893: 43); München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 7021, fol. 160^{v} (15th cent.); München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 536, fol. 89^{v} (c. 1143-1147). For references to additional sources, one may consult (Ohrt 1927-1942; Matthiessen 1967: 149-166; Linderholm 1917-1943: 49-50, 64; Schulz 2000a: 69; Hall 2007a).

[2] Most elf exorcisms preserved on lead tablets have been collected and edited by Rudolf Simek (2011). A parchment strip from medieval England has been edited and translated by Christopher Wordsworth (1903).

[3] The interpretation of the phrase form the Royal Prayerbook is fraught with grammatical difficulties. Alaric Hall has offered the following argument:

> Here, then, we have the word *aelfae* which, in the absence of any likely Latin, Greek or Hebrew identification, must be a Latinised form of *ælf*. *Aelfae* is integral to the text and unrelated to the tenth-century Old English glosses in the manuscript. *Diabolus* here is surely a vocative, and satanae a genitive. But it is not immediately clear whether *aelfae* is intended as a common noun in apposition to *Satanae* ('I conjure you, devil of Satan, of an *ælf*'), or whether it is a vernacular synonym for *Satanae* ('I conjure you, devil of the *ælf* Satan')" (2007a: 72).

Meanwhile, Rudolf Simek has contended that

> neither the actual reading nor the (possible) grammatical construction […] is as straightforward as it may have looked to Hall: firstly, in the manuscript the endings are now hardly distinguishable at all, and secondly, […] the form *aepistulam* in the following line shows that *-ae* need not be the genitive, but in all likelihood stands for the vocative, which is to be expected in all these formulae, even if neither spelling nor grammar is quite correct here (as *Satan* is undeclinable, and *diabolus* is certainly not the correct vocative) (2011: 43).

[4] Also see Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 271, fol. 229^{r} (c. 1526-1544); Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 275, fol. 23^{r} (c. 1575); Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 259, fol. 184^{v} (c. 1576/1580); and British Library, MS Harley 218, fol. 147^{v}, which includes a remedy that should protect "a woman in childbede from aluys 7 wyckud dremes". I wish to thank Katherine Hindley for bringing the last of these references to my attention.

[5] For medical studies on sleep paralysis and its various cultural interpretations, see Jarcho 1980, Liddon 1967, Pearce 1993, Stores 1998, Lang 2001, Davies 2003, Cheyne 2003, Spoormaker, Schredl, and van den Bout 2006, Shelley 2011, MacLehose 2013, Gordon 2015, Sharpless and Doghramji 2015a, b, Cox 2015.

[6] I wish to thank László Sándor Chardonnens for offering his assistance with the interpretation of this passage.

[7] I wish to extend my gratitude to Katherine Hindley, who has brought this reference to my attention.

[8] The medieval written record contains numerous other texts that specifically advise a scribal performance for exorcising folkloric conditions. One example can be found in a remedy for *dweorh* that is included in the Old English leechbook *Lacnunga* (10th-11th cent). In a prose section that prefaces the incantation it is advised that

> þæt galdor þæt her æfter cweð man sceal singan, ærest on þæt wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne [b]ufan þæs mannes moldan. And ga þænne an mædenman to and ho hit on his sweoran (Storms 1948: 166-167).
>
> The incantation, which is written hereafter, must be sung, first into the left ear, then into the right ear, then above the crown of the man's head. And then let a virgin go to him and hang it on his neck.

[9] I would like to thank Jaqueline Borsje for sharing her views with me concerning the possible interpretations of TADO's lead tablet.

[10] For manuscripts containing elf exorcisms see note 1; for editions of tablets and parchment strips, see note 2.

[11] I wish to extend my gratitude to Richard North for offering his guidance in the interpretation of this section of the *Canterbury Tales.*

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ANGELS, THIEVES AND NARRATIVES: A CASE OF LATVIAN THIEF BINDING CHARMS

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Abstract: The article explores benefits of a semantic group analysis of nearly 800 Latvian verbal charms against thieves. In order to map the intertextual relationships between charms and other texts, a conceptual model of three levels is provided, defining a broader cultural context, the level of narrative reference, and the level of text. The corpus of Latvian charms against thieves consists of both non-narrative and narrative charms, the latter dominated by "Thieves and The Holy Child" charm type. Few geographical and temporal outlines are suggested concerning the material in question, and a semi-quantitative analysis is applied regarding actors of encounter charms, locations in historiolas, and magic devices preferred by charmers.

Key words: textual authority, intertextuality, encounter charms, Latvian, narratives, 'Thieves and The Holy Child' charm type.

ANGELS, THIEVES AND NARRATIVES: A CASE OF THE LATVIAN THIEF BINDING CHARMS

Among all other folklore genres, verbal charms are uniquely defined by trust. One can say, it is the sole condition of their existence due to the functional, intentional nature of charming practices. If so, this very trust is the *sine qua non* in scholarly examination into the meaning of certain motives, narratives, formulas, and other components of a particular charm. In very general terms, trust always is anchored in certain world-view. It draws on certain authority that encourages the believers. Verbal charms draw their authority from either of two sources: from the charmer, performing the charming act; or from the text of the charm. Although both sources are often combined, non-verbal magic performances or textual amulets can accordingly demonstrate both extremes exclusively. Just as charmers or practitioners of magic always represent a par-

ticular socio-cultural tradition, similarly, verbal components of charms must belong to a tradition, too—one defining certain motifs as sacred, associated with power, and related to particular cultural context. I suggest making distinction between both types of authority as performative and textual. Most Latvian verbal charms were recorded in the period between the late 19th to the mid-20th century without much information on their performance context, treating them as mere texts according to the dominant paradigm of folklore archives and scholarship. Therefore, it is both a necessity and opportunity to use this material in order to explore the nature of textual authority.

The working premise of this article is that the textual authority of charms can be asserted on three levels:

1. The most general level of shared culture. It constitutes the horizon of meaning, allowing authority to be articulated and understood. On this level a genesis of new, original texts is possible; at the same time it is constituted by necessary long-lasting institutions of tradition, practice and habitus, also including language.

2. The level of narrative reference. Here particular texts like sacred narratives, ecclesiastical rituals or some folklore material provide the textual authority through reference, a direct quote or recognizable resemblance. On this level, non-verbal components of charms can be treated as a traditional text. Charms are mostly short narratives; therefore, the density of references or their lack also plays an important role in the migration of motifs between charms, languages and cultures.

3. The level of text. On this level repetition, copy and mechanical dissemination of charm texts takes place, including transition between the written and oral realms of culture. Similarly, it is the level of meta-practices like the collecting of charm texts that does not require their understanding, but allows a reconstruction of intertextual links and the level of culture.

Compared to healing charms, the thief-binding charms demonstrate the presence of authority by their double structure: a typical charm consists of two parts, one for binding the thief and the corresponding one for realising the bound culprit. The very existence of this other part suggests a trust in the efficiency of the first part of the charm, and such a trust is impossible without an authority to draw upon. The binding of thieves is also known from other folklore material like legends (e.g. Melne 2006: 242-243) For example, one legend tells that a man left horse at the tavern unattended and it was stolen. The owner declared that horse will be returned sooner than two bottles of beer emptied. Indeed, the

thieves arrived with the horse and begged the owner to stop their torture [AFL 556, 1527]. Other story retells the case where an owner bragged that no one can steel his cartful of fish, because everyone who tries will be stopped. While the owner went away, someone else arrived; he broke the charm inflicted upon the cartload, and distributed fish [AFL 556, 3131].

LATVIAN CHARMS AGAINST THIEVES

The card index of Latvian charms against thieves consists of almost 800 entries,[1] including similar records and close variations. The whole index containing approximately 54,000 records is organized according to functions of charms, with the charms against thieves being one of the largest functional groups of non-healing charms. 373 charms of those related to theft are indicated by folklore collectors, informants, or authors of traditional hand-written household charm books as intended for binding the thieves, while 301 are meant for releasing a bound thief. Despite the fact that both types function as related parts of the same charm, they are recorded separately. Still, this allows efficient analysis of particular motifs based on general correspondence between volumes of both counterparts. One-hundred twenty-three charms belong to the same functional group but are not intended for binding thieves, and instead provide means for preliminary protection, tracking of the stolen property, or a punishment of wrongdoers.

A large quantity of records in the Latvian charm corpus was generated by copies from published texts: re-circulating the published examples into an oral and handwritten tradition by practitioners as well due to active involvement of schoolchildren in nation-wide folklore collecting practices during the interwar period (cf. Lielbārdis 2014). Such a multiplication on the textual level (see above) was possible mainly due to the rather early publication of Latvian charms by Fricis Brīvzemnieks in 1881 (see References). While the circulation of texts between differently contextualized realms of print, writing, and orality is well known, the Latvian corpus demonstrates an interesting deviation at the core of this process. Why in similar conditions (e.g. published in the same source, addressing the same task) are some charms copied and reproduced by other means, while others are left untouched in the print? Folklorists have addressed the scholarly notions of authenticity and related editorial practices critically from the perspective of disciplinary history (Bendix 1997; Bauman and Briggs 2003), but the research of preferences applied by other parties has yet to be performed. In some cases, the sole reason might be the poetics of the text (Ķencis 2017), corresponding to some 'general idea of a mystic air around

charms and magic', created and exemplified by popular fiction on the level of shared culture. Other cases suggest a more specific reliance on intertextuality—requiring additional research why a certain charm is popular while the one next to it is not. Among such is the circulation of non-narrative charms, consisting of charming instructions with just small numbers of 'words of power' or none at all.

For example, all of the 12 entries of charms against thieves ('Thief charms') published in the book by Brīvzemnieks (1881) are present within the card catalogue of the Archives of Latvian Folklore, but in radically different proportions. The most obvious example is that of the two charms published literally one after the other:

> For a thief to bring back a stolen thing, on Thursday evening after the sunset take an old wheel nave, block both ends with rowan-tree bungs, take it to a boiling spring and drop in it, saying: 'let your heart swell like this wheel nave!' But do not look back while going home (Brīvzemnieks 1881:183).

With only slight differences, the type of a charm against thieves using a wheel nave as its central magic device is recorded 54 times, as such being by far the most popular of non-narrative thief charms. Is this charm so popular due to the use of the wheel nave, which is encountered also in fever medicine and other charms? Or is it due to formula 'do not look back while going home' that is shared by many magic fairy tales and thus embedded in a more general level of intertextuality? The charm published next does not appear to be so very different:

> To return the theft, take one recently laid hen egg, bind a green silk thread around it, put the egg in hot ashes and say: 'on the name of the thief I put this egg and let him stand as long as he perishes' (ibid).

The charm featuring an egg and a thread is recorded only four times. It is not much more exotic than the other one, especially with the background of often encountered cabalistic palindromes and other strange imagery of charms; similarly to 'boiling spring' and 'rowan-tree bungs', it features poetic devices like 'hot ashes' and 'green silk thread', and there should be no reservations from the ethical point of view, because both charms are equally violent.

Leaving this discussion open until more similar discoveries would allow seeing a coherent pattern, I will proceed with narrative or encounter charms addressing the same problem of theft. Due to the large number of charms, recorded in a comparatively short period of time but within extremely different contexts, by various actors, and following rather different (if any) meth-

odologies, this group of charms resists effective and representative typology, therefore it might benefit from a group analysis of interrelated motifs which will be demonstrated below.

THREE THIEVES

The majority of Latvian encounter charms are related to the charm type 'Thieves and the Holy Child'. Jonathan Roper mentions this type as one also being popular in neighbouring Estonia (Roper 2009: 177). In this regard equally true for Latvia should be his hypothesis, "… that narrative charms as a folk magical device in Estonia are relatively recent cultural loan largely derived from German-speakers and German texts" (ibid.). Indeed, both countries, almost since the Northern Crusade in the 13th century, shared the same German-speaking elite and regional administration. Despite their mutual similarity in political situation established by the Northern war, the territories of modern Latvia and Estonia differed from the third Baltic country, Lithuania, as predominantly Protestant as opposed to the latter's Catholicism, and to the Orthodoxy that was dominant religion in other provinces of the Russian Empire, part of which all three countries remained until the Great War. While there are ancient layers of both Latvian-Lithuanian and Baltic-Slavic shared traditions, as well as lesser and more recent direct influences from Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Belorussian cultures, the majority of narrative charms recorded in Latvia are of direct German influence and as such shared with Estonian charmers. The thief binding charm type 'Thieves and the Holy Child' has not been mentioned by researchers of Russian charms against theft (Mikhailova 2011), and it cannot be found either in the index of plots and plot situations of western and southern Slavonic charm texts (Kliaus 1997), or in the most recent index of West Slavonic charms (Agapkina and Toporkov 2014).

The elite Baltic German culture of charming has yet to be discovered in archival materials, household books and lost manuscripts; currently almost all of the charms gathered by Latvian and Estonian folklore archives are recorded either in Latvian or in Estonian. Nevertheless, recorded variants are very close translations of those documented by Ferdinand Ohrt as known in German without a Latin analogue since the 15th century (1929: 241). This allows for the safe assumption that the charms present in Latvia can be dated close to the same 15th century, coming most likely from monastic sources and Baltic German households, but becoming increasingly popular with the advent of Moravian Church[2] at the end of the 18th century (Lielbārdis 2014). The comparison of archival material, Brīvzemnieks' publication and Ohrt's examples

demonstrate some rather interesting patterns of intercultural and intertextual charm exchange.

The first of Ohrt's German examples of the *Die Diebe und das heilige Kind* type is a charm featuring Virgin Mary giving birth and being visited by three angels and St. Peter. Brīvzemnieks has published a similar example, but not mentioning/featuring angels (1881: 182). In the archival index of 796 charms, only three feature Mary giving birth. At the same time, in 164 charms Mary is accompanied by the Holy Child when encountered by thieves. A typical example of a condensed version of the narrative can be seen in the following:

Binding of thieves

> Our Mother of God walked over a green field and the child of God was by her hand. Then came three thieves who wanted to steel that baby. And she started to scream: 'bind, Peter, bind!' Peter replied: 'I've bound them not with chains but holy hands of God. You shall stand like a log and here you shall count all stars in heaven, all leaves on trees, all stones on the field and all sand on the seashore. You shall stand and move no further until I come and release you. In the name of…' [AFL 150, 6][3]

The closing formula 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (*In Nomine*), usually concluded with 'Amen' and often complemented with the sign of the cross, is a characteristic seen across the whole corpus of Latvian charms of both Christian and non-Christian origin. The example above features all four persons defining the charm type: Virgin Mary in distress, the Child to be stolen, unknown thieves, and Saint Peter binding them. As such, they directly correspond to the charming situation with a victim of the theft, the stolen property, unknown culprits, and the charmer. More than five times smaller number of charms, i.e. 32 entries, features Mary without the Child. Here the intertextual links define the missing object through her identity as the Divine Mother. Moreover, her vernacular title in Latvian is *Dievmāte* that literarily means God-mother.[4] Still, more often than not, she meets angels as in the following example:

Against thieves

> The mother Mary walked around, holding her dear child by hand, when she entered the garden and met three riding angels. First was the angel of bread Gabriels, second – Zamuels, and the third – Zundija. There came three thieves who wanted to steal the dear child. She said unto Peter: 'Bind them with cords of heaven and hell, as all thieves must remain still.' Peter replied: 'I have bound them with the five wounds, as all thieves must stand and be bound. You shall count all leaves that grow on trees;

> the second – you shall count all stars that are in heaven; the third, you shall stand for me as a tree and you shall count the drops of rain and snow until released by my hand. With this I give you heaven as your hat and earth as your shoes. In the name of…' [AFL 116, 693a]

The basic structure of the charm remains the same, although Peter elaborates on magic devices he uses, introducing the five wounds of Christ's crucifixion, and each thief is appointed to a different and particular impossible task. While angelic names require an additional explanation provided below, one more example should be introduced in order to illustrate the designator of place as an additional intertextual signifier, and most likely a recent variation of the charm text:

Binding of thieves

> The Holy Mary was in the garden of Jesus Christ, there she called three holy angels: The first – Peter, the second – Radimi, the third – Gabriel. Peter said: 'I saw three thieves coming and they wanted to steal.' Peter said – 'bind them with fingers of God. Jesus Christ called the name, the angel Gabriel who threw Satan from the heaven down to earth. Gabriel, bind him with hard chains, ribbons and fingers of God as he shall remain like a pillar of salt, like a key, as the holy name of father and go not a step further; and he shall count all stars in heaven and go no further. I thus pray in the name of…. '
>
> One shall walk around the place or item in danger of theft three times and one shall recite this three times. [AFL 266, 1442]

The absent Child is identified between his mother Mary and his fulfilment as Jesus Christ, but Peter is identified as one of the angels. The locus of the garden is introduced. Persons in the historiola participate in the binding formula, and the latter has acquired otherwise rare references to the War in Heaven and the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the only charm mentioning Satan, while 'pillar of salt and key' appears in only 15 entries. Overall, in encounter charms of this type the most variable part is that of magic devices i.e. the means by which the thieves are bound. This is also the textual location where a majority of various interchangeable references to other Biblical or non-canonical narratives are introduced. Now, as the basic structure and the amplitude of its variations are introduced, the textual authority invested in those charms can be examined in closer detail. In order to highlight particular

intertextual links, I propose an examination of groups of motives in three categories: actors of charms, locations in historiolas, and exploited magic devices.

ACTORS AND THEIR NAMES

A total of 209 examples have Virgin Mary as the central character of the charm type, followed by St. Peter with 185 appearances, and Christ Himself featured in 168 entries. Mary's predominance is one of the key factors defining the charm type 'Thieves and the Holy Child'. On this basis two sets of intertextual relationships can be mapped. First of all, the position of this charm type among other narratives about Mary and the new-born Jesus; indeed, taking into the account that the birth of Son of God as a human is one of the cornerstones of the Christian creed, the birth has been covered both by canonical (Mt. 1:18-25; 1: 26-38) and non-canonical texts. As popular as this motif might be, the thieves are unusually missing from it. Some of charmers have introduced Joseph in the tale (eight cases), referring to the 'Flight to Egypt' and the 'Massacre of Innocents (Mt. 2: 13-23) – Joseph is warned by an angel (sic!) and the Holy Family avoids the threat. In those cases, 'thieves' here are equalized with 'robbers and murderers' as in this passage:

> When our Lord Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary, they had to flee to Egypt from hands of thieves and murderers. Peter, bind in the name of… Mary, bind in the name of… The angel Gabriel bind, come to hand, bind in the name of… You shall stand like a tree and gaze like a roebuck, and count the stars in heaven and gaze so long until I say that you shall go. [AFL 868, 237a]

The same events are recounted also in several apocryphal texts (see Elliott 2006: 134), including the encounter with robbers in Arabic Infancy Gospel 10-25.[5] First, it is one of miracles recounted in the Gospel. When in Egypt:

> On leaving the city, they came to a place where there were robbers who had bound and plundered several men of their baggage and clothes. Then the robbers heard a great noise, like the army of a magnificent king leaving his city with his army and his chariots and drums. At this the robbers were terrified and left all that they had stolen. Their captives rose up, loosed each other's bonds, recovered their baggage and went away. (ibid.: 117)

Alas, the culprits are frightened away instead of bound here, thus undermining the possible connection of this episode and the charm type in question. Similarly, essentially different is the other legendary encounter with robbers Titus and Dumachus, who thirty years later are crucified beside Christ (ibid.: 122). Too many differences prohibit the attribution of 'Thieves and the Holy Child' as an original micro-narrative without explicit links to other biblical plots. As such it probably arrived in Latvia around 1790 as a part of one of the so called 'Heavenly Letters' or 'Books of Heaven' that were translated from German and initially distributed via handwriting (Lielbārdis 2014: 90). Researcher Aigars Lielbārdis recounts the use of this charm in a form of written amulet in Latvia as late as 2013 (ibid.: 91).

