

# **Incantatio**

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Charms, Charmers and Charming

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Charms, Charmers and Charming

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An International Journal on  
Charms, Charmers and Charming

## **Issue 6**

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Tartu 2017

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(May 6–8, 2016, University College Cork, Ireland)

## INTRODUCTION

This special issue of *Incantatio* is dedicated to the theme of tradition and innovation and comprises a selection of papers presented at the 9th conference of the Charms, Charmers and Charming International Committee of the ISFNR held at University College Cork on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th May, 2016. The papers presented here engage with the theme from a range of perspectives; historical change and the impact of modernity (Dillinger, Radchenko); theoretical and methodological innovation driven by the digital and virtual worlds (Ilyefalvi, Sawden) and the evolving ways in which charms and charmers have been viewed and represented in different societies over time (Milne, Tausiet, Leitão) are explored and reflected on from different disciplinary perspectives.

This issue opens with Johannes Dillinger's keynote lecture from the conference: "Charms and the Divining Rod: Tradition and Innovation in Magic and Pseudo-Science, 15th to 21st Centuries". Addressing the question of historical change in the use of charms, and magical thinking more generally, in relation to the practice of divining with a rod, Dillinger's paper demonstrates how charm texts associated with dowsing came in and out of vogue over the course of history. The function of charm texts in relation to dowsing, according to Dillinger, offer us an important insight into the relationship between magical and scientific thinking, and personal, moral and supernatural power from the medieval and early modern periods onwards.

The contribution from Daria Radchenko, "Dealing with Danger: The Practices of Keeping and Discarding Magical Letters", offers a historical analysis of the means by which various forms of magical letters, especially the genre of "Heavenly Letters", were handled by recipients of these sometimes unwanted and unsolicited chain letters. The study explores historical and contemporary Russian examples of this understudied folklore genre. Emese Ilyefalvi's article joins the ongoing discussion on the ambition (and merits of) creating an international charms index and database. Advances in digital database technology and the emergence of "computational folkloristics" offer new possibilities and lead Ilyefalvi to question the merit of traditionally conceived type and motif indexes and catalogues.

Louise Milne's article "The Terrors of the Night: Charms Against the Nightmare and the Mythology of Dream" takes a semiotic and structuralist approach to understanding the characteristic nightmare package of imagery, or image-constellation, which appears also in charms, curses and lullabies to do with disturbed sleep. Elements of the nightmare package – its mythos – is examined in its relationship to a spectrum of charms and related belief-narratives.

Kari Sawden's paper, "A Shared Inheritance: The Interrelationship between Divination and Charming in 21st Century Canada", explores the relationship between divination and charming in modern-day Canadian context by drawing on ethnographic research with Canadian divination practitioners to investigate the ways in which connections are created between charming and divinatory practices and how the two are utilised together in new contexts.

María Tausiet's contribution, "Threefold Stories, Threefold Charms: Bécquer's Poetic Ethnography of Witchcraft" looks at the work of 19th century Spanish writer Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, focusing on his collection titled *Letters from my Cell* from the 19th century, and examines the charm-related material it contains, in the context of local folk traditions of the village of Trasmoz in Aragon, Spain. Traditional material such as legends and verbal charms are viewed through the lens of a 'poetic ethnography'.

José Vieira Leitão's article examines traditional Portuguese verbal divination procedures and processes of agency and causality as well as by referencing comparable methods of divination in contexts connected to Western esotericism.

In the following pages, we are delighted to present the work of scholars who are researching important questions in charms scholarship and enhancing our knowledge of diverse aspects and contexts of this subject area. With the publication of this volume, we hope that these scholarly essays will inform a wider audience about traditions, and innovations in those traditions, across different time periods and cross-culturally.

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## CHARMS AND THE DIVINING ROD: TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN MAGIC AND PSEUDO-SCIENCE, 15<sup>TH</sup> TO 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES

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The rise of treasure hunting as a typical element of popular magic in the 15th century coincided with the beginnings of dowsing. Treasure hunters did not rely on the divining rod exclusively, they also used a variety of charms addressing the spirit world. In contrast to that, miners who used the divining rod treated it more like a technical instrument in a modern sense. With the success of mining as a motor of technical and economical innovation, the divining rod enjoyed a breath-taking career. In the 18th century, it had become the divinatory object par excellence that could be used to find virtually anything. The 19th century witnessed the breakdown of the traditional magico-religious treasure hunt. Instead of trying to talk to the spirit world in order to find treasures, treasure hunters became interested in historical narratives that provided clues which helped to discover hidden or lost objects. Even though dowsing was eliminated from professional mining, it managed to survive. The very fact that dowsing was largely non-communicative – it was even claimed that the ability to dowse depended entirely on the individual, inner and non-transferable qualities of the dowser – seemed to be the key to its continuing success in the area of fringe science and fringe medicine. Only in recent years, the new interest in spirituality combined dowsing and the use of incantations again.