As mentioned above, only three texts of charms against thieves kept at the Archives of Latvian Folklore mention Mary giving birth. A preliminary hypothesis might explain this lack as a result of an inter-tradition migration of the text. The motive of childbirth might have entered the Latvian tradition as a thief binding charm, but then, through some mechanism of semantic economy, it was allocated to charms of childbirth proper. The mother of Mary, St. Anne of David's house and line, is mentioned in only two charms, while 'the other Mary' in three entries. Anne's presence might indicate the childbirth magic context, as she belongs to the sequence of holy mothers, while three angels are encountered in at least some European charms of the fourteenth century (cf. Jones and Olsan 2015: 421).

Mary's comparative isolation leaves St. Peter as her most consistent companion in those charms, building a particular form of textual authority. The dominance of Saint Peter's presence is easily explicable, if not self-evident, from the point of view of intertextual analysis. First of all, he is the most often encountered apostle in Latvian charms in general (Ķencis 2013). He is featured in various healing charms against toothaches, broken bones and other ills, but his binding powers and the keys to the Heavenly Kingdom (Mt. 16:19) suggest that he can lock mouths of mad dogs, wolves or other wild beasts. Besides thieves, he can similarly bind witches, wizards and the evil eye. Peter's presence like that of Mary and Christ in magical texts corresponds to his presence in the New Testament, similarly to binding powers that are ritually applied during the religious ceremonies like marriage therefore forming a traditional reference. Just as Peter is related to binding, John the Baptist is related to the baptism of Christ in the river Jordan (Matt. 3: 13-17 *et al.*). The special ability of Peter and the particular act of John constitute their authority and consequential presence in charms. Regarding John the Baptist, he appears in 54 charms against thieves, and in all of those it is a reference to 'Flum Jordan' formula, commonly used in blood-staunching charms. However, the blood staunching

charm usually goes, 'Stand still ye blood as waters of river Jordan stood still when Jesus was baptised in it', and as such it seems to refer to the 7th century Paschal Chronicle which itself is a combination of multiple older sources. But the particular thief-binding charm, both in Latvian and German (Ohrt 1929: 243) rather refers to baptism of Christ as it is described in the New Testament (Mark 1: 9-11). Here is the command: 'Stand [still], thief, like Jesus stood when he was baptised in the river Jordan by John the Baptist.' While Peter's keys and other magic devices are examined below in more detail, another line of inquiry is required for angelic names.

While in German examples one of charms refers to 33 angels, no similar text is recorded in Latvian. However angels, most often three in number, are mentioned in 80 entries of catalogue within charms against thieves. Usually it is the Archangel Gabriel who is mentioned with Michael in the Old Testament Book of Daniel (8: 16 and 10: 13, 21). According to early extra-canonical apocalyptic literature, both are archangels, angels of the throne, and angels of punishment (Barton 1912: 157). Moreover, the prophet Daniel speaks of some kind of apocalyptic dragon (Dan. 7:7 and non-canonical 14:22) which later appears in the New Testament (Rev. 12:4). That is the dragon who intends to steal and eat a new-born child. That might suggest functional similarity of the three thieves and the dragon, in immutable presence of angels, the latter associated with guardianship and punishment (see above also the example of a Latvian charm featuring Gabriel and Satan). However, Daniel himself and Peter are denominated as angels in some of those 80 charms, contributing to the wild variety of misspelled angelic names, them being given as follows: '*Bābels, Baels, Ballis, Bauls, Dago, Derga, Diega, Doega, Emanuels, Gabriels, Gabrils, Gahbelis, Gardija, Imanuels, Izmanuels, Joels, Kaels, Londija, Miķelis, Nabtuels, Radimi, Raguels, Raptels, Ravaels, Realis, Roels, Sahgaels, Samuels, Sandaja, Sandija, Sardija, Sardija, Sauls, Sermulīts, Seters, Zadijus, Zamuels, Zamuels, Zamusetās, Zardija, 3 Zaudijas, 3 Zundai, Zundija*.'

The spelling variations here illustrate the lack of any tradition related to the cult of angels in predominantly protestant Latvia. As angelic names other than the two from the Bible were lacking any textual reference, in charm texts they became replaced by phonetically transcribed substitutes or seemingly familiar analogues from other texts.

LOCATIONS IN HISTORIOLA

The textual authority of a charm might be generated also by a location reference. The special localities where the precedent narrative action takes place has been studied and described regarding the magical texts of the neighbouring Russians (e.g. most recently in Agapkina 2016), but not yet in Latvia. Therefore

a cross-corpus comparison of places in verbal charms analysed here and other similar ones is not available. Still, three particular places can be distinguished in charms against thieves: Egypt, Jordan, and a garden.

Egypt was just mentioned as an intertextual link to evangelic events of the flight of the Holy Family from the murderous intentions of King Herod and the robbers and thieves associated with him in vernacular tradition. As such, it does not function as a 'proper' magic place by its own, constituting only a reference to narrative plot. The case of Jordan is a slightly different one, this referring to the previously mentioned river of Christ's baptism. Interestingly, in all 54 charms where John the Baptist is mentioned he is next to the river Jordan, but six more charms refer to this river, but not to John. That might be a common characteristic of the 'Flum Jordan' charm type—some kind of disintegration of signifiers in the order of importance. Jordan, apart from the charm type also popular within other categories of Latvian and Estonian charms, has more than 180 references to it in the Bible, while John the Baptist features only in 16 verses in the Gospels. Still, in the thief charms Jordan is only referred to – and exclusively – as the baptism site of Jesus, as such it is inseparable from the account of this particular sacred history.

In many encounter charms of the type 'Thieves and the Holy Child', the Virgin Mary 'just walks' or 'walks outside'; however, in 48 charms she either enters a garden or walks through a garden. At first glance, this might be explained by the structural opposition of garden as a safe, orderly, cosmic place while the wilderness (forest, field or meadow) is an unsafe, dangerous and chaotic place. In many cases this even might be true, but not in this one: a garden here is the unsafe place, the one where thieves are encountered. Apart from a mechanical transcription ('garden' is mentioned in two charms against thieves published by Brīvzemnieks in 1881), it definitely draws the authority on the level of intertextuality. After all, it is the Garden of Eden where the human history starts and the cosmic drama unfolds, according to Genesis. Similarly, The Garden of Gethsemane is of utmost importance in the New Testament geography; it is the place where Jesus is betrayed, arrested, and taken away (producing, again, a similarity to theft). Significantly, of all the apostles it is Peter with whom he communicates on that night and in this place. While the proper name 'Gethsemane' might be too unfamiliar and bears no other reference, the garden appears as a perfect signifier for a magic location – sacred and dangerous. Moreover, the intertextual links of this signifier by far transcend the borders of Christian narratives. A garden is a place where the hero encounters magic helpers as well as various kinds of perils in many fairy tales shared in European cultures. In Latvian folklore, a garden is featured in a number of

various folksongs—from a local ‘garden of roses’ next to one’s dwelling, up to the sacred ‘garden of God’ in heaven.

While these three described above were biblical places, of locations of the real world the ‘boiling spring’ is a distinctive place in Latvian non-narrative charms into which an old wheel must be thrown with wooden chips from the thief-crossed threshold in its nave. Similarly to the garden in narrative charms, the boiling spring in non-narrative charms draws its authority from intertextual links to legends and fairy tales. The latter usually features in them as a magical place, a passage to the netherworld.

THE MASTER SIGNIFIER AND MAGIC DEVICES

Our Lord Jesus Christ, besides denominations of ‘Son’ within the *In Nomine* closing formula and ‘Child’ who is to be stolen, is mentioned in 168 Latvian charm texts against thieves, thus being surpassed only by His mother Mary and His disciple St. Peter, both main actors of the ‘Thieves and the Holy Child’ charm type. Although Christ is an actor in various micro narratives, His predominant function is that of a master signifier: He is the final reference, alpha and omega of Christianity. Therefore any episode of his life can be adapted to magical means, and any of his characteristics can constitute a sacred precedent. Certain key episodes like baptism and crucifixion are naturally more popular, constituting their own charm types like ‘Flum Jordan’ or ‘Crux Christi’, while others reflect non-canonized episodes of his deeds like ‘Super petram’ or ‘Longinus’. While all of these refer to particular events, Christ’s name alone or its amplification with a very concise biography often serves the charming purpose alone. As in this very short example, recorded in 13 variants:

Words for locking the thief

> Jesus was adored with the crown of thorns. Jura agrips [Agrippa] prays you to mishear the wrongdoing of our soul, do it in the name of… [AFL 150, 2479]

Sometimes rather random motifs of his life are bound together in a charm, as it is illustrated by the following charm:

For stopping thieves

> To stop a thief that he shall stand in silence, this benediction must be recited or read under a clear sky on Thursday morning before the sunrise.

> You, thieves, I swear that you shall obey like Jesus obeyed his Father until the cross, and you shall stand for me and do not leave my eyesight. In the name of the Holy Trinity. I command you in the name of all-mighty God, in the name of all mighty and human Jesus Christ that you shall not leave my eyesight. xxx. Like Jesus stood at Jordan when Saint John baptised him, I swear you, man or horse, you shall not leave my eyesight. You shall stand like Christ the Lord stood nailed to the pole and the grandfathers were released from the power of hell. You, thieves, I bind you with words high and strong – be bound like Christ the Lord has bound hell. xxx With these words you are settled and other settlement is in order to release you. Riding or walking, here you are under your hat, poured over by blood of Jesus Christ; with the holy five wounds barrel of your rifle and pistol, sword, dagger and knife are stopped and bound. In the name of… (3x) [AFL 116: 518]

Here the particular characteristics as well as micro-episodes of Christ's life serve as magic devices that must bind thieves: first of all, comes the obedience of Christ; second, it is the power of Christ; third - the baptism of Christ; fourth, the very crucifixion of Christ; fifth, the victory of Christ; sixth, the blood of Christ; and finally, seventh, His five wounds. All these magic devices are interwoven in an intertextual relationships of canonical, liturgical and non-canonical texts, drawing their authority from various sources. The tell-tale motif is 'release of grandfathers from hell', namely, the reference to the so-called harrowing of hell. It is not mentioned in the Gospels, but the liturgical text of the Apostles' Creed states that Christ descended into hell after His death at the cross and before the resurrection. An explanation of 'grandfathers' is found in the Gospel of Nicodemus: those are Adam, Eve, and the righteous patriarchs of Old Testament.

While the Gospel of Nicodemus originated in Late Antiquity or the early Middle ages, it became widespread among the Latvian population during the late 18th and early 19th centuries through the above mentioned Moravian Church and its Herrnhut branch. The harrowing of hell is absent from charms published in 1881, though it shows up relatively often in the archive records – in 47 entries – and so it could testify to a real tradition not just mechanical repetition on the level of text. References to the act of crucifixion and five wounds of Christ are found in 67 and 62 entries respectively, representing also the overall popularity of these motifs. At the same time, it seems that charms against thieves have developed a particular formula featuring Jesus Christ—'Stolen from God the Father, found by Christ, bound by Holy Spirit'—recorded in 11 variants. As such a formulaic expression, as it seems, neither appears in German sources nor in the seminal book of 1881, it might be of relatively recent and genuinely local origin. Next to it, with eight entries, is a short formula 'Christ was

lost, Christ was found'. As such it might be a reference to 'Crux Christi' charm type, as already in the pre-conquest England of the tenth century charms against cattle theft feature the Latin expression of the lost and found cross of Christ: '*crux cristi abscondita est et inuanta est*' (Dendle 2006).

Among other magic devices used by Latvian charmers, the most popular are 'heavenly chains' or the formulaic expression 'bind not by chains, but by hands (variations: will or words) of God'. As this device is mostly attributed to St. Peter, its closest source of authority should be the reference to Gospels: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matt. 18: 18). As that is the very text the church draws its authority from, it circulates in various liturgical and ritual contexts as well. Additionally, 'keys of heaven' are featured in 39 charms, while 29 more, usually just after 'chains of heaven', feature 'manacles of hell'. The popularity of chains over keys might be explained by additional intertextual links: keys of the heavenly kingdom are mentioned only once in the New Testament, while Peter, in a way, has command of chains – he has been imprisoned and chained by King Herod, and then liberated by God's angel (Acts 12: 1-19). Chains as manacles of hell might be a reference to Peter's letter regarding chained fallen angels (2. Pt. 2:4). The intertextual dominance of the New Testament narratives is highlighted by only 15 references to 'pillar of salt' (Gen. 19: 26) – the Old Testament story of Lot's wife and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Similarly, there are only eight references to the Ten Commandments. The latter fact suggests prevalence of the textual authority over the legal authority: despite God commanding 'thou shall not steel, charmers choose to build their cases against thieves with other means.

The release part of charms more often includes physical rather than explicit verbal instructions: slapping, pushing, kicking etc., for example:

Releasing the thief

> Strike his ear twice, then push and say: go in the name of… and do not sin anymore. [AFL 76, 484]

Or with a short reference to binding formula 'bind not by chains, but the hand of God' like here:

Releasing the thief

> Go in the morning, before sunset and say to the bound thief: "Friend, why do you stand here in the hand of God, go in the hand of devil", and strike his ear. [AFL 734, 56]

However, in 18 cases the release instruction contains a magic device of its own – three drops of blood:

Releasing the thief

> Oh, man, see – I take off these three drops of blood. One from your palm, the second from your tongue, and the third from your heart's power. Why do you stand here in someone's hands, leave your manacles in the name of… [AFL 804, 4986]

There is no additional information to clarify whether it is a form of punishment or a preventive measure against future criminal activities. Similarly, it does not seem related to any well-known narrative. Overall, magic devices in charms against thieves are most often related to main actors of historiolas – Jesus Christ or St. Peter, and thus draw their textual authority from narrative contexts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This semi-quantitative analysis of Latvian charms against thieves indicates a correspondence between occurrences of particular motifs (actors, places and magic devices) in charms and the density of references providing intertextual authority to those motives. Similarly, more extensive cultural context grants formulaic stability, while the lack of it leads to increasing variation beyond recognition – as it is demonstrated regarding the angelic names. Transfer of certain texts from printed to oral and long-hand forms might be related similarly to the same intertextual density, but to some extent modified by poetic qualities of particular texts. In general, this approach might help in analysing comparatively large and loosely structured corpora of verbal charms like the one in the Archives of Latvian Folklore. As such, it is the alternative to manuscript studies developed by specialists of British and Dutch medieval charms as well as investigation of certain charm types often pursued in studies of Slavonic charms and vernacular prayers.

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Notes

[1] The most recent count is 796, but it must be treated as indicative only. As with all folklore collections gathered over longer periods of time, in this case – more than a century – the differences of methodologies, principles of categorizing, possibilities of double entries, simple human errors etc. should be taken into account. I suggest that all data within the current article are viewed with a margin of 5% statistical error.

[2] In Latvia more widely known by their adapted Latin name (Unitas Fratrum – Unity of the Brethren), then Moravian church or Brethren's Congregation from Herrnhut was an incredibly successful protestant mission, establishing a network of congregations as an alternative for official Lutheran Orthodoxy. For several decades this movement was illegal, but still gathered even 90% of inhabitants in some parishes. The Moravian church was the main contributor to literacy and the circulation of hand-written literature in the 18th-19th century Livland (Northern Latvia and Southern Estonia).

[3] Number of the collection and entry within it at Archives of Latvian Folklore

[4] The Latvian name for godmother instead is *krustmāte* – a cross-mother.

[5] An account of miracles and following festivities taking place in Egypt during the Holy Family's sojourn there. The date of these stories is probably the sixth century (Elliott 2006: xvii).

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MEDICINE AND MAGIC DURING THE ENGLISH WITCH-TRIALS: NEGOTIATING LEGALITY BETWEEN RELIGION AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: The years of the English witch-hunts (1542 to 1736) present a negotiation between state and citizenry. In discussing the relationship between magic and medicine we can see the negotiation between religious orthodoxy and practicality. Demonologists called for widespread prosecution of charming acts as a means of eliminating sin - desires put into law, but never truly implemented because of the reality of Early Modern English Life. The widespread availability of Cunning Folk, traditional charmers, represented the practicality of magic. In between the two poles Hermetic-Cabalists used charming but retained the language of piety.

The English witch-trials demonstrate the fraught process of defining what 'magic' is and is not permissible when faced with the reality of Early Modern Life.

Keywords: England, Medicine, Magic, Witch, Cunning Folk, Demonology, Statutory Law

INTRODUCTION

It is something of a cliché to depict the victims of the witch-hunts as wise-women persecuted by priests and judges for their healing crafts. The idea of women, healing through wisdom and love, silenced by the evil male authorities fits within an appealing mythos. [1] The women (and men and unknown persons) who died are therefore martyrs to a greater cause, vindicated through science and modernity. Making them a rallying point against their descendent institutions. "This is what *they* did to *us*!"

While it is tempting to characterise the place of healing in the witch-trials so simply it is the role of the historian to move beyond this and interrogate what the evidence shows. While finding empowerment through self-identification

with the idea of a 'witch' is understandable,[2] misrepresenting the real lives and deaths of women (predominately in the English case) for an ideological purpose betrays their autonomy and in many cases, the victim's wishes themselves.

While it most definitely true that 'witchcraft' was related to medical practices, it is worth considering how charming relates to accusation. Through the case study of medicine in the English witch-hunting period (1542 to 1736) we can see the complex relationship between authority and reality.

Charming was a common part of Early Modern English life and nothing demonstrates it better than the topic of medicine. What constituted charming, and witchcraft itself, was contentious and a matter of argument. The point at which activities became magic, as opposed to legitimate religion or science was fraught with tension. Demonologists[3] supported the widespread prosecution of all magic as diabolic, but this was met with resistance from communities that utilised charming, whether against 'witches' or for the gain of holy knowledge, and from the reality of Early Modern English life. Magic and medicine were intertwined in Early Modern England, so much so that efforts to limit magical practices through laws and preaching were always doomed to failure.

In order to understand the English witch-trials I propose that we view magic as a spectrum between an orthodox religious pole and a practical pole. This allows us to better understand charming within the context of Early Modern English society, both in terms of therapeutic practices and the wider society.

On the religious end of the spectrum were demonologists like Richard Bernard (1568–1641), who viewed any preternatural practices or abilities as diabolic in origin. Those who held these beliefs were the prevailing authority in Early Modern England. 'Magic', being a power outside of God's own, either came from demons or it was idolatry. As such it needed to be eliminated. This was supported by English Statutory law, which focused on *malificia*, 'bad magic', over continental ideas of a conspiracy of 'witches' (Davies 2003: 8). The aim of clerics and demonologists was to stop all other narratives around charming that framed 'magic' as beneficial and reinforce orthodox 'scientific' medical practices.

Traditional healers, known collectively as the Cunning Folk, offered charms and healing services as well as witch-finding and the lifting of bewitchment.[4] They used 'white witchcraft' against 'black witches' but were not limited to the 'beneficial' and could also offer charms for ill-intent or accuse others of *malificia*. They represented the most practical of all forms of magic but were outside of orthodox religion.

Hermetic-Cabalists attempted *ritual* or *natural magic,* as progressions of the explorations of wisdom and pursuit of scientific knowledge. [5] A melding of religious thought and practical application, through knowledge of the macrocosm and microcosm and the manipulation of *ritual* and *natural magic* they

could achieve both physical and spiritual effects, such as the summoning of angels and manipulations of physical bodies. What they practiced was not the power-hungry diabolic pacts feared by demonologists, but a further extension of efforts to understand God and 'use' faith. They sit between the two poles as practitioners of questionably orthodox but practical charming.

Ultimately, this paper argues that historians must move past understanding 'witches' in Early Modern England as just those accused of witchcraft and consider the accusations within a broader context. In doing so, the impossibility of attempts to eliminate all 'magical' practices, particularly those related to therapeutic benefits, within Early Modern English society and the compromises made to establish the limits of permissible and illegal forms of charming become more apparent. I will suggest that the witch-hunts were not about 'magic' at all, but about publicly enforcing the beliefs of powerful and influential demonologists when not at odds with practical considerations at a state level. We can see this particularly in the case of medicine, where the origins, morality and legality of practices was negotiated with practical considerations.

DEMONOLOGISTS

England never embraced the concept of the *Sabbath Witchcraft,* the meetings of witches to worship the devil or the use of judicial torture leading to few mass witch-hunts, unlike it is other European neighbours (Cohn 1993: 233).[6] The aim, instead of revealing a conspiracy of devil worshipers was to end common magic practices themselves. [7] The English Statutory law Acts created felonies out of not only 'witchcraft' but also 'enchantment' and 'conjuring', it was the act of magic that was targeted. The aim of the laws was to limit any and all potentially diabolic practices. Hence there was no active differentiation between 'witches' and other magic users in England at this time as William Perkins wrote:

> "A Witch is a Magician, who either by open or secret league, wittingly, and willingly, consenteth to use the aide and assistance of the Deuill, in the working of Wonders"
>
> (Perkins 1608: 636).

This is not a 'witch' in the nightmare-hag sense,[8] or that of the covens of continental Europe. For England, witchcraft was not in-of-itself considered heretical. As Major-General Boteler said of prosecution of members of the Society of Friends (Quakers)

> "The magistrate is to be a terror unto evil works. If we punish murder and witchcraft, and let greater offences go, as heresies and blasphemy, which is under the same enumeration; for my part, I could never reconcile myself nor others to leave out the latter and punish the former offences."
>
> (5th of December, 1656, in Thomas Burton 1828: 26).[9]

The potential to cause harm or lead the unsuspecting into demonic pacts or idolatry was what spurred on demonologists calls for prosecution. Protestant demonologists themselves were typically members of the clergy and based their writings upon their preaching (Clark 1990: 56). As a result, folk practices and the consulting of the Cunning Folk - activities of their parishioners - were warned against as gateways to sin. Often Puritans, they were primarily concerned with eliminating 'Catholic superstition' and associated fears around what was and was not acceptable religious behaviour. Preternatural intervention was seen as beyond the core beliefs of the newly formed Protestant church and too close to idolatry, a terrible sin. Traditional practices such as the blessing of church bells conflicted with the message of trusting solely in God's grace. James Calfhill wrote of the traditional blessings of the Catholic Church that it was

> "applied, I promise you, to as good a purpose as when the witch, by her Paternoster, made her pail go a milking. For why should I not compare the Priests, (that consecrate Crosses and ashes, water and salt, oil and cream, boughs and bones, stocks and stones; that christen bells that hang in the steeple; that conjure worms that creep in the field; that give S. John's Gospels to hang about men's necks;) to the vilest witches and sorcerers of the earth?"
>
> (Calfhill 1565: 17).

Yet, parishioners behaviour is often an imperfect mirror of religious doctrine.[10] Laws, when not enforced or that are unenforceable appear to the modern eye like popular condemnation while they are only representation of fringe positions.

THE CUNNING FOLK

Traditional charmers known as the Cunning Folk were a ubiquitous part of the English landscape.[11] As Alan Macfarlane noted in his ground-breaking study of the Essex witch trials, in Essex no village was more than ten miles from one of

the Cunning Folk (Macfarlane 2008: 120). These figures appear in both literature and entertainment. For example, Thomas Heywood's fictitious but familiar figure of the wise-woman of Hoxton, describes herself in the following terms:

> "First, I am a wise-woman, and a Fortune-teller, and under that I deale in Physicke and Fore-speaking, in Palmistry, and recovering of things lost. Next, I undertake to cure Madd folkes. Then I keepe Gentle-women lodgers, to furnish such Chambers as I let out by the night: Then I am provided for bringing young Wenches to bed; and for a need, you see I can play the Match-maker. Shee that is but one, and prosesseth so many, may well bae tearmed a wise-woman, if there bee any."
>
> (Thomas Heywood 1604, *The Wise-Woman of Hoxton*, Act 3, Scene 1)

While this particular wise-woman is a character, she represents a common figure in the everyday life of English men and women and she demonstrates the popular potential prosecutable services on offer by Cunning Folk. The recovery of things lost, a particularly lucrative business venture ranging from identifying who had stolen personal items, revealing hidden caches to the defeating of purposed guardian spirits of hoards had the potential to lead to magical and spiritual concerns (Davies 2003: 93–100). Prophesying, whether by astrology or palmistry, was on the fringes of legality as laws against prophesying focused on eliminating seditious and politically motivated prophesies.[12]

Positioning themselves as *counter-maleficum*, able to cure madness and assign blame, Cunning Folk could practice traditional charms and remedies without appearing as prosecutable 'witches' while engaging in activities outside of the law. 'Witchcraft' was defined in opposition to their practices, it is what others did, and what the Cunning Folk offered defence against. Those 'madd' with bewitchment may be cured by the appropriate remedy, magical or otherwise.

By positioning themselves as useful wise-women and cunning-men, like the wise-woman of Hoxton, they could continue practices that were not strictly legal under statutory law. Accusations of *maleficia* often came from neighbours but, because they held a position of trust within the community, there was little will to stamp out the Cunning Folk. Cunning Folk were 'useful', as Owen Davies argues, and so were seldom implicated in the witch-trials (Davies 2003: 13). Their position in society demonstrates the importance of the practical aspects or the appeal of magic in people's lives.

THE HERMETIC-CABALISTS

For the learned, another form of magic, both religious and practical was appealing. Hermetic-Cabalism, an Early Modern trend, sought to explain the world through the supposed mystical writing of the ancient pagan mystic Hermes Trismegistus and Jewish Cabalism, particularly the wisdom of Solomon. While its founders were not Christian their practices existed very much within a Christian framework. As Robert Turner, translator of many Hermetic-Cabalist works into English noted, 'the Art of Magick is the art of worshipping God' (Turner 1655: 1).[13] *Grimoires* (spell books) gave instruction on theory, religious purity and the practice of ritual magic authenticated by a famous author, either from antiquity, or an academic like Hebrew scholar and law expert Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa.[14]

The line between science and magic had yet to be set in Early Modern England, James I for one called magic a 'black and unlawfull science',[15] so intellectuals like Issac Newton could research and participate in the occult without a sense of contradiction. These scholars were defining themselves 'scientists'. Theoretically one could achieve amazing goals by knowing how the universe was constructed and experimenting with those results. Hermetic-Cabalism offered esoteric wisdom and an understanding of how the universe was constructed, gained from years of study and biblical reflection. By extension of understanding the divine organisation of the universe, one could use that wisdom to effect physical change. Prophesies could be made by understanding planetary relations, and charms could be activated by the successful melding of favourable planetary alignments and ritual. By the manipulations of these inherent properties the practitioner could perform actions beyond the scope of their own understanding; 'natural magic'.

While some of the practices advocated in *grimoires* could be prosecuted under the 'witchcraft' acts. These men were not prosecuted as witches but were active and influential members of Elizabethan and Jacobean society. Not truly part of the orthodox medical establishment they combined theological ideas with practical application. Their actions were understood within a 'scientific' and academic context that defended against accusations of devil worship by presenting a holy framework around the origin of their power and practical benefit for defining their behaviours not legal.

MEDICINE AND MAGIC

The difference between 'magic' and 'medicine' was one of degrees and negotiated constantly. Years before outlawing charming, Henry VIII (1491–1547) had attempted to restrict the 'socery and which crafte' practices of 'Smythes Wevers and Women' for the benefit of 'them that cannot descerne the uncūnyng from the cunnyng;' in *An Act concerning Phesicions & Surgeons* (1511–12, *Statutes of the Realm*, pp.31-2). While attempting to protect Englishmen and women the law would be challenged by the practicality of implementing such a policy.

The relationship between the practicing physician and the Cunning Folk was often one of direct opposition. The desire to believe in the powers of those who claimed to be able to heal with no evidence or formal training was a challenge to those who wished to eliminate superstition and advance scientific forms of knowledge. Any person could claim ability and knowledge of medical treatments, although they might lack the training and education of physicians. John Halle, a surgeon, recounted that he was introduced to a shoemaker who claimed to have the ability to cure diseases of the eyes. When questioned about his qualifications or knowledge of the eye he was unable to provide any sufficient answers (Halle 1565: 210). The Company and Fellowship of Surgeons of London used this Act to sue and limit therapeutic practices by those outside of its company, which led to a shortage of adequate medical care and undue suffering—the explicit reason the statute was overturned thirty years later. *An Acte that persones being no cōen Surgeones maie mynistre medicines owtwarde* (1542–3, *Statutes of the Realm*, p.906) stated that those with knowledge of herbs, roots and waters, both men and women, could safely offer medical treatments including baths, poultices, emplasters and brews as long as that knowledge, gained through speculation or practice, was held to have *originated from God.* This negotiation between what was permissible and what was illegal highlights the importance of practical considerations together with religious obligations. The issue of what constituted 'magic' and 'witchcraft' was a matter of life and death, not just for those accused but for all those who used or would use potentially 'magical' therapeutic services. Traditional 'magic' formed such a vital part of the Early Modern English medicine establishment that it was utilised by all sections of society, including the uppermost elite. When Fernando Stanley, Fifth Earl of Derby and potential successor to Elizabeth I fell ill in 1594 a wise-woman was called forth to minister to him before the physicians arrived.[16]

The sliding scale between orthodox medicine and magic was itself evident within the works of the physician. Robert Turner, along with his translations into English of key Hermetic-Cabalist texts, wrote two books on medicine, including *The Brittish Physician: or The Nature and Vertues of English Plants*

(1664). *Grimoires* like Pseudo-Paracelsus' *Of the Supreme Mysteries of Nature* (*c*. 1500) held that supernatural diseases required supernatural cures and, as such, an aspiring learned man should study magic (Pseudo-Paracelsus 1656: 44). As such men of the period might have a copy of the magical astrology book *Picatrix,* (also known as the *Ghāyat al-hakīm*, *c*. 1000) much like that which passed through the hands of physicians Simon Forman and Richard Napier and other notable intellectuals of the period.[17] Forman and Napier were two of the greatest astrological physicians of their time, serving clientele from across all strata of society at their London and Buckinghamshire practices.[18] Notes on their consultations between 1596 and 1634 have survived, allowing us to see in detail the practices of a group of Early Modern physicians. Whilst not denounced as 'witches' these physicians were occasionally railed against by the religious authorities for potentially illegal activities, such as the consulting of angels.[19] The writer and folklorist John Aubrey, relates a story told to him by Elias Ashmole of a woman who was given a magical angelic remedy for an ague from Napier, which her minister convinced her to burn to protect her immortal soul.[20] Former and Napier were popular physicians and yet their services were preached against as ungodly. What they did could be considered prosecutable offences yet the practical value of their skills protected against accusations.

They could in fact, be useful in creating those accusations themselves. As an extension of their services to ensure good health, uncovering of bewitchment and subsequent witch-finding were offered by both the conventional physician and the Cunning Folk. Forman and Napier record 837 cases of suspected bewitchment over the forty-two years of records (1.73 per cent of all cases).[21] Cunning Folk were often called on first to discover witches and cure bewitchment, as when the wise-woman of Hoxton cured 'Madd folkes'.[22] They were readily available and they offered preventative charms and to find the witch responsible (Davies 2003: 103). Detecting bewitchment through the use of magic challenged the way the laws worked, rendering both the 'victim' and 'guilty party' practitioners of illegal arts.

The officially sponsored demonological viewpoint, that all magic should be eliminated as a means to save souls and reduce heretical behaviour was met with challenges too great to overcome by the practical aspects of magic. Magic played such a vital part in Early Modern medicine that, no matter the laws or preaching of clergymen, charming could not be stopped. What was permissible became a contested ground that merged orthodox religion and practical concerns.

CONCLUSION

In 1627, Englishman Richard Bernard (1568–1641) cautioned in his *Guide to Grand Jurymen* that:

> "Bad Witches many prosecute with all eagernesse; but Magicians, Necromancers, ... and the Curing Witch, commonly called, The good Witch, all sorts can let alone"
>
> (Bernard 1627: 5)

'Richard Bernard goes on to argue that all those who practice 'magic' should be prosecuted, just as it was set out in law, even though many jurists were hesitant to convict. This encapsulates the difficulties that were inherent in defining 'magic' and 'witchcraft' during the English witch-trials and how what was acceptable and unacceptable was meditated through what was practical.

In investigating the way demonologists, Cunning Folk and Hermetic-Cabalists understood charming in different ways, it is possible to better ascertain the way charming was understood by the Early Modern English person. Instead of viewing 'witchcraft' as simply illegal, I position it on a spectrum between religious and practical understandings of the world and of bewitchment. Doing so better informs us about why accusations of witchcraft were made because it explains the complexity of magical practices and their deep-rooted nature in Early Modern England. Magic was central to the lives of those living in Early Modern England. Although demonologists, who believed that all charming was either Catholic superstition or diabolic shaped the law, this was challenged by the practical value the Cunning Folk placed on magic, and the 'godliness' of the Hermetic-Cabalist movement. As accusations of witchcraft often came from neighbours, acting on the conflicts of daily life there was little grass-root support for prosecuting 'useful' magic, it was not a practical action in the lives of those who relied on these services.[23] These discourses combine to allow us to better understand how charming was understood and practiced on an everyday basis beyond the law and outside demonological belief.

While the desire to eliminate all charming practices was apparent, we cannot think of the English witch-trials as reflecting only the demonological framework of repression of magic but as a result of the meeting between demonologists, Cunning Folk and aspiring 'scientists' in an environment that required magic to work.

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NOTES

[1] Exemplified in books like *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healer* (originally 1972, second edition 2010) by second wave feminists Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. While mostly non-academic or of questionable standards of authority, these books have actively shaped how the public thinks about witch-trials.

[2] For an example of 'witch' as identity formation see K. Aune's *Feminist Spirtuality As Lived Religion: How UK Feminists Forge Religio-spiritual Lives* (2015).

[3] 'Demonologist' historically refers to those who study witches along with demons as they were typically thought to work together.

[4] The premier work on the Cunning Folk in England remains Owen Davies' 2003 study *Popular Magic: Cunning folk in English History.* Another, slightly more recent, study specifically on the topic of English Cunning Folk is Emma Wilby's *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft* (2005).

[5] Yates convincingly argues that Hermeticism and Cabalism should not be thought of as two separate movements (Yates 1979). For Hermetic-Cabalism, outside of Yates work, see the collected essays of Ingrid Merkel and Allen Debus' *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (1988), and Vaughan Hart *Art and Magic in the Court of the Stuarts* (1994).

[6] Of the three types of witchcraft for the Early Modern witch trials that Larner found in her study of Scottish witch trials — "*maleficium*", "compact witchcraft" and "sabbath witchcraft"—only *maleficium* and compact witchcraft were common in England (Larner 1984: 80).

[7] Recently economics Leeson and Russ (2017) have proposed that the European witch trials were the result of competition for the faithful between the Catholic and Protes-

tant churches. While this is a novel (so much so that it was reported on in mainstream English language newspapers) economic approach, it is entirely 'top-down' with little consideration for the cultural contexts and the source of accusations in the diverse areas. Additionally, they fail to provide a clear explanation of the demise of the witch-trials, assuming that the end of the trials mark an end in the popular belief in witches, spurred on by the scientific revolution (30), but such a suggestion has been clearly disproved by the work of authors such as Davies, most recently in *Researching Reverse Witch Trials in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England* (2018) and in the continuing study of magic and witchcraft by folklorists.

[8] See the influential anthropological study *Witchcraft* by Lucy Mair (Mair 1961: 36–42).

[9] Two days later as part of the same debate, Judge-Advocate Whalley would bring in a book that Thomas Burton 'witchcraft and blasphemy and free-will, &c.' to be taken into consideration against the Society of Friends (Quakers) (Burton 1828: 80).

[10] John Selden's *Table-Talk* (1689), a list of pieces of wisdom attributed to the influential jurist and politician after his death, while highly critical of Catholicism, suggests that the routing out of traditional charming was not effective in stopping sin (Selden 1689, 1856 edition: 110).

[11] They went by a range of names but as George Gifford (1548–1620) in his treatise on witchcraft implies, the commonly used terms were "cunning men and wise-women" (Gifford 1593, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft,* p. iv). Nearly a century later these terms are still used according to Webster (1610–1682) as "…we, in the North of England, call such as take upon them to foretel where things are that have been stolen, or to take upon them to help Men or Goods, that the vain credulity of the common people have thought to be bewitched, we (I say) call them wise men, or wise women, without regard had to the way or means by which they undertook to perform these things" (Webster, 1677, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, pg.131). John Bullokar's (1574–1627) dictionary *An English Expositor: teaching the interpretation of the hardest words used in our language, with sundry explications, descriptions and discourses* (1616) defines *Wisard* as "A Wise man, a Witch, a cunning man" (Bullokar 1616).

[12] Such as those that Lady Margaret Clifford, Countess of Derby mother of Fernando Stanley was caught using (Bonzol 2010: 79).

[13] His 'Preface to the Reader' of his translation of *Arbatel of Magick* (1655) articulates his views on ritual and natural magic as:

"Witchcraft and Sorcery, are works done merely by the devil, which with respect unto some covenant made with man, he acteth by men his instruments, to accomplish his evil ends: of these, the histories of all ages, people and countries, as also the holy Scriptures, afford us sundry examples.

But *Magus* is a Persian word primitively, whereby is expressed such a one as is altogether conversant in things divine; as Plato affirmeth, the Art of Magick is the art of worshipping God."

(Turner 1655: 1)

[14] Not only was Agrippa instrumental in the Hermetic-Cabalist movement but in 1528, Agrippa was one of the Hebrew scholars consulted on the topic of the theological legality of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, possibly at her request. Also, in

1510 Agrippa is known to have visited London and been in contact with Renaissance humanist John Colet (1467–1519) and Erasmus (1466–1536) (Yates 1979: 38–41).

[15] King James I, 1597 Daemonologie, vol.1.III: 9.

[16] For more information on this case see Bonzel, 2010.

[17] One copy of the Picatrix went from the physician and occultist Simon Forman (1552–1611) to his student Richard Napier (1559–1634) and then passed to Sir Richard Napier 1st Baronet, of Luton Hoo (1607–1676), William Lilly (1602–1681) the highly successful almanac author, founder of the Royal Society Elias Ashmole (1617–1692), Henry Mordaunt, 2nd Earl of Petersborough (1623–1697), politician Sir Joseph Jekyll (1663–1738) and physician Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753) from where it passed into the British Museum. Pingree 1986: xix–xx.

[18] For full biographies see Casebooks Project (About the astrologers).

[19] On the 5th of April 1611, Richard Napier notes that he summoned the Archangel Michael at the request of another member of the court, Elizabeth Cary, Lady Berkeley, goddaughter of Elizabeth I. Casebooks Project (CASE37819 [Normalised Version]).

[20] Once done, her ague returned and she repeated the proscription, again to burn it because of her minister. Finally, Napier told her she had slighted the angels and would die, as she went on to do (Aubrey 1721: 136).

[21] See Casebooks Project (Search results summary) for a further breakdown of the data.

[22] The connection between medicine and the witch-hunts has also been used to criticise the treatment of the mentally ill. Thomas Szasz evocatively compared the role of the psychiatrist to that of the witch-finder in *The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement* (1970).

"Like the witchmongers of bygone days, contemporary psychiatrists never tire of emphasizing the prevalence of mental illness and the dangers to society of the mentally ill. As a result, our ability to see signs of madness all around us now approaches – indeed, perhaps surpasses – that of the medieval inquistitor's ability to see signs of heresy all around him."

(Szasz 1970: 39)

[23] It is the opinion of the author that it should be unsurprising that accusations of witchcraft often came from neighbours and were based on issues relating to everyday life and conflicts. Ascribing negative traits and events to those we have tense relationships with is a logical response in a worldview that accommodates such a position. If you believe that witches *can* steal crops and inflict harm on others then it follows that a neighbour, who you dislike or distrust, *is* stealing crops and inflicting harm using witchcraft.