**Keywords:** charm, divining rod, dowsing, treasure, water witching

What was the purpose of charms in the context of dowsing? This article will try to discuss this question in a long term perspective stretching from the earliest beginnings of dowsing in the early 15th century to the esotericism of the early 21st century. This article is based on a wide variety of sources from German-speaking Europe, France and Britain: folkloristic and historic collections of spells, demonological and scientific tract and modern esoteric literature.<sup>1</sup>

The divining rod was a very special and comparatively recent variety of the ubiquitous magical staff. In contrast to the magician's wand the divining rod is supposed to find lost or hidden objects. Thus, contrary to the claims of popular literature about dowsing, we should not count Moses' staff that struck water out of a rock, the magical wand that granted wishes mentioned by Cicero or Siegfried's golden rod in the Lay of the Nibelungen as divining rods (Waele 1927: 275; Ludwig 1998: 368–369; Ruff 2003: 262–271). We do not encounter divining rods used to locate specific objects before the end of the Middle Ages. The earliest source appears to be Johannes von Tepl's *Ackermann aus Böhmen*, the Bohemian Ploughman, a poem about a fight between a ploughman and the Grim Reaper written around 1400.<sup>2</sup> Tepl mentioned in this text a "soothsaying divining rod". Even though Tepl used this expression as a metaphor for a person it is quite clear that he thought a divining rod could be used to gain knowledge. The next texts to mention the divining rod are charms. The earliest charm seems to date back to the first half of the 15th century. It is written in a Bavarian or Austrian dialect. The charm was a part of a lengthy ritual. It belonged clearly to the context of the learned, clerical magic of the late Middle Ages. The text explained that anyone who wished to use the divining rod should first go to mass, donate a silver coin, then select twigs of hazel that had grown over the last year. The magician kneeled down, facing in turn East, South, North and West saying:

In the name of the Father I have searched you. In the name of the Son, I have found you. In the name of the Holy Spirit, I cut you ...*Egrediet virga de radice yesse... Et flos de radice eius ascendet* [A rod shall grow out of the root of Jesse. And a flower shall arise out of that root] ...O eternal and omnipotent living Son of God hear me and think of my desire. O God creator of heaven and earth through your divine incomprehensible power that you have used since the beginning of the world, I remind you that you shall pay attention to my desire and to my endeavor with these rods so that in them power shall be ready to reveal the right truth that I poor sinner desire to learn. O sacred God of eternal wisdom through all the power that you used in the firmament of the sun, of the name of all the stars and of the seven planets give me poor sinner, your creature and your servant that I in this hour shall find a good time to succeed in the endeavor that I will undertake through all the power of the wicker rod that you gave to it. Amen.

Finally, the charmer implored the rod in the name of God and the three Magi to "show the truth" (Klapper 1905: 55–56). The rather elaborate description of

the actions of the conjurer who searched for the rod, found, and cut it is strongly reminiscent of magical formulae used by herbalists.

A more simple ritual from the German Southeast of the first half of the 15th century began with a charm that addressed the rod:

Be greeted in the name of God, sapling, who has created me and you on this earth. Sapling you are called in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost that you shall retain all the power that God has given to you and to me on earth. In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The rest of the incantation implored the rod in the name of God and various saints to reveal reliably where silver, gold, buried treasure and mineral water [“das wasser des arczts”, literally: the doctor’s water] could be found (Klapper 1905: 56–57). This charm from the first half of the 15th century is the earliest source that suggests that the divining rod could find water. Until now, historiography assumed that the earliest source that mentioned dowsing for water was a Bavarian law from 1612 (Dillinger 2012: 98). Thanks to this newly discovered charm we may safely say that dowsers started looking for springs about 200 years earlier. Of course, they did not simply look for any kind of water. As water was readily available in most parts of Europe, there was hardly any demand for simple water witching. The 15th century charmer had a mineral spring with water of therapeutic value in mind.

Lengthy conjurations seem to have been the exception rather than the rule. After 1450, we encounter a number of much shorter formulae. A Swabian magical spell dating back to the second half of the 15th century provides a good example. It emphasizes the practical use of the rod:

I conjure thee, four hazel rods, in the name ... [of the four Evangelists] ... so that you show us to the real treasure we hope to find. I conjure thee in the name of the three holy Magi ... that they [=the rods] show us the real hidden treasure as they [= the Magi] were shown the true child Jesus Christ by the star which led them” (Eis 1964: 146–147).