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FEAR, SUPERSTITION AND BARGAINING: A CURSE AS A THREAT IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE[1]

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Abstract: The power of words is a special topic in the Old Norse-Icelandic literature. The extant corpus, including prose and prosimetric sagas as well as poetry, creates an impression of a culture in which language was both respected and feared. Those who knew their way with words could exercise power over both human and supernatural characters of myths, legends and sagas. Among the ways to use words a prominent place is taken up by curses, especially the versified ones. The variety of sources in which the curses are found – ranging from medieval sagas to later folktales – and the diverse social roles of the speakers as well as the addressees of the curses are briefly discussed in the introduction to this paper.

However, curses did not always have to be fulfilled in order to be effective. The main question to be addressed in the present paper is, whether the very belief in the power of words – and specifically of the versified curses – could give a clever magician or witch a chance to bend someone to their will with a mere threat of a curse. The rules of an effective curse-threat and the role of various elements – such as supernatural creatures and runic inscriptions – are taken into account in this discussion. The two specific cases explored here are *Skírnismál*, a poem about gods and other supernatural creatures from the *Elder Edda*, and *Busluboen*, a curse extant in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* – a legendary saga about human kings and heroes.

Key Words: Old Norse poetry, curse, sagas, Elder Edda, medieval literature, runes

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[1] The article has developed on the basis of the paper titled "Fear, Superstition and Bargaining: Two Old Norse Curses Which Were Never Fulfilled", delivered at the conference "Verbal Charms and Narrative Genres" in Budapest, Hungary on December 10, 2017. The author is grateful for the feedback received on that occasion, as well as for the stimulating and instructive discussions throughout the conference.

INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF WORDS

Even fleeting acquaintance with Old Norse literature would show how much power this culture gave to words – both spoken or written, and especially poetic. Verses could bring great wisdom and great shame, could insult and enchant. People like skalds, who knew their way with words, were perceived as partly supernatural beings. They knew their own power – and people around them also knew what these enchanters were capable of. The sagas of Icelanders include episodes in which curses chanted by skilled court poets have dire consequences to the people who have insulted or wronged the poet. For instance, one of the most famous sagas of the thirteenth century, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, recounts how the Icelandic poet confronted the Norwegian king Eiríkr *blóðøx* (Blood-Axe) and the king's wife, the witch-queen Gunnhildr. Egill expresses his hostility in the verses directed against the royal couple; in addition to this, chapter 57 of the saga describes a magic ritual performed by the poet. He mounts a pole, topped by a horse's head and inscribed with runes, on the sea-shore, facing the king's land, and utters a curse (Thorvaldsen 2011: 173–182; see also Raudvere 2005). As a result of the poet's actions and his words evoking the spirits of the land, Eiríkr and Gunnhildr are banished from their own kingdom. Elsewhere in the saga we learn that Egill is indeed well-versed in magic, especially in rune magic: he inscribes runes on a drinking horn (ch. 44) to avoid getting drunk or poisoned, and on one occasion he treats a sick girl by correcting the badly inscribed runes that caused her illness (ch. 72). His skill as a poet is closely connected with the knowledge of verbal magic and rune-magic. Egill was a model skald of his time and the story of his life was well-known, so it would not come as a surprise if people who knew about the magical episodes of Egill's life also expected other professional poets to have certain supernatural powers.

The episodes recounting Egill's magical exploits usually contain *lausavísur* – loose stanzas composed and performed by the poet. In other cases, the skalds skilled in magic composed long poems which were curses in themselves and had immediate devastating effect on those to whom they were addressed. A notable example of this is the central episode of *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskáld* – a short story extant in the great Icelandic manuscript from around 1400 called *Flateyjarbók*. The main character Þorleifr was an Icelandic poet and trader who came to Norway and suffered terrible wrongs from the jarl Hákon of Hlaðir: Þorleifr's goods were taken from him by force and all his men were hanged. The Icelander is not overhasty with his revenge; all alone, he goes away to Denmark and gains good reputation as well as considerable wealth as a court poet there. Later on, Þorleifr comes to the court of jarl Hákon. The Icelander

is disguised as an old man and purposefully lets everyone in the hall make fun of him. Drawing the jarl's attention, the ridiculed stranger claims that he can make praise poetry – and Hákon, anticipating further entertainment, graciously agrees to listen to him. The praise poem, however, turns out to be a disguised insult and a curse (see Heslop 2012). Not only does it subtly debase the jarl, but it also causes him physical discomfort, making his thighs itch. Culminating in the so-called *Þokuvísur* (Fog verses), the curse causes havoc at the feast: the room goes dark, weapons come alive and injure many men, and when the light comes back, the mysterious guest is gone. It is noted that jarl Hákon lost half of his hair and half of his beard as a result of the curse – a terrible slight to a Scandinavian man's dignity. This episode, even more dramatic than the better-known curse of Egill, shows how a poet could repay injustice and physical violence with powerful words.

The idea of a talented and skilful poet using versified curses against his enemies has persisted in Iceland well into the twentieth century. An example of this persistent tradition in the more recent times is the image of *kraftaskáld* ("power-poet") present in Icelandic folklore. These characters have a sort of spontaneous skill with words. A versified curse they would utter on the spur of the moment would always come true. For example, one such poet throws a short verse at someone, promising that the addressee's vile tongue would be eaten out by shrimps. However unlikely and even ridiculous this curse may seem to modern city-dwellers, the threat was quite real: the following year the poet's enemy went fishing and drowned, and when the body was found – it turned out that the tongue was gone (see Bauman 2004: 16–20). In any age, this kind of stories would warn anyone, from an Icelandic fisherman to a Norwegian king, against quarrelling with a poet.

The power of poetry could manifest itself in the ways more subtle than a straightforward curse. In the medieval law codes of Iceland and Norway we find specific clauses that reflect the popular belief in the power of poetry – and in fact make this belief official. Composing an offensive verse – a *níð* (sometimes rendered in English as 'slander'), such as *Jarlsníð* attributed to Þorleifr in Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds, was a serious crime that could get the poet outlawed and eventually even killed (for a detailed discussion of *níð*, see Meulengracht Sørensen 1983). Moreover, the same treatment was reserved for what we would call love poetry – in Old Norse, *mansǫngkvæði* (from *man* – 'slave' or 'maiden' – and *sǫngr* – 'song'). Such a harsh attitude is partly explained by the damage such poetry caused to the reputation of the poem's addressee. In case of *mansǫngkvæði*, the male guardian of the woman for whom the poet composed such verses would also be gravely offended, as the poetry praising a woman's body and character suggested a certain degree of intimacy between her and

the poet. Is she then cheating on her husband, or is her father not capable to guard her honour? However, the significance of both slandering verses and love poetry might have run deeper than that. As Margaret Clunies Ross puts it, the core belief behind the phenomenon of the poetry of insult and slander is "the idea that poetry has the power to affect its victims with physical harm and mental hurt as well as to damage their reputations"; in case of love poetry, "there is no doubt that it was thought capable of turning a woman's affection to a particular man, without her knowledge and against her will" (Clunies Ross 2005: 41). With his poetry, a skald was apparently believed to influence other people's bodies and minds – not only in the metaphorical way in which any art influences its audience, but also in a very practical, magical way.

The connection between medieval skalds and magic was an intimate one. The very skill with which they arranged words according to the rules of complex metres and their seemingly effortless use of intricate and baffling metaphoric language (much of it rooted in the stories about the gods and other mythological and legendary characters) could create a mysterious image for the poets. Understanding their poetry was a privilege that required certain skill and was not readily available to just anyone. Composing poetry was an even more privileged and mysterious craft, and its source was often attributed to the supernatural sphere. In the sagas we find stories about aspiring skalds learning their craft from the dead (Þorleifr *jarlsskáld*, mentioned above, posthumously passed on his poetic skill to a fellow Icelander who persistently came to his grave mound every night and once fell asleep there) or from eating a magic fish (this was the alleged source of talent for Sighvatr Þórðarson, who started out as a rather useless simpleton and then came to be one of the favourite poets of king Óláfr Haraldsson).[1] Last but not least, skaldic poetry was associated with the god Óðinn. The story about the supernatural origins of the mead of poetry and about Óðinn stealing the mead from the world of *jötnar* is told, most prominently, in the *Elder Edda* – thirteenth-century treatise that also explains many intricacies of the poetic metre and language.

In the Old Norse-Icelandic sources Óðinn comes forward as a very versatile figure (Lassen 2006). Aside from his connection with poetry and poetic language, he is also an archetypal ruler, a god of war and a patron of warriors. Intertwined with these "social" roles is his image as a wise old man, a trickster and a magician. When in Old Norse-Icelandic narratives professional poets, such as Egill or Þorleifr, manifest magic skills, they fulfil the expectations of the audience by proving the poets' affinity with their patron, Óðinn. The magic associated with Óðinn is first and foremost the magic connected to words – in varying forms. As we have seen above, Egill Skalla-Grímsson, in addition to being an exceptional poet, also possesses the knowledge of rune-magic – and

this magic is associated with Óðinn in mythological and legendary sources. In the actual runic inscriptions available to us from archaeological sources there is neither a predominance of the magical over the more mundane or practical purposes, nor a prevailing presence of Óðinn's name over other gods; however, in poetry and sagas the magical and mysterious uses of the runes are an established theme. In the Eddic poem *Hávamál* the list of charms known to Óðinn is preceded by a cryptic account of the god hanging on the tree, sacrificing himself to himself, and picking up the runes during or in the aftermath of this ordeal. The knowledge of charms is, furthermore, associated with the ability to carve and colour the runes (st. 144).

Another instance of detailing the magical use of runes in the *Elder Edda* is found in *Sigrdrífumál* – a poem of the second, "heroic" part of the compilation. Here the young hero Sigurðr Fáfnisbani awakens a valkyrie named Sigrdrífa, who has been punished by Óðinn for her disobedience. The valkyrie imparts the knowledge of runes to Sigurðr – possibly also remarking on the connection between Óðinn and the runes (st. 14). The rune magic is mostly positive and potentially useful for a young warrior: the charms and rituals of rune-carving can, among other things, protect him against poisoning or treason, heal wounds and help in battle. Some of the runes can also bring him wisdom and prudence and protect him against evil-doers; somewhat bafflingly, the list also includes the runes of midwifery that do not fit in so neatly with the image of a great warrior and wise ruler – however, their importance for the well-being of society and for the continuation of the hero's bloodline would no doubt be recognized by the medieval audience.

As the examples from *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (cited above) show, at least some of the magical uses of runes appear in the sagas of Icelanders. The tradition knows of both beneficial and harmful applications of this magic. In chapter 72 of *Egils saga*, the illness caused by badly carved runes may be classified as unintentional harm, while it also reveals the potential power of runic curses. Two of the prominent examples illustrating how runes could be used for curses can be found in the Eddic poem *Skírnismál* and in the legendary saga *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. These two cases will be discussed in detail further in the present article. However, both in *Skírnismál* and in *Bósa saga* we do not see an immediate magical effect of the runes. To assess the power of rune magic, we can go to yet another of the sagas of Icelanders – namely, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. The main character of the saga, Grettir the Strong, is a formidable man who, even though outlawed for many years, demonstrates amazing survival skills. The very idea of outlawry is tested, as Grettir manages to fare quite well in the wilderness, get help from powerful friends even though he is banished from the society, and repeatedly elude the murderous

schemes and attacks of his enemies. In the end, his downfall is brought about by a series of supernatural encounters – and the fatal blow is dealt by a malevolent witch called Þúriðr. She curses Grettir twice, and the first curse, spoken orally in prose form (ch. 68), does not seem to bring immediate harm. The hero manages to defeat the witch using purely physical force – at least for the time being. However, later on (in ch. 79) Þúriðr comes back, more malevolent and determined than ever. She carves magical runes on a piece of wood and colours the symbols with her own blood. This curse cannot be easily refuted, and very soon Grettir finally meets his death, after many years of eluding it. If this formidable hero could be defeated by a feeble old witch with the help of runes, anyone would do well to fear the rune magic. And of course it is not hard to imagine that if runic curses were combined with powerful poetry, the effect could be devastating.

BARGAINING AGAINST A CURSE: TWO CASE-STUDIES

The examples cited above testify to a lively tradition about verbal charms and curses. These include, in particular, runic inscriptions imbued with magical meaning, and verses or formulaic utterances that often contain references to the powers of nature and to supernatural beings. While the descriptions of curses attributed to witches or magicians could be limited to striking and easily recognizable physical activities (such as "magical mooning" and "goatskin twirl" discussed by Gunnell 2014), both poets well versed in magic and magicians or witches not known as professional poets could use verbal curses. The characters living in the world of Old Norse narratives were aware of the power of words and presumably could feel its effect first-hand at any given moment. We can expect this awareness to influence their decisions – for instance, producing unwillingness to quarrel with a poet or a witch, – and their disposition – as when a person of particular reputation chants a curse or carves runes, other characters in the story would manifest fear or at least caution. It is a commonplace in the stories of different cultures and different ages that the awareness of a prophecy often leads to its fulfilment, often as not the attempts to avoid it being instrumental to make the prophecy true. At least to a certain extent, a charm or a curse is also given power by the awareness and belief of the one subject to it. The forms taken by the power that was born out of belief, however, are not necessarily limited to a literal fulfilment of the uttered words. An interesting form of this power – specifically relevant to curses – is the effect of the object's attempt to placate the speaker and to avoid the fulfilment of the magical words. In fact, some of the examples found in the Old Norse literature show that even when

a curse is averted its agent might still gain the upper hand in the encounter. Sometimes it is even dubitable if the fulfilment of the curse would have been as productive as its cancellation proved to be – or, in other words, whether those were not in fact cases of calculated blackmail, and whether the character threatening to curse someone was not bluffing on the basis of the object's belief in the power of a curse. On the following pages, I am going to look into two cases when horrible curses were chanted but not fulfilled, study the nature and effect of threats they contain, and question whether characters reciting them were truly going to carry out their threats.

The first case is *Skírnismál*, the poem of the *Poetic Edda* (or *Elder Edda*)[2] in which Freyr's servant Skírnir woos the *jötunn* maiden Gerðr for the sake of his lovesick master. Neither *Skírnismál* nor other extant sources on Old Norse mythology testify decisively to the nature of Skírnir. Whether he is human (like Þórr's servants Þjálfi and Röskva) or a deity, his rank is lower than Freyr's. However, he is skilled with magic as well as with weapons; moreover, before the journey he receives from Freyr not only the god's own sword, but also a steed capable of travelling to the hostile world of the jötnar. Thus equipped, Skírnir uses all means to win the unwilling maiden. When neither promising her various boons nor threatening Gerðr with violence work, Skírnir curses her at length and carves maleficent runes. And although in the beginning Gerðr proudly refuses rich gifts, and when Skírnir threatens her with the sword, she proudly states: "Ánauð þola // ek vil aldregi", ("oppression tolerate will I never", st. 24), the eloquent and detailed curse, coupled with the physical presence of the runes, finally makes her change her mind and promise to spend a night with Freyr. Interestingly, at one point Skírnir informs Gerðr that he can "carve off" the runes just as he had carved them on, "ef görast þarfar þess"("if that is needed to be done", *Skírnismál* 36).[3] So, if Skírnir has sufficient reasons, he would invalidate the terrible and powerful words directed at the distressed giantess, thus turning the curse into a bargain, which can be resolved more or less to the benefit of both sides.

Skírnismál is an emotional and highly entertaining poem, one of the most popular nowadays and perhaps equally successful in the Middle Ages. Vast scholarship has been dedicated to understanding its nature and meaning. Does it contain memory of an ancient fertility cult, as Magnus Olsen suggested in 1909? More specifically, perhaps it hints at *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage), as suggested by Ursula Dronke? However, it is quite likely that *Skírnismál* is not a creation of heathen culture at all, but a masterpiece belonging in Christian era (see Sävborg 2006 for an overview of the dating problem). The curse, taking up the central part in the poem, might be a genuine specimen of magical tradition (Mitchell 2007, 2011). But, whether connected to ritual (religious or

magical) or completely fictional, this poem was very likely more than a literary work: as Terry Gunnell shows persuasively in his writings (see Gunnell 2006) and real-life experiments, *Skírnismál* could be a good show. This would mean making the audience live this story themselves rather than simply learn about the sequence of events; laughing earnestly or being genuinely afraid. The audience should believe in what is happening, even if for a short while, take the performers for the characters they play and take the magical ritual depicted in the poem for a real one, even though it cannot harm anyone in the audience. If we go further in this direction, can't we suggest that *Skírnismál* was more than an elaborate illusion, that it could be one illusion inside another? While an actor might be pretending to be Skírnir for spectators' entertainment, isn't Skírnir making a performance for Gerðr, pretending to curse her to make her accept the deal he proposes? The maiden apparently believes him, but does Skírnir himself believe in what he is saying, or is he bluffing?

A deal quite similar in structure (though not in purpose) occurs in chapter 5 of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, when the witch Busla comes to the bed of King Hringr, who intends to execute Busla's foster-son Bósi and his own son Herrauðr. In chapter 3 of the saga Busla is introduced as a woman who "kunni margt i töfrum" ("knew much of charms"). Ironically, Bósi is reported in the same chapter to be unwilling to learn from her, for he did not want people to write in his story that he gained anything "með sleitum" ("by trickery"). Now, in chapter 5 Busla, eager to save her foster-son, threatens king Hringr with a curse so awful that the Christian narrator appears reluctant to repeat it in full. The curse is introduced as follows:

> "Þetta kveld it sama kom Busla í þat herbergi, sem Hringr konungr svaf í, ok hóf upp bæn þá, er síðan er kölluð Buslubæn, ok hefir hún víðfræg orðit síðan, ok eru þar í mörg orð ok ill, þau sem kristnum mönnum er þarfleysa í munni at hafa, en þó er þetta upphaf af henni" ("That same evening Busla came to that room, in which king Hringr slept, and started that prayer, which is since called Busla's Prayer, and it has become famous after that, and are therein many words that are needless for Christian men to utter, and yet here is its beginning").

From this description we learn several important things about Busla's magical act. First of all, she intrudes the king's privacy and gets him alone in his bed chamber; in a similar way, Skírnir was an intruder in the world of Gerðr, and yet managed to catch her alone and unprotected. Second, the curse is called a "prayer", thus indicating an invocation of some supernatural powers on the part of the speaker. Its force does not rely solely on Busla's magical skills, but

on her contact with the unknown and terrible powers or creatures. Third, part of the authority is also the reputation of the curse which became widely known ever since – this remark clearly aims at impressing the listeners of the story, rather than the characters. Furthermore, the Christian scribe manifests his unwillingness to quote the curse in full (this unwillingness resurfaces more than once in the course of this episode). Paradoxically, some verses are still cited – though we are given to understand that they are not all and most likely not the most terrible ones either. It is worth noting that *Jarlsníð* receives a similar – although less eloquent – treatment in Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds. The praise-poem turning out to be an insulting curse is described, and so are its effects, but no verses are quoted from it. The culmination of Þorleifr's performance, the Þokuvísur, are also described, and only its beginning is quoted ("[karl] hóf þá upp vísur og heita Þokuvísur og standa í miðju Jarlsníði og er þetta upphaf að" – "[the old man] began then the verses, and they are called Fog Verses and stand in the middle of Jarlsníð, and here is the beginning of those", followed by four lines of actual verse). The unwillingness to quote a powerful curse may, of course, be explained as an act of Christian piety. However, considering the themes of these narratives – especially Bósa saga ok Herrauðs with its wealth of bizarre supernatural and obscene episodes – the narrator's comment contributes to the idea of powerful verbal magic, rather than to the image of a pious Christian scribe. The narrator is prudent, but the foundation of this prudence is the belief in Busla's magic – or at least a manifestation of such belief for the sake of the story.

Buslubæn received much less scholarly attention than *Skírnismál*, as the poem from the corpus of legendary sagas (Old Norse *fornaldarsögur,* "sagas of ancient times") – the corpus little valued by scholars for the most part of the twentieth century. Lee Hollander, characteristically, places this poem much lower in aesthetic sense than "the "classic" curse of Skírnir", but admits that it is "perhaps the most instructive of its kind in literature" (Hollander 1936: 76). One of the most intriguing questions concerning *Buslubæn* is how old and how authentic these verses are. Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch pointed out that at least a part of the poetic text is considerably younger than it is presented in the saga. Some grammatical forms, obviously immanent to the metre, show rather late stages of language development (Heusler & Ranisch 1903: xcviii). The earliest copies of *Buslubœn* are extant from XV century[4], but already at that time the variants differ from each other considerably at some points, adding to the impression of the scribes being rather creative in writing down this text. However, whether it was a deliberate creation or a vestige of oral lore, it was not based entirely on Christian tradition. *Buslubæn* has much in common with accounts of other curses performed by Scandinavian witches,

both literary (Þuriðr cursing Grettir; witches of Icelandic folktales collected by Jón Árnason) and historical (like Ragnhild, the witch from Bergen tried for cursing the man she loved and his young bride; see Mitchell 2011: 170–171). In a concise and at the same time far-reaching analysis of *Buslubæn*, Lorenzo Lozzi Gallo shows that the poem "may be interpreted as a sort of *pot-pourri* of ancient curse formulas derived from such diverse sources as truce-oaths, verbal *níð* and some accounts of hostile magic in the sagas. It shares with them both stylistic and thematic features, but integrated into a new system" (Lozzi Gallo 2004: 135). According to *Buslubæn*, terrible disasters would happen to anyone who hears it, but especially to king Hringr. However, there are two ways for the king to avoid the effects of the curse. First, he can solve the runic riddle Busla gives him in the last part of her curse (*Syrpavers*). But it's apparently unsolvable for him. Secondly, he can let Busla have her way, that is to let his two prisoners live and send them away on a dangerous mission, so that they can manage their own destiny. As soon as Busla wrestles this promise out of the king, she leaves assuring him that her spell would now do him no harm.

Both in *Skírnismál* and in *Buslubæn* the powerful curses are in effect cancelled when their speakers get what they want. The curses are thus not fulfilled in the literal sense, but Busla and Skírnir still have their way with the terrified victims. These episodes seem to involve a mixture of fear, knowledge of tradition and prudent calculation based on both, rather than literal magic power. In this way they still testify – perhaps even more strongly – to the power attributed to words in the Old Norse tradition. It would seem that all ends well, as both Hringr and Gerðr avoid the terrible dangers promised by Busla and Skírnir, respectively; however, the situation is changed through the curses – changed in favour of the one who performs the curse and then cancels it at will. Let us now examine what it is that Skírnir and Busla do to their victims, how they do it and why their curses are powerful even when (or especially when) revoked.

CALLING UPON THE WORST HUMAN FEARS

Ursula Dronke notes that in Skírnir's curse quite human fears are called upon. The *jötunn* maiden is treated not as a specifically supernatural being, but as a normal girl, who values her own sanity of mind, health, social ties and womanhood (Dronke 1997: 392). If we suppose that a mystification is going on, it is in fact crucially important that for the audience of the poem (whoever that may have been, they were definitely humans at all times) the threats were perfectly understandable. Showing how universal and pervasive they are, Joseph Harris divides threats in *Skírnismál* into four categories. Skírnir systematically curses

the following large domains of maiden's life: Social Life, Private Life, Mental Life and Physical Life (Harris 2002: 86). While the content of some threats may be bizarre and supernatural, the fears addressed here are universally understandable – especially to young women. It does not really matter that Gerðr belongs to another race and another world, as long as we can relate to her plight and understand the decision she makes in the end. The object of *Buslubæn,* on the other hand, is not separated from humankind in the same way as the jötunn maiden; however, Hringr is a mighty king, and his life is in many ways different from the lives of ordinary people. But when it comes to cursing, his fears seem not dissimilar to fears of any man. The whole range of Busla's threats is perhaps unknown to us (Hollander, for instance, believes that *Buslubæn* is really fragmentary, as the narrative suggests), but we can discern in it traces of a system similar to the one Harris finds in *Skírnismál*. Let us now look at the patterns of fear and threat in both curses.

Threats to Hringr's Physical Life start even before the curse is chanted. As we learn after the first third of the curse is quoted, the king has been made motionless, so that he cannot stop Busla nor do something to stop hearing her evil words: "Konungr vildi þá upp standa, ok var þá fastr við sængina" ("The king then wanted to get up, but was he stuck fast in bed").[5] In stanza 4 the threats of the physical kind become more sinister, as the witch wishes his eyesight and hearing to decline, and his heart to be eaten out by snakes:

Svá skal ek þjarma
þér á brjósti,
at hjarta þitt
höggormar gnagi,
en eyru þín aldregi heyri
ok augu þín
úthverf snúist

("So shall I hit your breast, that vipers will gnaw at your heart, and your ears will never hear, and your eyes will turn to the inside")

As the curse develops further, it seems that the life of the king would always be in danger – from natural elements, wild animals and supernatural creatures alike. Moreover, even in the seeming safety and luxury of the man-made halls Hringr would not find simple comfort, as we hear in stanza 7:

Sé þér í hvílu
sem í hálmeldi,
en í hásæti
sem á hafbáru

("May it be for you in rest like in a fire of seaweed, and on the high seat like on a sea-wave")

The Physical Life of Gerðr is also the first thing endangered, as Skírnir tries to frighten her with the sword before resorting to magic. In the curse itself, in stanza 27, Gerðr is promised that food would become as disgusting to her as snakes are to others. From this point on, the physical threats become only worse: Gerðr would become terrible to look upon, starve and suffer horrible diseases, and her best drink would be "geita hland" ("goat's urine", st. 35). Unlike king Hringr, she can keep her eyes and hearing, but she would lose her bodily beauty: "Að undursiónom þú verðir" ("A wondrous sight you'll become [meaning it in the negative sense, as some kind of disgusting monster]", st. 28). This specific emphasis on ugliness is even worse for a maiden, undermining her womanhood and feminine attractiveness as well as her health.

The position of the victim is rendered even more intolerable as the threats to his or her Mental Life come into view. Both Physical and Mental Life of king Hringr are further threatened in *Syrpavers,* which is rendered as a separate verse, but continues *Buslubæn* logically:

þá skulu þig hundar
í hel gnaga,
en sál þín
sökkvi í víti

("Then shall hounds in Hell gnaw you, and soul of yours would sink in punishment")

Apart from these supernatural dangers, the king is also faced with a loss of power to make his own decisions – crucial to his status as a ruler. His will over his actions and even over his feelings is being taken from him. This powerful threat, that would cause great loss of face for a man, and especially for a king, is in the very heart of *Buslubæn* and looms large in the refrain. The wording changes slightly from one stanza to another, but the main idea remains the same:

nema þú Herrauð
heipt upp gefir
og svo Bósa
biðjir til sátta.

("But you give up deadly hatred for Herrauðr, and leave Bósi in peace.")

Not only would Hringr lose the power to capture or kill the young men. He would even be unable to hate them. If Busla is appeased and the curse taken

off, Hringr would also have to give up some of his power, but still be a master of his feelings, and retain the superficial independence of actions.

Skírnir is even more vicious in enumerating his threats to Gerðr's Mental Life than in threatening her body. An accurate summary of the howling madness that awaits her can be found in stanza 29:

Tópi ok ópi,
tiösull ok óþoli –
vaxi þér tár með trega!
("Madness and weeping, longing and lusting – let tears of woe grow in you!")

But the real centre of Skírnir's curse, as well as *Buslubæn,* is not madness, but submission of will. Gerðr would have to yield to Freyr or to be disgraced by total loss of control over her lust:

Þig geð grípi,
þig morn morni!
("Let passion capture you, let pining make you pine away!" st. 31)

The uncontrollable desire and longing are probably among the things that were feared in connection with *mannsǫngkvæði*, as I have noted above. The curse of Skírnir, however, works more subtly: the submission of the maiden's will to be attained in any case, Gerðr is given a choice. The options are fairly narrow: either she is reduced to an ugly roving madwoman with her desires undirected and unfulfilled, or she keeps her good looks and normal life, but returns the affection of Freyr (or, at least, "willingly" yields to his desire). Just as king Hringr, she chooses the lesser evil and accepts the proposal made by Skírnir – thus saving both her physical and mental health and a semblance of dignity.

Fears of Gerðr and Hringr in the domain of Social Life are also unsurprisingly different and still universal. Busla, having made the authority of king Hringr problematic (even if only in particular case), has already threatened his social position as a ruler. Stanza 5 is directed at destroying the king's skills as a seafarer in the following fashion:

Ef þú siglir,
slitni reiði,
en ef stýri,
stökkvi krókar
("If you sail, may rigging break, and if you steer, may tholepins spring")

Stanza 6 similarly threatens his horse-riding skills. These threats further undermine Hringr's status of an able king, as his warrior (perhaps also trading) skills are dubious, if he can neither sail a ship nor ride a horse any more. The

horror of such loss of face and competence, and the subsequent shattering of the victim's social status would be understandable to the audience – and almost any man would very likely choose to give way in one conflict, rather than become an inadequate member of his society (or even an outcast) for the rest of his life.

A woman's pride and social prestige do not require sailing ships or riding horses. But her reputation and her position in the society depend to a certain extent on marriage. The menacing words of Skírnir draw a picture of loneliness for his headstrong victim, who would be too terrible for men or gods to look upon anyway. Moreover, if she rejects the fair and powerful god Freyr, she will either stay a spinster or have to settle with a despicable partner. For a young beautiful maiden (whether she is human or not), either of these options is undesirable, to say the least:

Með þursi þríhöfðuðum
þú skalt æ nara,
eða verlaus vera
("With a three-headed thurs [giant] forever will you linger, or stay without a husband", st. 31)

In addition to promising the destruction of health and social position, both Skírnir and Busla specifically emphasize the threat to their victims' Private Life. Of course, such emphasis is quite logical in *Skírnismál*, where Gerðr's sexual life is the main concern of the whole situation. Dramatically calling upon a multitude of supernatural beings to witness this particular part of the curse, Skírnir proclaims:

Heyri jötnar,
heyri hrímþursar,
synir Suttunga,
sjalfir ásliðar,
hve eg fyrirbýð,
hve ek fyrirbanna,
manna glaum mani,
manna nyt mani.
("Hear, jötnar, hear, frost-giants, sons of Suttungr, and the hosts of the gods, how I forbid, how I prohibit to the maiden the women's joy, to the maiden the women's pleasure", st. 34)

However, king Hringr is also threatened with the loss of his sexual power. Interestingly, in stanza 7 Busla suggests that this might be a greater trouble than those she foretold him before:

þó skal þér seinna
sýnu verra,

en ef þú vilt við meyjar
manns gaman hafa,
villist þú þá vegarins;
eða viltu þulu lengri?

("But later will it be worse for you, and if you want to lie with maidens and have a man's pleasure, you will lose your way then; or do you want a longer list?")

Specific preoccupation with Private Life in these curses probably reflects general human fear, only in part rational and only in part controllable, that was widely thematized in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: the loss of honour and delight, of future heirs and, in effect, the loss of gender identity itself. The sexual failure seals the physical, mental and social destruction of the female victim of Skírnir and the male victim of Busla, and neither the supernatural origin of the jötunn maiden nor the initially high status of the human king can protect them from this ultimate plight.

THE LANGUAGE OF MAGIC

As it turns out, if Gerðr doesn't accept Freyr's wooing, the fulfilled curse would effectively ruin her whole life, leaving her mad, sick, deprived of social connections, and a complete failure as a woman. King Hringr, if Busla's curse has its full effect on him, would lose his will and senses, warrior faculties and royal power, in return acquiring numerous supernatural enemies and embarrassing problems with women.

However, would it do any good to the enchanters? Neither Skírnir nor Busla are brutal maniacs, nor are they fighters for justice. Simply making another person suffer is not their goal. Skírnir needs to bring his master the desired maiden, and Freyr would hardly be grateful to him for making Gerðr an ugly, demented and continuously menstruating wreck. Busla wants the king to release the young men who have been sentenced to death. This wish is indeed a part of the curse, but if this refrain alone was powerful enough, why threaten the king with all other terrible disasters? As discussed above, the whole curse undermines Hringr's authority considerably, so, ultimately, it can even prevent him from being useful for Busla's protégés. The thorough and genuinely frightening threats posed in *Skírnismál* and *Buslubæn* might thus seem either superfluous or even contradicting the actual intentions of their conjurers. Rather than doing actual harm, it's much more useful for both Skírnir and Busla to show their magical power without applying it. In fact, even if Skírnir could

not do any magic at all, and Busla was only able to immobilize her victim for a short while, they could still succeed, for the main condition for the success here is the one subject to the curse (real or feigned) believing in its power and fearing it, so that the enchanter can have his or her way. The magician must primarily be cunning here: if he (or she) is caught at inability to deliver the curse, he will of course fail, but if he artlessly employs his power and delivers the curse, he will fail in a different way, perhaps not spoiling his reputation, but still not getting what he wanted in the first place.

Even if powerful and potentially harmful magic really exists in the world of the narrative, knowledge of superstition should be demonstrated, more than knowledge of real magical art. The curses of Skírnir and Busla are prudently thought-out. A rational design seems to underlie them – unlike, for instance, the effective curses of the later Icelandic *kraftaskáld*, always conjured on the spur of emotion. Not only are the worst possible fears evoked and cleverly exploited – a number of elements also signals unequivocally that what's going on is not an empty threat, but a valid curse. For instance, imagery used in curses is quite distinctive: it creates an atmosphere of cold dark world filled with terrible creatures – both natural and mythological, but invariably malevolent and dangerous to the victim of the curse. Particular animals (like snakes) and particular plants can be given specific prominence.[6] Moreover, as Stephen Mitchell puts it, the conjurer of a spell invokes the supernatural world to persecute the victim in natural, realistic ways, and then calls "on the natural world to do unnatural things" (Mitchell 2011: 56). The first category is represented in *Skírnismál* by the hideous monster Hrímgrímnir, Gerðr's promised lover (*Skírnismál* 35), while in *Buslubæn* supernatural creatures are instigated to kill king Hringr as soon as they lay their hands (or whatever) on him. Gerðr would also suffer terribly from such natural things as food and sexual intercourse, while king Hringr would be attacked by natural elements, objects and animals. This contortion of natural and supernatural spheres makes the victim even more powerless before the enchanter. It is habitual for a maiden to be disgusted by dirt or worms, or for a king to fight against living, human (or at least human-like) enemies, but what to do if food repels one, or if one has to fight against rabid animals and malevolent rigging? This seems almost more disruptive for the mind than for the body. The victim, threatened from all directions (as was discussed above), is also deprived of habitual logic and thus completely broken psychologically. Then the magician inflicts the final blow, sealing the curse with a runic inscription.

Both Skírnir and Busla make runes an important part of their rituals. The culmination of Skírnir's curse is carving of four runes. The first of them, Þurs, is supposed to destroy the maiden's sexual health (Dronke 1997: 393), while three others (in *Skírnismál* 36) invoke *ergi* (lust), *æði* (frenzy) and *óþola* (restlessness),

making Gerðr long for sexual pleasures she is deprived of. Busla, on the other hand, puts runic symbols to a different use: she carves a riddle, encrypting names of six magical entities in a sequence of symbols. They are at the same time part of the curse and a theoretical salvation for Hringr, if he manages to solve the riddle. Interestingly, he does not seem to even try that – perhaps knowing that would be a hopeless undertaking, perhaps so frightened that he is unable to think straight. It seems important that *Syrpavers,* introducing the riddle, is said to be a traditional curse. Its suggested reputation should add to the victim's informed fear in case he hadn't had enough yet. The runes are an immensely convincing argument in both cases, and this is unsurprising, for a long tradition, stemming from the introduction of literacy (Spurkland 2005: 11) and reinforced by influence of Christian book culture, seems to suggest that curses or insults carved on wood are even worse than those said aloud; and for most powerful effect these must act together (Mitchell 2007: 84–85).

We have already seen some examples of magical use of runic symbols and inscriptions in the introduction to the present paper. However, it is important not to over-interpret such instances found in Old Norse-Icelandic prose and poetry. In his concise guide to the runes, Michael Barnes dedicates a separate chapter to such literary evidence, as well as its re-use and re-interpretation (or, often as not, misinterpretation) in modern culture and politics. Barnes rightly cautions the scholars against leaping to conclusions and against seeing the rune magic of the sagas and Eddic poetry as ready evidence to the popular belief and ancient magical practices. At the same time, while people who used runes on daily basis as a script would hardly believe in the magic power of runic symbols as such, "the Icelanders might (or might at least have been disposed to exploit such notions as literary motifs)" (Barnes 2012: 192). In other words, the people living on a remote island, who were probably not exposed to rune-carving in their daily life, could entertain certain superstitions concerning the runes or at least let their imagination run loose and use the strange symbols as a literary device.

Furthermore, the instances of runes in Old Norse-Icelandic literature are diverse: for example, in the same *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonnar* the main character uses runic script to carve his own poem and thus let other people know that Grettir has killed a giant and found some bones in the giant's cave. Grettir brings the bones together with the rune-stick to the church, and the next morning the priest reads the inscription (ch. 66). While the supernatural is present in this episode, runes as such do not have any direct supernatural connotations – they are simply a means of passing on the information. At the same time, the episode in *Grettis saga* demonstrates two important ideas connected to the runes – not necessarily seen as magic, but as a script. First,

when the poem is inscribed on a stick, its transmission is ensured: the words will not simply perish after our hero utters his poem, unheard by any living being. Second, the ability to carve and read runes implies specific knowledge, specific kind of literacy, which is available both to the poet and to the priest. As *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonnar* reminds us, this knowledge was not readily available just to anyone: badly carved runes could even cause harm. At the very least, if the inscription is garbled or if the recipient is unable to read it for some other reason, the purpose of the runes would not be fulfilled. For example, in the Eddic poem *Atlamál in grænlensku*, that deals with the fate of Guðrún, the widow of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, and her brothers, malevolent intent is achieved partly with the help of runes – but no magic is involved. Guðrún's second husband, king Atli, invites her brothers to a feast; Guðrún knows that he has planned treacherous murder, and she sends a warning, including runes carved on wood. The royal messenger, however, changes the runes so that no one can make sense of the inscription: "rengdi þær Vingi" ("Vingi distorted them [the runes]", *Atlamál in grænlensku*, st. 4). This undermined communication adds to the doom that pervades the poem.