This charm alludes to searching and finding as the main elements of dowsing. The rod shall be as successful as the three Magi who led by the star found the child in the manger at Bethlehem. The text might invoke the four Evangelists as symbols for truthfulness or just as especially powerful saints.

In the late 17th century, dowsers used this charm:

Rod of hazel, I break you and conjure you through the power of God the All Highest that will show me where the hidden gold or silver or precious stones are hidden in the ground. I conjure you with these words that you

shall have as much power as the staff of Moses on which he hanged a snake in the desert. I conjure you that you shall have as much power as Aaron as he led the children of Israel through the Red Sea. I conjure you that you shall have as much power as John the Baptist as he baptized Christ in the river Jordan” (Sökeland 1903: 205).

The whole imagery of power in this charm is less than convincing. Neither Aaron nor the Baptist are good symbols for power. What they seem to have in common is water. However, water witching is not alluded to: The dowser wants to find gold, silver and precious stones. The charmer did not really know his Bible. He gets the allusion to Moses totally wrong. He overlooks the obvious parallel between the rod and the staff of Moses and mentions the wrong Biblical episode: According to the Book of Numbers, the bronze snake was put on some pole not on the staff of Moses. We may safely assume that this charm did not originate in the priestly context of learned magic.

At the same time, in the late 17th century, we encounter this charm:

Be greeted in the name of God, noble rod, with God the Father I search you, with God the Son I find you, with the power of God the Holy Ghost I break you. I conjure you, rod and growth of one summer, with the power of the All Highest that you will show me what I command you to show and that you do it surely and truthfully, so purely and so clearly as Mary the mother of God was a pure virgin when she gave birth to our Lord Jesus, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost” (Klapper 1905: 53–54).

The charm seems to imply that the rod could be used to discover a variety of objects. The charmer carefully avoids mentioning any specific items the rod is supposed to find: It will show everything that the charmer might want to look for in the future. The rest of the charm invokes the trinity as a source of power and the Virgin. The purity of the Virgin is presented as a parallel to the infallible reliability the charmer expects of his rod: The rod’s reliability is presented as an equivalent to honesty. Thus, it has a certain moral quality. The charm does not draw any parallels between the charmer’s successful search for the rod itself and the searches he wants to perform with the rod. The reason for that might be that the subject changes: The charmer found the rod, but now the rod is supposed to find something for him.

All of the divining rod charms I have found so far addressed the rod itself. Occasionally, they spoke to God like prayers. The charms never addressed the object the dowser hoped to find. The aims of the charmers are obvious: They want to make their rods powerful and reliable instruments. They try to achieve this by establishing a link between the rod and superhuman beings. In truly

magical fashion, the charms presented metaphors like reliable connections. The rod was addressed like a sentient, indeed like a rational and responsible being.

The charms themselves hint at the social contexts in which divining rods and dowsing charms have been used: treasure hunting and mining. In the early modern period, treasure hunting was clearly a magical activity. The magic of treasure hunters had essentially two aims: magic helped them to locate the treasure. It also helped them to communicate with the sprits guarding the treasure while it held these spirits at bay at the same time. Treasure hunters used a whole arsenal of magical instruments and texts. The divining rod was arguably a most important part of the arsenal but it was just one of great variety of magical objects treasure hunters employed. Treasure hunters used crystals and mirrors that showed treasures hidden in the earth, early modern equivalents of Ouija Boards that allegedly could be used to communicate with the dead, and ceremonial swords. Treasure hunters used magical writings of any description, be it printed books, manuscripts, loose sheets with magical characters on them or elaborate drawings of magical circles. The symbols and texts were supposed to enable the treasure hunters to communicate with the spirit beings that guarded the treasure (Dillinger 2012a: 85–113).

The guardians of treasures were of supreme importance for early modern treasure beliefs. Ghosts were the most important but by no means the only treasure guardians. Numerous people believed that fairies watched over or in fact owned the treasures. If these mysterious beings were addressed in the proper way they could be persuaded to give away at least a part of their riches. Demons could be treasure guardians. Strangely enough, the saints and the angels could be treasure guardians, too. The patron saints of treasure seekers were St. Corona, and especially St. Christopher. The most important charms treasure hunters used addressed these saints. There were innumerable versions of the so-called St. Christopher Prayer. All Christopher Prayers followed the same pattern. They implored the saint in the name of God, the trinity, Jesus' sufferings, and of course in the name of other saints to help the charmer find a treasure. St. Christopher was asked to protect the treasure hunters from any harm, to keep evil spirits away from them and to lead them safely to the treasure. A Christopher Prayer from Southern Germany, confiscated in 1741, consisted largely of a litany-like invocation of the saint. Ever-repeated formulae which called upon the saint filled 43 narrowly written pages. The prayer begged St. Christopher, the "treasurer" in the name of God to reveal the hidden treasure "consisting of silver and gold in a good currency accepted in this country". This was a standard feature of Christopher Prayers. As counterfeiting bedevilled the early modern economy, the contemporaries evidently thought it best to ask the saint explicitly for valid coins. The text of the 1741 prayer went on to suggest