In *Skírnismál*, Skírnir uses the presupposed belief in the power of carved symbols; at the same time, he precludes any possible misunderstanding, as he carefully explains the meaning of the symbols he is going to carve. The inscription on a stick does not add much to the curse in terms of content; however, it seals the threat, creates a lasting, tangible sign of it. The runes that the curse of Skírnir will linger even after he finishes his speech – and even if Gerðr used to be ignorant about the meaning of the particular symbols, from now on she is all too well informed. The significance of knowledge is reversed in case of Busla and king Hringr. In fact, the inscription carved by the witch is not a curse at all. It is an encrypted text – a phenomenon quite well attested in various writing systems, including the runic scripts. The form of Busla's inscription, in which several symbols are repeated in a certain sequence, is even reminiscent of actual runic inscriptions known to us from archaeological evidence (see Barnes 2012: 148–152). It is not a curse, but a riddle to be solved; Busla even gives a sort of a hint in verse, telling the king that she encrypted six names in her cipher. It is understandable that the king is in no condition to solve riddles by that point. Moreover, as no single uncontested solution for Busla's riddle has been suggested up until now, it might be safe to say that king Hringr had no real chance to solve it. However, the riddle lends a tangible presence to Busla's threats. And, even more clearly than in *Skírnismál*, the act of carving the runes turns the curse into a bargain. Sealing a curse with an inscription has a paradoxical effect, as it is impossible to unsay something, but quite easy to "uncarve" runes: we have seen how Egill did just that in the

saga, and Skírnir himself promises to uncarve the terrible inscription if Gerðr reconsiders her feelings towards Freyr. This is precisely what makes the bargain both possible and visually clear in *Skírnismál*. Somewhat frustratingly, we know nothing about the fate of Busla's runes: she simply "unsays" the oral curse, while the carving is forgotten altogether. However, the very presence of the runes (placed, like in *Skírnismál*, in the culminate end of the exchange) and the effect they have on king Hringr support the hypothesis of runic inscription as an ultimate argument in the violent magical bargaining. The act of carving the inscription, while orally explaining its power and the consequences that are connected to it in various ways, the speaker of a curse invokes his or her victim's belief in the magical power of the runes; at the same time, however, the victim's common sense is invoked. The terrible consequences of a curse have been spelled out in utmost colourful detail; but now the victim is shown a way out. However unequal the bargain might be, it is still better than the curse – at least this is clearly the conclusion at which both the jötunn maiden and the powerful human king arrive at the end of their respective encounters with the cunning users of magic.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

As we have seen, the belief in the power of words was such an overwhelming presence in the Old Norse-Icelandic literature that some of the characters portrayed in the sagas and poetry needed only to threaten their victims with this power in order to get whatever the speaker wanted. The effective substitution of a threat for a fulfilled curse depended on belief, and the belief itself was built on the basis of clever psychological manipulation and the use of certain established features to construct a "correct" poetic curse. It is very likely that the poetic form itself contributed to the believability of a curse, for the connection between poetry and magic was a well-established idea. The reputation of the speaker also played an important role, and so did the reputation of the separate elements he or she included into the curse. The examples presented in this article suggest that the construction of a curse included the use of certain natural and supernatural imagery – including certain animals and plants, natural disasters and elements of the material world (rigging of a ship, the land itself) gone wild and hostile. Runes often added to the power of a curse, making it more tangible, but also increasing the feeling of the bizarre and unknown (as we have seen in *Syrpavers*, where the runes *per se* are not given any magic power). A closer examination of more numerous examples of curses would yield a more detailed inventory of the traditional curse imagery and tools; however,

even the modest selection presented here shows that different curses – spoken in a variety of situations and involving speakers of differing status, gender and even race – bear an unmistakable family resemblance.

To use the stock of traditional elements for attaining his or her goal, the conjurer of a curse had to demonstrate the ability to manipulate people on natural as much as on supernatural level. In fact, the ways by which the manipulation is attained – especially in cases when the curse is not literally fulfilled – makes an interesting case not only in the study of ideas about magic, but also in the study of medieval psychology and mentality. To be effective, a carefully crafted illusion of a curse had to address not only what people believed (or at least what the literary characters would believe and the medieval audience would find believable enough), but also what they feared (and it is my belief that no qualification or division between literature and life is really needed here). The magician who wanted to threaten the victim with a curse, as well as the storyteller who told of this magician, manifest their skill at playing upon the worst human fears, threatening the major domains of the victim's life. In particular, the most intimate and the most vulnerable sphere of gender identity and sexual relations could be used to construct an effective curse or to achieve a powerful illusion. The ways in which the audience could relate to the victim's fears and sympathize with them (perhaps not always feeling sorry for the victim, but definitely feeling thrilled or anxious about the danger the curses seemed to involve) give us a valuable glimpse into the minds of this audience.

At the same time, it might be worthwhile not to take the episodes from *Skírnismál* and *Buslubæn* strictly at face value. We have seen how the curses in these case-studies turn out to be effective threats and how they are a tool in bargaining. In both stories, the bargain served the speaker of the curse better than the literal fulfilment of the curse could, and both Busla and Skírnir achieved their goals. The "victims", to whom the curse was addressed, have to abide by the others' terms, while attaining barely a shred of dignity: in an almost comical turn, Gerðr suddenly finds herself liking Freyr, and king Hringr, paralyzed and helpless, allows an old woman to dictate his royal decisions. But could these blatantly unequal instances of bargaining actually include bluff on both sides? It is obvious that Skírnir and Busla intimidate their victims; however, what they are doing just might be the right strategy to allow the "victims" to make a certain decision. A proud maiden would think of her honour before yielding to a man's desire (even if the man is actually a god), and selling the honour for rich presents would not make her look good. However, what if she receives an offer that she cannot possibly refuse, if she is threatened with things that no one could protect her from (thus, things mightier than a sword)? And the powerful and obstinate king, who has to think about his honour and his

authority, cannot really afford to keep forgiving his ruthless (and potentially dangerous) son. However, what if a different power takes care of protecting the prince, what if the king meets the limits of his authority, but these limits are so bizarre and otherworldly that they would not really shake his reputation for the purposes of day-to-day human rulership? In such conditions, the maiden would have to yield, and the king would have to forgive his son. They are both left with no alternative, but to show prudence and submit to a powerful Other. Seen from this point of view, the bargain may be much more profitable for all parties, and the seeming loss of face for the "victims" may actually become the saving of face. And in case someone has to be blamed for the ambiguous behaviour, the Other, armed with his or her magic and reputation, is conveniently there to take the blame.

NOTES

[1] See Faulkes 1997 on the significance of divine and magical sources of poetic inspiration and the cross-cultural references this theme envokes.

[2] Preserved in the *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda* and in AM 748 4to; also referenced in *Snorra-Edda (Younger,* or *Prose Edda)*.

[3] All quotations from *Skírnismál*, as well as stanza numbers, are cited by Ursula Dronke's edition (1997, see bibliography in the end). The translations from Old Norse here and onwards are mine – A.S.

[4] AM 586 4to, AM 510 4to, and AM 577 4to.

[5] For quotations and stanza numbers, I use the editions of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* by Guðni Jónsson (1954) and by Árni Björnsson (1971). A complete (although not always literal) translation of *Buslubæn* can be found in: Hermann Pálsson & John Edwards. *Seven Viking Romances.* London: Penguin, 1985 [also printed in the Appendix to Lozzi Gallo 2004, parallel to the Old Norse text]. The translations in the present article are mine, but I have consulted with the existing English translation.

[6] Among the plants that are prominent in curses thistle stands out, having been puzzling the scholars for decades. Reviewing the comparison of Gerðr with dry thistle (*Skírnismál* 31) and its possible meaning is not the subject of this essay. However, it is interesting to note that according to a possible interpretation, *thistill* (and it is equally frustrating companion *mistill*, mistletoe) might also show up in the solution of Busla's riddle (Hollander 1936, 79).

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BIO

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WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO STUDY VERBAL MAGIC FROM WITCH TRIALS?

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Abstract: I analysed data about charm practices from witch trials. It is diversified and a very rich mass of material. What is more important than generalities is that while acquiring additional details of early modern charm practice, due to the characteristics of this source type, we also get an insight into the beliefs underlying charms, as well as the social, personal and contextual use and strategies of talking about these beliefs. The goal of this paper had been to show why it is indispensable from the point of view of charm research to study the source documents of witchcraft persecution.

Keywords: witch trials, Hungary, charms, rituals, early modern witchcraft

INTRODUCTION

Judit Helpári appeared before the feudal court of Diószeg on February 16th 1701, accused of witchcraft. During the hearing, witnesses were questioned about two particular instances of threat, describing in both cases the exact circumstances of the situation, the people present and the content of the threats that she had made. The court also inquired what were the motivations that triggered Judit Helpári's behaviour. They asked, in general, whether the witnesses knew of any threats that were also adequate for proving that the accused was in actual fact a witch. The witness statements leave no doubt, and later the accused herself openly admitted the fact of the threat she had made. At the same time, the pleader and the accused herself both claimed that 'the threats she made were not of a devilish nature' but 'lawful', driven purely by sentiments of maternal love, the case being that she threatened the people who wanted to persecute her son to his destruction (Schram 1970, I. 49). Did they manage to convince their judges? And what are the devilish and non-devilish ways of threatening someone?

This paper undertakes to present verbal interactions that survived in the sources of early modern Hungarian witch trials. At the beginning of my analysis, I will present witch trials as an important source type of the research on verbal magic and especially charms. Following that, I will briefly discuss the issues related to terminology, which will also shed light on the methodological background of the research. The second half of the paper will sum up the conclusions

of the analysed trial documents, illustrating the results with a few concrete examples. Although the framework of this paper does not leave room for me to discuss in detail the dilemmas of source criticism that generally arise during the study of early modern witness testimonies and witch trial documents, at the end I will briefly touch upon charms confessed during torture interrogation procedures that are relevant from the perspective of charms research.

LOOKING FOR A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

Why is it essential to examine the source material of early modern witch trials for the study of verbal magic? What additional information do they contain that other types of sources do not? Contrary to other folk genres, the phenomena can be studied through numerous types of sources, dating from Antiquity until today (to mention only a few: codices, books of recipes, marginalia, literature against superstitions, nineteenth-century newspapers, etc.). However, if we want to learn about the use or the modes of application of charms, spells, curses or the attitude and the opinion of the people who used these texts, the available source material is very meagre. It is even more so if we want to capture the practice of the illiterate and lay people of the medieval and early modern periods.

Aside from a few extraordinary sources, practically the only suitable material for this purpose would be the trial documents of medieval and early modern religious and secular legal proceedings, especially the texts of witness testimonies. The other source types allow merely the unearthing of the charm-corpus typically transmitted through writing and only occasionally the reconstruction of the oral presentation of these texts.[1] In early modern witch-hunts verbal magic became one of the central elements of prosecution because according to the ideology explaining calamities, a witch is a person who casts bewitchments, and the simplest way to bewitch is through words (MacFarlane 1970; Kieckhefer 1976; Larner 1984; Pócs 1998, Bever 2006, 2013). Consequently, witch trials have richly documented the various forms of verbal magic (curse, threat, incantation, etc.); in most of the cases they even paid attention to the accuracy of the recorded text (Tuczay 2006: 182; Rider 2015; Oates 2006). We find countless examples in early modern Hungarian trials with Latin protocols where the scribes recorded the text of an incantation in the original Hungarian version; or in the trial document with Hungarian protocols the incantations were underlined for emphasis; furthermore, in the case of charm texts we often

[1] Borsje 2016.

find the corrections and posterior modifications by the scribe.[2] See examples below from the trial of Mrs. András Hagyó, 1567, Kolozsvár.[3] The highlighted lines were originally Hungarian in the Latin texts.

> a) [Q]uod sunt anni octodecim in capillis existens [uxor Andreae Hagyó] una cum sorore maiore quadam Elizabet summo diluculo ante auroram in festo Georgii, antequam gregem in campum expellerent, ad fores stetissent, ac illa Elizabet voce alta acclamasset:[4] **″Witches in my tub, milk, butter, and my shit into your tub!″**
>
> b) [Q]oud ipsa in profesto Sancti Georgii audisset et vidisset, quod in capillis existente [uxore] Andreae Hagio cum sorore quadam ad retrimentum in plateam stetissent. Et altera earum clamorem edidisset:[5] **Csűr, csűr!**[6] Adeo quod rati fuissent testes horreum ardere.[7] **Milk and butter into my pumpkin dish and my tub, my shit into yours!** Sed testis nescivisset de quibus fuerit loquuta.[8]
>
> c) Dehinc transcendens in hortum proprium quandam ollam effodisset herbas antehac collectas in eam condens, et hoc tempore introit[us] armentorum erat hiis dictis:[9] **″Let my tub fill with butter and cheese, and dung into others'!″** Et coram armenta exivisset et ibi discurisset. Id a propria consanguinea audisset, quod dictum uxori Andreae Hagio: cur non vivis etiam hic pacifice inter vicinos tuos, tamen scis te etiam in patria versatum esse in condemptionem propter tua facta, et etiam spine consecate erant tibi, et adhuc non servas te immunem, hic quoque non vivis pacifice.[10]

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[2] Liv Helene Willumsen's paper examined Scottish witch trials and found charms in Gaelic in English and Latin context; and Raisa Maria Toiva, in relation to Finnish witch trials, draws the attention to threats and incantations in the Swedish legal text that were left in the original Finnish version without translation. (Willumsen 2011: 542; Toivo 2012: 148–149.)

[3] Komáromy 1910: 14–15; Ilyefalvi 2014: 180–181.

[4] That it has now been eighteen years since Mrs. András Hagyó, then still unmarried, and her sister Erzsébet, stood by the door one morning early, at dawn, before sunrise, before the herd was driven out, on St. George's Day, and that Erzsébet called out in a shrill voice [...].

[5] That she herself had seen and heard on St. George's Day that Mrs. András Hagyó, then still unmarried, stood in the street with one of her sisters. And one of them heard a call [...].

[6] Words used perhaps as onomatopoeic imitations of spitting and clicking the tongue.

[7] So much so that the witnesses believed that they were to pluck up courage to do something fearful.

[8] But the witness did not know what they were talking about.

[9] Going over from here into her own garden she buried the pot, putting into it the herbs she had collected beforehand, she did this as the cows were brought in, she said,

[10] She went out to meet the cows and walked up and down in front of the herd. She heard it from a relative as told to Mrs. András Hagyó, Why don't you live in peace at least here among your neighbors? You know that they raised charges against you in your own country for your doings and reproached you for your sins, and still you cannot feel innocent until you learn to live in peace here.

Nonetheless, research has so far dedicated little attention to charms in witch trials. Although historians, historical anthropologists and folklorists dealing with early modern European witchcraft, concerning *maleficium narratives*, have been emphasising, since the 1970s, the role of the malefactor witch who casts bewitchment with curses and threats, few have focussed their analysis and interpretation on the dialectics and personal interpretations of the various genres of verbal magic such as charms, threats, curses or profanities (Labouvie 1992, 1993; Leitner 2017). All this is not surprising, since archivists and researchers of early modern history are not interested in the practice of charms; moreover, in Western Europe, the study in historical anthropology and microhistory, the monographic discussion of one region, village or problem are only rarely accompanied by source editions.[11] The study of charms documented from early modern orality, however, requires source editions and historical corpuses; researchers cannot go to archives looking for charms documented in one way or another from orality, because it would be similar to looking for a needle in a haystack.[12]

In the case of Hungary, fortunately there is no need to go to archives, since Hungarian witchcraft research was motivated and characterised by a significant interest in historical folkloristics and anthropology from the very beginning; and since the 1980s, besides the discovery and analysis of trial documents, the publication of sources was of primal importance, precisely with the aim of making the material available to other disciplines as well. For instance, they ensure source material for the study of early modern belief systems carried out by folklorists.[13] As a result of this work, the documents of more than 2000 trials are available in printed versions. The historian and ethnographer Péter Tóth G. is currently working on uploading the trial texts into a digital database.[14] Thus, for my analysis, I had several thousands of pages of early modern witch trials in Hungarian in a searchable format at my disposal. On the one hand, this was a unique opportunity, considering the monumental size of the corpus covering approximately 300 years. The digitized version allowed instant search by expression or word (such as ‘incantation’, ‘curse’, ‘threat’, ‘prayer’). On the other hand, since the corpus is not invested with semantical annotations, and the language use of early modern Hungarian speakers was very diverse (multilingualism, mixed or bilingualism, dialectological differences etc.), which was

[11] The Scottish witch trials constitute an exception to this. For the different sources of witchcraft see: Monter 2006.

[12] This is also well reflected in text editions including charms in historical sources, which only rarely contain charms from witch trials or from any legal proceedings.

[13] For the history of Hungarian research on early modern witch-hunting see: Tóth G. 2001. For the most important general information and statistics in English see: Sz. Kristóf 2013. And for the most important English publications of the research group and its predecessors see: Klaniczay & Pócs (eds.) 1991, 2008, 2017; Pócs 1998, 2001.

[14]http://boszorkanykorok.hu/ Last accessed: 28.11.2018

only further diversified by the varied writing practices of scribes recording the trials, an immense knowledge of vocabulary, word stems and a preliminary background knowledge of the topic is required for reaching meaningful results. All this is further complicated by the continuously changing scholarly publication practices of the past fifty years. Even though the source editions are supposed to be exact transcriptions, they are in reality on different degrees of transcription and vary by publisher and by researcher. Analysis carried out on the basis of second-hand source editions has its drawbacks; in my paper, however, I want to focus on the advantages; that is, on the useful conclusions of analyses carried out on a philologically 'dirty', but large corpus.

Beyond the problems of source criticism, the investigation is further complicated by the terminological and theoretical dilemmas of the research on verbal magic.[15] It is often very difficult to apply to the corpus the wide interpretation and the functional definition of verbal magic (any text or genre can be a charm if it is used with the function of a charm; that is, if the speaker uses words with the aim of inducing positive or negative change), since the intention of the speaker is not necessarily clear from the situation. However, the judges and the magistrate in the early modern era were driven precisely by this strict, functional approach, going beyond genre classification, since their primary goal was to prove the accusation of bewitchment and not to explore the speakers' knowledge of genres. Thus, the interrogators asked about the use of 'such' or 'diabolical words', about 'superstitious benedictions', 'unusual prayers' in various ways. For instance, in 1727 in Bagota (*Bohatá*) in Komárom County, they put the following question to the witnesses: "has the accused used charms or other prayers that are otherwise pious or in God's liking to heal an illness; [if yes] how many times and on whom?" (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 504–505).

For my present analysis, I used the new edition of Hungarian charms published in 2014, for which I have collected the charm texts manually from the complete witch trial corpus (Ilyefalvi 2014: 179–219). The edition focussed, on the one hand, on texts that could be defined as charms on the basis of their contexts; which means that I have not taken into consideration the emic vocabulary of the speaker and of the scribe recording the speaker (the following definitions could be found before the text: 'replied', 'said', 'answered', 'prayed', 'charmed', 'cursed', etc.). On the other hand, however, due to the classical concept of a folkloristic text collection, the edition does not include the stereotypical curses and threats, which are otherwise omnipresent in the trials. Consequently, chapter F of the volume is rather a collection of healing charms and verbal love magic, and not that of all occurrences of verbal magic. The volume contains six

[15] It was also a continuous challenge for researchers educated in theological and demonological literature to distinguish between the genres (such as prayer – benediction – charm) from the late Middle Ages on (Bailey 2006).

texts from the sixteenth century, seventeen from the seventeenth century and almost sixty charms form the eighteenth century. This corpus was completed for this analysis with cases in which the emic wording of the trial suggested that the characters were referring to charming. The trials mention the practice of charms much more often than they contain the actual charm text.

CHARMERS AND FUNCTIONS – RITES AND GESTURES

In most cases the social status, social background and personal life path of the person practicing charms are impossible to reconstruct; nonetheless, generally speaking they were mostly serfs, landless peasants, shepherds or simple village or city women. In many cases those who practiced positive magic (wise women, seers or midwives) also practiced charms, and were suspected of witchcraft precisely because of such activities. About eighty percent of the accused were women, which was well reflected in the ratio of women among charmers, since there are only two charm-texts that survived where the accused were men. There are even two among the trials from the aristocratic milieu that stand out because of their rich references to charms: the early seventeenth-century trial of Kata Török from Medgyes (*Mediaș*) and the trial series against Anna Benkő from Háromszék County (*Comitatul Trei Scaune*) from the mid-eighteenth century.

Among historical sources, the documents of witch trials show the most diverse picture regarding the function of charms; besides healing incantations, we find data on charms used for bewitchment, preventing bewitchment, divination, love magic, treasure seeking, expelling frogs, exorcism, changing location with magic spells, causing drought or hail, transforming someone into an animal, ensuring favourable judicial results or the release from prison, as well as on ensuring good business for tavern-keepers. In a trial conducted in 1648, for instance, one of the witnesses alleged that Mrs Pál Szabó was released from the Miskolc prison thanks to a charm; in 1733 (Schram 1970, I: 133), during a procedure in Máramarossziget (*Sighetu Marmației*), the accused and a companion put the rope of a hanged man on a tavern's trade-sign, then poured mead in a bowl and had someone say a charm on it for good business (Tóth G. 2005: 105).

Even more important additions can be learned from witness testimonies explaining in detail the rites and gestures carried out while practicing charms. Besides massaging, palpating and rubbing, the witnesses describe in certain cases with exceptional precision frequently spitting and licking. In 1670, in Nagybánya (*Baia Mare*), Mrs Gergely Nagy first licked the two cheeks of a sick child and then spat next to it, then licked the child again and finally spat saliva between the eyes of the mother. In the same trial, we read that in order

to successfully start breastfeeding, Mrs Gergely Nagy wiggled the footwrap of the husband with some vinegar around the breasts of the nursing mother while blowing on it (Balogh 2004: 81, 83). Mrs Mátyás Nagy, in 1715 in Békés County, in order to heal a woman, measured her with a stem of a hop plant, on which she tied three knots every day for three months (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 88). In 1742 in Kraszna (*Crasna*) the midwife, called to a patient with epilepsy, said a charm, yawned, then stuck her knife a few times in the bed board. Afterwards, she stuck the knife in the ground and carved a little hole in it with the knife, then sent one of the relatives to bring water, with the instruction to draw the water downstream. She poured a little water into the hole, then she had the patient drink from it and also washed and rubbed the region around the heart with the water from the hole while saying charms and yawning (Kiss & Pál-Antal 2003: 209). The gestures and rites were not only assigned to healing charms. In 1705 in Nagybánya, according to a witness, for confronting the deliberating judges, the accused took earth from the graves of twelve former jurors and sprinkled the dust in the town hall while saying: "As those dead bodies cannot speak, / so should the council keep their mouths shut!" (Balogh 2004: 195).

The rites, gestures and functions of the texts are essential elements of the research on charms; fortunately, these often become apparent from other manuscript forms besides witch trials. However, the trials also contain additional contextual information that we would not find in any other source type. Where did the charm take place and who was present? How long did the treatment last? How does one acquire the knowledge of charms? Who enunciates the charm, the charmer or the patient? How do charmers heal themselves? What compensation does the charmer receive? We still have very little information regarding these questions, even in light of twentieth-century folkloristic and anthropological field studies.[16] In a 1739 case in Zilah (*Zalău*), the twenty-one-year-old Barbara Horvát explained in her testimony that the accused midwife performed the ritual of water casting together with another woman, and despite her wanting to be in the room to see what and exactly how they do it, she was locked out and could only observe the ritual by peeking through the window and she could not see the events properly (Kiss & Pál-Antal 2003: 200). This

[16] The problem was already identified in the nineteenth century by a folklorist who collected charms. See Stiùbhart's study on the Scotsman Alexander Carmichael and his charm-collecting journeys in the second half of the nineteenth century (Stiùbhart 2014). In general, it can be said that the editors of twentieth-century charm collections paid less attention to the ritual narratives and the way of narration in their publication practice; they were rather focusing on the actual text itself. This problem of collection methodology is still an issue in the twenty-first century. Even in the case of a longer fieldwork based on participant observation, it is relatively rare to be present to witness the actual act of charming, unless it is the researcher who is being treated by the charmer. For this see the anthropological field experiences of James A. Kapaló (Kapaló 2011a; 2011b: 171–172).

case accentuates seclusion and the secret, prohibited side of healing, which can be illustrated with numerous examples. The same goes for the phenomenon that even if there are others present during charming, due to the silent, whispering and slow parlance of the charmer they cannot understand or hear the pronounced text (Schram 1970, II: 184; Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 158–159).[17] In other cases, however, the public is apparently not excluded; it would definitely be worthy of further investigation to examine the relationship between secrecy and the type of illness or other functions of charms. In Felsőbánya (*Baia Sprie*), Márton Csiszár was ill and sat on a threshold and a Wlach woman said a charm on him there and then, which was witnessed by the person giving the testimony, who was on his way home from the garden at the time (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 683). Occasionally, it is not even necessary for the charmer to be present in order to perform a charm. On 1726 Hegyközpályi (*Paleu*), Mrs Gáspár Balázs asked Mrs Pál Paládi what kind of hair her pig had because if she knew, she could name the animal and then, she claimed, she would be able to drive the worms out of it even if it were on the other side of the River Tisza (Komáromy 1910: 366). According to the trials, charming is sometimes a onetime thing, which has an immediate effect; in other cases, it is part of a cure or a treatment lasting for weeks or even months.

Regarding the practice of transmitting the oral tradition the historical sources contain little information; in the protocols of witch trials, however, there are important data about this as well. In several cases we read, for instance, about the patient who learned the charms on the occasion of a previous healing; that is, from the person who once healed the patient. In 1727, Judit Jászberényi from Nyitra County (*Nitriansky komitát*) learned the incantation for sprains from a certain late Mrs Csákány when she healed her foot with charms (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 504). In 1752, Mrs György Horváth from Magyarnádalja also testified to having learned the charm's text during a treatment and later applied it on herself (Schram 1970, II: 728). In addition, we do have a few references of transmitting the tradition within the family. In 1752 in Kiskunmajsa, the testimony of Mrs Gergely Bozsér, accused of witchcraft, reveals that she had learned the healing prayer from her mother (Bessenyei 2000, II: 288). In certain cases, the specialist taught the mother of the sick child to charm and to perform the ritual.

[17] In a multilingual environment, witnesses often claimed that the reason they did not understand what the charmer said was that the charm was pronounced in another language (for instance, Romanian, Croatian, etc.). See for instance in 1674 in Croatian Schram 1970, II. 709; or in 1727 in Felsőbánya in Romanian, (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I. 682).

EMIC INTERPRETATIONS

The biggest novelty of witch trials as sources of the research on charms, however, was not all of the above, but the unique insider perspective. This is the point at which we turn back to the example quoted at the beginning of the paper, i.e. the case of Judit Helpári. This woman from Diószeg did well in front of the courts – although her prosecutor would have willingly sent her to the stakes eventually she was acquitted. This lenient verdict may partially have been related to the fact that her accusers could not offer a bewitchment narrative in which the threat was followed by actual harm, and also that no other charge beyond the named instances of threat occurred in the case of Mrs. Aradi. However, it is instructive from the perspective of the study of verbal magic that in the early 18th century it was possible to make a meaningful distinction between a threat uttered under a strong emotional impulse and a 'devilish threat.' A threat that was expressed as a result of maternal love 'feeling bitter and meaning the thing in a lawful manner' did not constitute a proof of witchcraft.

The actors in the situations described by witness testimonies often react to certain phenomena of verbal magic, they comment on it or interpret for themselves what they saw and heard. Naturally, when studying these interpretations, we must not forget that firstly they were speaking in a courtroom situation with specific intentions that could have shaped the content of their testimonies. However, the enunciated interpretations are possible and acceptable interpretations and valid expressions of the speakers, thus, they do have a source value to us. In the 1660s in Nagybánya, for instance, a patient instructed the healer woman "not to use charms, only to rub her", as if she were refraining from being treated with such superstitious practices (Balogh 2004: 60). Others did the opposite and tried to accentuate the religious, Christian nature of the texts, thus legitimising the healing procedure they were treated with, by using expressions such as 'Godly prayer', 'healing with Godly methods' (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 504–505). In a crisis situation, one has to follow a specific behavioural norm, but not everybody was able to comply with this norm. In 1684 in Nagybánya, a servant of the family started to laugh when the healer was about to start charming, for which the midwife inflicted him with a lifelong bewitchment, according to the trial narrative (Balogh 2004: 104). In other cases, we see that, even though they receive precise instructions for the procedure, they do not 'dare' to carry out the ritual (Pakó & Tóth G. 2014: 157) or simply doubt its mechanism. In the trial series of Anna Benkő in Háromszék, one of the witnesses recalled a situation when Anna Benkő told the Romanian Gypsy woman who performed love magic that "this was about as useful as a horse shoe for a dead horse" (Klaniczay & Kristóf & Pócs 1989, I: 334).

The different personal interpretations, verbal interactions, habits and attitudes corresponding to the situation highlight an important aspect of verbal magic-practices. On the one hand, they show that despite any text being suitable to have the function of a charm (and in certain crisis situations the charmers did not select among the texts) and despite the fact that the tribunals were also primarily interested in proving the accusation of witchcraft, the early modern charm users did, however, distinguish between different kinds of verbal magic; and not only to prove their or their neighbour's innocence or guilt. They discussed verbal magic mostly from the perspective of the charm's intention and function (a frequently used defence strategy of the charmers was to claim that they only knew texts to heal certain illnesses, such as bewitchment, aches, skin conditions, and no other), the content of the text and its presumed effect, as well as from the point of view of the emotional state of the utterancer. On the other hand, we can see how the actors use charms and narratives about charms in a judicial context serving the ideology of persecution.

CHARMS FROM TORTURE INVESTIGATIONS

The 'great' Szeged witch trial at the end of the 1720s was the only mass persecution and trial series that took place in the history of early modern Hungarian witchcraft, during which numerous torture confessions were extracted (Brandl & Tóth G. 2016). During torture, the interrogators asked the accused the question whether they used 'superstitious benedictions'. Some confessed the simplest, ordinary texts associated with ordinary work rituals, for instance when planting millet seeds she used to say: "You plant the millet, may it grow tall!" However, some of the witnesses confess to having said texts that, in light of the entire charm-corpus, can be considered unusual. According to one witness, they healed a girl by saying the following charm: "We bewitched her in the devil's name / now we want to heal her in his name". Another witness confessed that while the participants were dancing with whistles and drums they said: "We are the troops of Beelzebub. With the fame of *szotypiri tantiri*". Mentioning the devil and naming him by name, changing location or shape by saying the Lord's prayer backwards or by saying the words "*hipp-hopp*" or a variant of it, are almost exclusively only known from torture confessions (Brandl & Tóth G. 2016: 119, 126–129, 150, 162). Charms forced out with torture interrogation of the accused show clearly which texts the accused considered to belong surely to the prohibited sphere of magic; and consequently, which were the texts that they could confess, with the hope that they would perhaps escape.

CONCLUSION

In my paper, I analysed data about charm practices from witch trials. It is difficult to draw general conclusions from the diversified and very rich mass of material. However, what is more important than generalities is that while acquiring additional details of early modern charm practice, due to the characteristics of this source type, we also get an insight into the beliefs underlying charms, as well as the social, personal and contextual use and strategies of talking about these beliefs. The goal of this paper had been to show why it is indispensable from the point of view of charm research to study the source documents of witchcraft persecution. It was meant as a programmatic reminder for later systematic analyses to point out the importance of certain topics that are waiting to be examined. By analysing the trial material we may gain a glimpse into such areas of the charm tradition which hardly any other source can provide. The witness accounts offer examples as to who the charmers were and to what ends they deployed the power of words; where the healing/bewitchment took place and who were the persons present (whether secretly or overtly); who uttered the text and what sort of compensation was given to the healer; how did the knowledge transfer take pace. We can read detailed descriptions of rituals and gestures, often accompanied by explanations of the beliefs they rest upon. As regards witness statements from confessions made under torture, these highlight the way in which the method of acquiring the data influences the textual material recorded. At the same time, from the point of view of exploring the genre itself, the most important thing is that these witness statements enable us to comprehend the phenomenon from the perspective of the contemporary 'user.' Charm researchers working on the historical material are still finding it difficult, in spite of repeated criticisms, to leave behind such anachronistic binary oppositions as magic vs. religion or charm vs. prayer (cf. Fisher 2016, Borsje 2016). Based on the witness statements we may attempt to discard such etic categories.

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Emese Ilyefalvi studied folkloristics, religious studies and philology at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. She worked from 2013 to 2018 as a junior research fellow in the “East–West” Research Project (“Vernacular religion on the boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: continuity, changes and interactions” ERC project No 324214). Within the framework of this project, she published a new Hungarian charm collection in 2014 co-authored with Éva Pócs and the Digital Database of Hungarian Verbal Charms in 2018. (See: http://raolvasasok.boszorkanykorok.hu/) She finished her PhD Thesis in 2019 about the theoretical, methodological and technical questions of computational folkloristics. She published several articles in Hungarian and international

journals (*Ethnographia, Replika, Incantatio*) on these topics. She was a visiting scholar in Vienna (Collegium Hungaricum Wien), in Amsterdam (University of Amsterdam) and in Edmonton (University of Alberta, Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies.) Since 2013, she has been giving lectures and seminars related to her research at Eötvös Loránd University and the University of Pécs. At present, she is an assistant professor at the Department of Folkloristics (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary) and a research fellow at MTA–ELTE Lendület Historical Folkloristics Research Group.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Eleonora Cianci, *The German Tradition of the* Three Good Brothers *Charm* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 2013).

Packed with motifs and able to claim for parts of its constituent narratives a very long history of circulation, the *Tres Boni Fratres* (or *Three Good Brothers*) charm is among the more common touchpoints encountered by scholars working in a variety of national contexts. Aptly labeled a *Sammelsegen*, or collection blessing, by the German scholar Oskar Ebermann in his examination of the subject published in 1903, surviving examples of this charm for wounds feature a complex bipartite narrative and a wealth of biblical allusions. In its fullest manifestation, the charm deploys a narrative centered on the encounter of three brothers with Christ followed by a brief discursive (sometimes interrogatory) episode between them, and finally, instructions to the brothers to perform some application of oil and wool alongside the recitation of a charm laden with Longinus motifs. It thus contains a charm within a charm, with the initial encounter historiola of the *Three Good Brothers* charm—as Lea Olson reminds us in *Incantatio* 1 (2011)—attested in strikingly early texts, namely papyri of the fifth or sixth centuries A.D.

Eleonora Cianci has produced a close study of twenty-six instances of the *Three Good Brothers* charm that she has identified in German-language manuscripts spanning the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. She approaches the charms systematically on a number of methodological levels, treating each instance as a text, a component of the manuscript that contains it (or the "mise en page," as she memorably terms it), a cultural article within the medieval and early modern context in which the manuscript was produced, and as a signifier of a healing act of which we know very little outside of the clues created by the charm text. Because she reproduces images of the manuscript page, transcriptions of the charm text itself, and descriptive cataloguing material for each of the sources, her publication is also a reference guide to the extant German-language material, bringing together in one place everything subsequent scholars will need to conduct their own analysis on the surviving corpus.

Cianci begins by reviewing the state of the scholarship on German-language charms recorded in manuscripts, and it is telling that after an initial spate of studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern work touching on the charm within the Germanic linguistic family consist of only a handful of researchers: Olsan, Cianci, and Christa Haeseli. This leaves Cianci with an open scholarly field in which to set the terms for how to interpret the German-language corpus. She takes up this challenge by next addressing the problem of corpus definition—how to decide what exemplars should be included under

the label *Three Good Brothers* charm, and what to exclude? As it turns out, identifying core overlapping motifs provides the best answer, allowing Cianci to assert that "despite the high number of manuscripts transmitting the German *Three Good Brothers* charm over approximately five centuries and despite the various languages offering a different set of versions and motif clusters, my opinion is that we can still consider the *Three Good Brothers* charm as one text on a general semantic level" (34). Those central motifs include the meeting between the brothers and Jesus, the dialogue that ensures along with its focus on the use of a herbal remedy and Jesus's instructions to seek Mount Olivet and the curative powers of oil and wool, and finally the incorporation of a Longinus charm. These motifs, and the numerous subvariants, Cianci excerpts from the manuscripts and organizes into separate charts for helpful reference (153–222).

Notably, Cianci is arguing (drawing from the work of Ruth Finnegan) for an approach that, while cognizant of the importance of analyzing performance, oral versus textual transmission, and linguistic features, contains at its heart a concern with the folk-narrative aspects of charms. The toolkit of the folklore-narrative discipline, and especially its hundred-plus years of developing motif catalogues and narrative identification, thus becomes the framework she argues for as the primary means of interpreting charms. This is an effective approach, and one that charm scholars can profitably adopt along the lines of Cianci's example here. It allows the scholar to gather together charms sharing the same core motifs and to propose charm typologies without disregarding the clear variations appearing in the historical corpus. These variations are one of the interesting contradictions found in charms: While verbal performance and shared knowledge of the words to be uttered with charms were clearly important, as Cianci notes, unlike the performance of verbal magic, charm content did not depend exclusively on a stable spoken formula (32). As a result, the development of a motif index, and not just a charm typology, should be central to the field.

Cianci concludes with a call for a multidisciplinary approach to future work on the subject, noting that an "eclectic approach which draws on philology, linguistics (more specifically dialectology), folklore, and folk-narrative studies might provide more answers than a single discipline or single person can do" (223). No quibbles can be taken with this advice, but it is worthwhile to consider what might be missing from this list of disciplines. Two interrelated ones come to mind: the study of folklore practices and history. Both would ask us to investigate the persons who created and made use of these historical charm texts. To be sure, Cianci devotes some time to this question generally—i.e. that literacy was on the rise, and that clerical and non-clerical scribes alike were responsible for these texts. And of course, an investigation of cultural practices must necessarily go beyond the charm manuscript sources themselves, a challenging

task for distant historical times. But what more can we know about medieval and early modern European, including German, attitudes toward healing, that Cianci does not explore in this book? What contemporary attitudes about the time, place, and understanding of how healing took place? These essentially ethnographic questions are difficult, but not impossible to answer, and have been explored by folklorists and historians alike for a number of years.

Certainly, the intrepid multidisciplinary charm scholar seeking to add this to Cianci's list of disciplines will have an essential reference work in the form of her book to start from. Moreover, the clarity of layout, systematic collating of variations, and close attention to the context surrounding each manuscript offers a helpful model for charm scholars working in other national contexts, making this a major contribution to the field.

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Vilmos Keszeg, ed., *Rontók, gyógyítók,* áldozatok - *Történetek* és élettörténetek (Cursers, Healers, Victims – Tales and Life Stories), Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2012, 399 pp., ISBN 978-606-8178-56-1.

Since 1990, the researchers from the Department of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology at the Babeș–Bolyai University in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca have focused on studies of the pragmatic aspects of popular beliefs in Transylvania. Their attention is turned mainly in three directions: the concentration of belief knowledge into the hands of specialists, the role of popular beliefs in modifying the human careers and everyday life, and the modes and ways of speaking about beliefs. Using participant observation, interviewing and sociological methods, the researchers have been able to draw a detailed image of the individuals' belief habits and practices, of the incorporation of the beliefs into the local social contexts, and of the nature of the belief events, their unfolding, courses and effects.

The results of these energetic and important research activities have been continuously published in the series *People and Contexts* (Emberek és kontextusok). Started in 2008, the series already boasts a number of volumes, with the book reviewed here standing as number eight.

Cursers, Healers, Victims – Tales and Life Stories is a collected volume, in Hungarian language, and contains the following parts: short preface, four studies, extensive bibliography, index, two summaries (one in Romanian and one in English language), black-and-white pictures appendix, audio recordings list, and a DVD with these same recordings in audio format.

The preface is written by Dóra Czégényi, who also compiled the bibliography. The first study is by Attila Fodor, and deals with the life stories and the collective beliefs about a woman from the village of Aranyosrákos/ Vălenii de Arieș. The analysis focuses on the alleged quackery via supernatural means, practiced by the said woman. The second study is written by Éva Salánki-Fazekas and examines the beliefs in supernatural beings, held by a Romani woman from the village of Berettyószéplak/ Suplacu de Barcău. The study discusses a detailed categorization of the supernatural entities and their functions, as they are told by the informant. The third study's author is Szillárd Salló and it is focused on the typology of the human practitioners of magic – cursers, divinators and healers in the village of Gyimes/ Ghimeș. The analysis deals with their general characteristics and activities, illustrated with case studies. All the three studies provide transcripts of the interviews with the informants and glossaries of the local dialectic peculiarities.

The fourth study is by the editor Vilmos Keszeg and provides summarizing comments of the previous three studies. It also presents the main results

of the research of beliefs in Transylvania so far, and points out directions for further examination.

The bibliography is very rich. It provides a comprehensive overview of the secondary literature on Hungarian popular beliefs in Transylvania. The literature is mainly in the Hungarian language, with a few pieces in French, English and German.

The appendix contains 35 black-and-white photographs of the locations and the informants, discussed in the studies. Both the appendix and the DVD provide additional depth of the book's content, illustrating important contextual details and circumstances.

Rich in source materials and profound scholarly analysis, the book offers major contributions to the field of studies of verbal magic. Firstly, it places very specific verbal magical texts and rites within the broader framework of the local belief systems. This is particularly valid for the studies by Salánki-Fazekas and Salló. The book convincingly demonstrates that verbal charms and verbal magical rites, practices and practitioners are integral and often central part of the popular beliefs systems. This is a reminder that very often it is impossible (and actually unnecessary) to separate verbal magic from its broader spiritual and cultural context.

Secondly, the book consistently connects and inter-connects the verbal magic and the popular beliefs with the everyday human life and its wide array of crises, necessities, deficiencies, emotions and accidents. The functionality of the charms, charmers, and charming is well demonstrated. It is clear that verbal magic plays an important (if not central) role in the process of influencing and modifying the human world via supernatural means. Certainly, this is generally true for a number of a cases all through human history. provides one more very close look on verbal charms as main tools in the management of human problems and the resolution of everyday life deficiencies and crises. It also shows verbal magic and related beliefs as expressions of personal emotions, interests, tensions and conflicts between individuals and families.

Thirdly, the book places verbal magic and the related practices at the cross-point of three cultural contact zones: Hungarian, Romanian and Romani. The book emphasizes again the importance of the language and the text, oral and written. The analyzed verbal charms and belief systems have their own specific vocabulary, a field of constant interplay between the three languages and between the variations of verbal magical texts. This interplay is linked to the broader interactions between various Christian religious denominations, in terms of sacred texts, rituals, clergy and laity. Canonicity and non-canonicity of beliefs, views and opinions plays a significant role too.

In terms of methodology, the volume represents case-studies at their best. The researchers are familiar with and deeply immersed in the cultures they are researching. They have really broad access to the daily lives and the belief systems of the informants. The source materials reveal not only a bulk of data, but also an atmosphere of trust, accuracy and authenticity. The authors conducted lengthy interviews rich in detail, and the same is true for the analytical parts of the book. The interpretations of the source materials are comprehensive, the analysis of the interviews outlines the patterns and the features of the belief phenomena, but also the variations and peculiarities, as they fluctuate from individual to individual.

Surely, the volume also contributes with the fact that it provides an opportunity for young researchers to present their research results. It does not, however, stop here. The work of Fodor, Salánki-Fazekas and Salló is not only published, but also discussed and commented by an established and experienced scholar, Vilmos Keszeg. Thus, their approaches, methods, analyses and conclusions become part of the interactive and productive scholarly discourse.

Finally, I would like to say that it is indeed a pity that the majority of the non-Hungarian scholars are not familiar with the Hungarian language. With its excellent content and form, this book definitely deserves an excellent translation into English. The same is valid for the whole series People and Contexts. Alas, such a publishing enterprise can turn out to be a lengthy and expensive pursuit. Hopefully it will happen someday. Until then, I sincerely hope that all the colleagues, interested in this excellent volume will find ways to access its valuable content.

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Sisinieva legenda v fol'klornyh i rukopisnyh tradizijah Blizhnego Vostoka, Balkan i Vostochnoj Evropy. Moskva: Indrik, 2017. // *The Sissinius legend in the folklore and handwritten traditions of Near East, Balkans and Eastern Europe.* Moscow: Indrik, 2017. 856 pp.

This collective monograph on the Sissinius legend, published in Moscow in 2017, brings together the contributions of fourteen scholars from Russia, Armenia, Romania and Greece. In this volume, the manifestations of the legend in various cultures and ages are discussed with an attentive eye to a wealth of source materials: printed books and manuscripts, folklore and oral tradition, visual representations of the legend and archaeological evidence. While maintaining strong links and excellent awareness of the pre-existing scholarship, the contributors to this volume provide the readers with accounts of the most recent developments in the field and with a number of sources and theories that have previously been unpublished or overlooked.

The legend of St. Sissinius, together with the prayers, verbal charms and imagery connected to this legend, is widely spread among the cultures of Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The roots of the story go back to the early centuries of the Christian era, and its popularity is attested in various forms up until modern times. The heart of the legend in its most generalized form is an encounter between a saint and a female demon; the demon usually threatens or harms pregnant women and infants, but the saint beats the demon, makes her acknowledge her many names and undo some of the harm she has already caused. The names of the female demon are the crucial part of the legend, for it is believed by many cultures that reciting the names or writing them down can protect humans from the demon's evil schemes.

The Sissinius legend has interested many scholars in the past 150 years, including M. Gaster, R. Basset, H. Winkler and R. Greenfield. The new comprehensive study of the Sissinius legend summarizes the previous research and brings together a wealth of material to create a complete picture of the currently available primary sources and existing trends in the scholarship. The aim of the project was not to close the discussion, but to produce a state-of-art platform for further research and fruitful discussion – and the book is eminently suitable for fulfilling this aim. In addition to the well-structured presentations of different versions of the Sissinius legend, its forms and interpretations, the book provides insights into the possible ways the versions of the legend developed and influenced one another. Moreover, the volume contains a number of previously unknown and unpublished sources, the texts presented in the original languages with Russian translations and commentary. Annotated lists of the demons' names supplied for some of the chapters will be of great help to cur-

rent and future students of the Sissinius legend, and the colour plates give us access to the imagery connected to the legend, as well as to a number of rarely exhibited manuscripts and artifacts.

The Introduction by A. Ljavdanskij and A. Toporkov gives a broad overview of the pre-existing scholarship and the major variants of the legend – in particular, the so-called Michael-type and Sissinius/Meletine-type, previously suggested by R. Greenfield. The authors outline the goals of the research project: broadly, "to follow the history, geographical spread and transformations of the main ethnolinguistic versions and plot types of the Sissinius legend in different cultures of Eurasia and Africa throughout at least 1500 years (5–20 centuries A.D.)" (p. 25). To achieve this goal, the scholars propose to reconstruct the prehistory of the legend, its major elements and characters, describe the different types of the legend and trace the ways the texts and the versions preserved in them have been transmitted, to analyze the imagery connected to the legend and explore the names occurring in the various versions. The methodology of the research includes historio-geographical, comparative and structural approaches, with the source-critical, textological, linguistic, folkloristic methods and the methods of the study of religion applied to the relevant sources. Each chapter of the volume centers upon a particular culture or a group of sources, and a separate appendix dealing with the image of St. Sissinius. The parallel structure of most chapters makes the argument easy to follow and the connections between different traditions clearly visible. The final chapter by A. Toporkov brings together some common trends and conclusions.

In the first chapter, A. Ljavdanskij offers a comprehensive study of Aramaic versions of the Sissinius legend. Studying the evidence of clay cups and metal amulets from 4–8 centuries, he outlines three redactions of the legend: A (with A1 and A2 subversions), B and C. He traces the changing cast of characters and their shifting roles between the Palestinian and Babylonian sources, paying specific attention to the image of Smamit, the female victim gradually transforming into a demon in later redactions, and the angels fighting the evil spirit in these texts.

In the second chapter, the same author focuses on the episode describing the encounter with the female demon Obisuf in the Testament of Solomon, the earliest redaction of which may date from as early as 4 century. The description of the demon and the motif of fighting her by writing her name is possibly among the earliest attestation of this type of legend and has many parallels in the international versions of the Sissinius legend.

In the following chapter, M. Kaspina takes a broader look at the Jewish tradition and focuses on the verbal charms and amulets protecting pregnant women and infants against Lilith and their connections to the Sissinius leg-

end. Summarizing the evidence of the sources from the long history of Jewish belief and learning, up until 20 century, the scholar outlines the two types of encounters between angels or the prophet Elijah and Lilith and notes the links of the Jewish tradition to the Aramaic and Byzantine traditions about similar encounters. The chapter concludes with a list of names for the demon in different types of texts and amulets and an anthology of key selected texts.

In order to explore the transformations of the Sissinius legend in the poorly attested Coptic tradition, E. Smagina turns to Arabic and Ethiopic evidence, attesting some close similarities between Coptic and Ethiopic images of the saint and his demonic adversary. The author also addresses the visual representations of Sissinius as an armed warrior in the Coptic iconography.

In the following chapter E. Gusarova undertakes the task of outlining the various manifestations of the Sissinius legend in the Ethiopian culture. The author emphasizes the complex nature of the legend's transmission, from its translation from Arabic into Ge'ez around 14 century through its centuries-long coexistence with other religious and magical beliefs on the Horn of Africa. The three variants of the first legend-type and one version of the second legend-type are analyzed, with a selection of original texts provided in the anthology. However, the scholar admits that the Ethiopian cultural context and the numerous manifestations of the legend still current in the Ethiopian society obstruct any clear view of the legend's development, so that any hypotheses about its roots and chronological forms are bound to be inconclusive.

In a brief chapter dealing with Arabic versions of the Sissinius legend, A. Ljavdanskij reviews a number of Arabic charms against child-stealing female demons, known from 19–20 centuries, but plausibly originating in a much earlier period. Although the Arabic sources do not contain the Sissinius legend as such, they manifest certain clear parallels to it: the charms and prayers are directed at the saint for protection of small children, and the demon takes on the shape of a woman. The author traces the origins of the demons' names and the variety of functions attached to them.

In the following chapter, A. Ljavdanskij and A. Nurullina address the Syrian tradition connected to the Sissinius legend. Discussing several verbal charms, mostly known from 18–20 centuries' collections, the authors note that these charms bear the traits of the Michael-type legend. However, the other type of the Sissinius legend seems largely unattested in the Syrian sources, which might make the earlier postulated close connection to the earlier Aramaic tradition doubtful. The characteristics of the Syrian charms, and especially the names of the female demons may suggest that apart from certain Aramaic influences, Arabic, Persian and Greek (Byzantine) influences can be traced.

Turning to the Byzantine tradition in the next chapter, O. Tchoekha analyzes a wide range of texts, the two structural types of the Sissinius legend found in them and the names of the main characters. The Byzantine versions of the Sissinius legend are attested as early as 8 century, and the two types of legend can even be found in the same manuscripts from 15 century onwards. The author revisits the preexisting scholarship, for which Byzantine tradition played a crucial role, and argues for Semitic origins of the Sissinius legend. While the structure of the Byzantine narratives and charms is similar to Arameic and Jewish version, the names of the demon and her female victim are changed, the most stable pair being Gilou and Meletine, respectively. A list of names, many of which are descriptive and refer to the harmfulness and Otherness of the demon, are a crucial part of the Byzantine texts.

In a short excursus, A. Rychkov offers a discussion of an important source that has not been included into the discussion of the Sissinius legend by previous scholars. A phylactery from a late 18-century Greek euchologion, reproduced in this excursus and supplied with a full translation, contains an intriguing example of two traditions: those of charms against child-stealing demons and against migraine (also personified as a demon).

In the following chapter, H. Passalis brings the discussion of the Greek material up to date with an exploration of the modern oral tradition. The modern Greek verbal charms connected to the Sissinius legend acquire a poetic form. They manifest two kinds of influences: on the one hand, the book tradition and, on the other, the oral verbal charms against different kinds of demons and sicknesses. The lists of names, crucial for the book culture, are largely absent from the oral charms.

The next tradition, discussed by T. Tadevosjan and Sh. Kozinjan, is the Armenian tradition of verbal charms. The earlier scholarship regarding the Sissinius legend has not included a discussion of Armenian folklore. This is unsurprising, given that St. Sissinius is not well-known to the Armenians; however, some references to him and some traces of the Sissinius legend, most likely derived from contact with other cultures (probably Greek), can be found in the Armenian verbal charms and amulets from 17–18 centuries. The scholars provide a selection of texts with translations and commentary to showcase the presence of the Sissinius legend in this culture.

The following chapter is dedicated to the Sissinius legend in the Southern Slavonic traditions. T. Agapkina gives an overview of the vast manuscript tradition, supplies editions and translations of selected texts, discusses the two types of prayer found in the Southern Slavonic texts and explores the variety of mythological characters found in these texts, with a particular attention to their names. A list of mythological names and terms is also supplied. Notably,

in the Southern Slavonic tradition one type of prayer is linked to the health and safety of pregnant women and infants, like in other traditions, while the other type (Michael-type) becomes connected to a broader range of illnesses. In the Russian tradition, addressed later in this volume, this latter type becomes attached to fever. Agapkina puts both types of prayer in the Southern Slavonic tradition into a wider context, discussing their place both in the book culture and in the folklore tradition.

In the next chapter, M. Mazilu and E. Timotin focus on the Romanian tradition of legends and charms about a female demon who harms pregnant women and infants. Providing examples of both Michael-type and Sissinius/Meletine type of the legend from 16 century onwards, the scholars discuss the subtypes of the texts, the names of the demons and saints involved and the possible influences from other cultures: Greek, Southern Slavonic, and later Eastern Slavonic. Interestingly, the Romanian legends and charms connected to the Sissinius legend involve a number of Biblical motifs (the beheading of John the Baptist; references to the Satan) and close similarities to prayers, and the texts currently available to us seem to have been mostly written down by priests and monks.

The last cultural tradition discussed in the volume is the Eastern Slavonic tradition of charms against fever and the connections it has to the Sissinius legend. A. Toporkov notes that while the Sissinius/Meletine-type of the legend is unattested in Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus texts, the Michael-type undergoes an interesting transformation among Eastern Slavs. The name of Sissinius is still connected to the structure of an encounter-charm, and the names of the female demons encountered and beaten by the saint are listed within the charms (often including 12 or 7 names with careful explanation of their functions). However, the function shifts from the protection of pregnant women and infants to the protection against sickness (fever). This type of charm must have originated from a radical reinvention of the Southern Slavonic Michael-type charms; although the tradition attributes the origins of the legend to a Bulgarian source, the particular version of the encounter-charm is found only in the Eastern Slavonic tradition. Toporkov also notes the close relationship between this charm and other charms and prayers approved by the Orthodox Church; the context of both textual and visual evidence connected to the Sissinius legend in the Eastern Slavonic tradition suggest that the Church either accepted, or at least did not disapprove of these charms. On the other hand, the influence of oral tradition and folk beliefs is evident in the written charms. Another notable feature of the Eastern Slavonic tradition is the image of St. Sissinius himself: he is often depicted as an old monk, while a new character, (arch-)angel Sikhael, overtakes the role of the mounted warrior physically at-

tacking the demon. The author traces the possible timeline of development of the Sissinius tradition among the Eastern Slavonic people. This spans from the non-canonical prayers and amulets against shivering fever in the 10th-11th centuries, through the appearance of Sikhael in the 12th century, to the shorter version of the encounter of Sissinius and Sikhael with the demonic daughters of Herod (14th–15tth centuries), and finally to the long redactions that included 12 names (17th–19th centuries). A selection of texts and annotated lists of the demonic names are supplied in this chapter.

In the following chapter, A. Rychkov focuses on yet another kind of evidence usually overlooked by earlier researchers: the Historiole of Gregory the Theologian. This text is found together with a prayer to St. Sissinius in some of the Greek sources and describes a meeting between Gregory and the Archangel Michael. The dialogue between them provides the believers with the names and functions of protective angels – including angel Sichael. This historiola possibly originated in 10–12 centuries and became the vehicle through which the Cappadocian cult of Sichael passed into the Greek and Eastern Slavonic traditions of verbal charming.

In the special appendix, A. Rychkov traces the origins and development of the name and image of St. Sissinius in an attempt to explain the role of this figure in the tradition and fill in the blanks in the history of the Sissinius legend. Finally, in the Conclusion to the volume, written by A. Toporkov, the vast material discussed in the separate chapter is brought together to show some trends in the development of the two types of the Sissinius legend and the image of Sissinius and his adversaries. The scholar traces links between different traditions and briefly discusses not only the ways in which the legend developed, but also the possible reasons of its popularity throughout many cultures and many centuries. Through the present volume, many problems connected to the Sissinius legend are clarified, new sources are uncovered and placed into the context of previous and ongoing scholarship, trends of historical development and intercultural influences are discussed, and the foundation for further productive discussion is established. The scholars of the Sissinius legend from across Europe would greatly benefit from an acquaintance with this book, its wealth of material and the sound analyzes provided throughout the volume.

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CONFERENCE REPORT[1]

VERBAL CHARMS AND NARRATIVE GENRES. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (BUDAPEST, DECEMBER 8-10, 2017)

Having an establish tradition of a regular conference on verbal magic is essential for the successful development of this research field. It is encouraging to see that such a forum happens again and again, providing the researchers of verbal charms with opportunities to report scholarly work, to tackle various problems, to communicate with colleagues, to establish continuity and to broaden the study horizons.

The most recent meeting of the scholars of verbal magic happened in Budapest, Hungary, in the hospitable and friendly atmosphere, provided by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Research Centre for the Humanities. The organizers were the International Society for Folk Narrative Research – Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming and Belief Narrative Network Committee, and the "East – West" Research Group – Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of Ethnology. The conference lasted three days, intensely packed with presentations and discussions, both formal and informal. The conference was opened by Balázs Balogh (Director, Institute of Ethnology RCH HAS), Mirjam Mencej (President of the ISFNR BNN) and Éva Pócs (PI of the „East-West" research group). They all emphasized the importance of interdisciplinarity and of communication between scholars. The planning and publication of two volumes, and also of this current (eighth) issue of Incantatio, were presented as main goals of the organizers.

Altogether, there were thirty-eight presentations, distributed in eight sessions. In line with the previous conferences, there were representatives from all over the world, speaking on a variety of topics. The speakers came from scholarly institutions from Argentina, Australia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, The Netherlands and The United States. While some papers covered the verbal charming in these national traditions, others

[1] Editorial note: Originally, the task of writing this report was undertaken by our colleague Alexi Moine, who gladly volunteered for it. Unfortunately, he seems to disappear from the face of the earth, without submitting his contribution. All my numerous attempts to contact him turned out to be futile. I most sincerely hope that nothing bad happened to Alexi, and believe that our scholarly community shares my concern. Still being worried by this unforeseen and unfortunate turn of events, I decided to prepare the conference report myself, as much as my memories allow me.

discussed also Bulgarian, Ethiopian, Iranian, medieval Germanic, Old Norse, Welsh and Turkic verbal magic. A number of presentation were about case studies or specific problems - for example, the intriguing supernatural personages from Argentinian, Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian and Turkic charms; the role of charms in Iranian epic and Japanese mythology; the links between verbal charms and supernatural beings like elves, faires, moras, saints, and the Devil.

Other papers focused on broader theoretical or methodological issues – for instance, the principles and practice of charms editions, the etiology of supernatural diseases, the interconnections between verbal charms and belief narratives, the links between charms, curses and saints' legends, the verbal magic in the contexts of witch-hunts and the importance of the witch trials as sources for verbal charms. While being concerned with larger frameworks, all speakers illustrated their points with a number of concrete examples.

At the conference, the scholars of verbal charms had the opportunity to become familiar with an important recent publication – the volume *The Sissinius legend in the folklore and handwritten traditions of Near East, Balkans and Eastern Europe*. This was one more occasion for discussion and planning of further research. The review of the book is available in this current issue of Incantatio.

Well-organized, well-attended and well-presented, the conference was closed with a summarizing talk on further research and on plans for future scholarly meetings. Next day, there was a wonderful excursion to the Pannonian cities, villages and religious monuments. It gave an opportunity for more informal collegial communication, and added a fine final touch to a very productive academic forum.

Svetlana Tsonkova