what the treasure seekers should do in case they encountered a demon. The demon would ask them ritually for their wishes. They should simply tell the demon that they wished nothing but “God’s mercy, life everlasting and money, 15 000 florins,” in the name of St. Christopher. Again, much shorter charms could be used to the same effect. In the Rhineland, treasure seekers used the formula: “St. Christopher we gave you an undying treasure, our souls, now give us a treasure of money” (Dillinger 2012a: 85–91).

Another patron saint of treasure seekers was St. Corona. So-called Corona booklets contained spells and incantations used by treasure magicians. Very like Christopher, Corona could be asked to show the way to a treasure, or simply to bring money; in one remarkable text she was asked to provide the exact sum of 99 000 florins. A Corona Prayer from Styria written in 1794, resembled – at least at first glance – the ‘official’ prayers of the Catholic church more closely than many Christopher Prayers. The person saying the prayer asked the saint to intercede on his behalf. As Corona had proven her love to Christ through her martyrdom, God would honour her intercession. All of that was of course in keeping with orthodox Catholic piety. However, the help expected from God at the intercession of St. Corona was the very concrete alleviation of the financial situation of the charmer. God should send money through the saint. The text’s theology was as questionable as its syntax:

Virgin and martyr Corona, I, a poor sinner, ask you to remember your great mercy and honour and your control over the treasures of the world and whoever asks you in the name of Jesus Christ your dear bridegroom, in his name you have power to give worldly goods to me, a poor and needy person, so I beg you with all of my humble heart, oh virgin and martyr Corona relief me from my needs and my poverty by giving me 50 000 florins of good gold for the salvation of my soul through the neediness and the redemption of the body.

The prayer stressed that the money Corona was supposed to bring would be used to the greater honour of God. Thus, it was in God’s best interest to send Corona with the money. This rather grotesque prayer-like charm ended, very like many Christopher Prayers, by ritually dismissing the saint after she had brought the treasure.

Now go away in the peace of God, which shall be between you and me, go back to the place where you came from, the eternal peace of God shall be and shall stay forever between you and me, and you will come again, when I wish to see you. Now go away and be blessed, through God and his holy five wounds, and go away in the peace of God, and the blessing

be between you and me and the mine. Amen (Dillinger 2012: 88–89; Reiterer 1905: 424–427).

The elaborate dismissal is strongly reminiscent of magical formulae used to conjure up and to control demons. The magician clearly regarded the saints as dangerous. However, the magician said clearly that he expected St. Corona to come back to him whenever he called her: Dangerous as she might be, she did bring treasure. Saints and demons were more or less interchangeable in treasure-hunters' conjuration. Extreme care had to be used when dealing with the spirit world.

Evidently, treasure hunters who used incantations that would make saints bring the treasure directly do them did not need divining rods anymore. Apart from that, all of these formulae and magical objects could be used together. For early modern treasure hunters, the charm used for the divining rod was often only the beginning of an elaborate magical enterprise. The divining rod was the most simple and the least costly magical object used. The charm said over it was often the most simple of a number of magical formulae used by treasure hunters. Treasure hunting could turn into a magical potpourri. In 1679, a professional treasure hunter handed out amulets to all his helpers and carried a lead tablet with magical signs himself. He found the treasure site with a divining rod over which he had said a secret charm. When he drew a magical circle with some symbols in it on the ground with a sword. He put birch twigs on the edge of the circle, said a lengthy conjuration and then he allowed his helpers to start digging in strictest ritual silence (Dillinger 2012: 108–111).

Treasure hunting and dowsing, especially dowsing using charms smacked of witchcraft. All magic could be condemned as demonic i.e. as virtually identical with witchcraft. In 1689, a spectacular case from Grenoble drove home this message. Canon LeBrun tried to convince the successful female dowser Olliva that she did the devil's work. Olliva did not feel guilty in any way. However, she agreed to pray fervently for God's help: if dowsing really was magic God should not allow the rod ever to move in her hand again. And indeed, after that Olliva lost her dowsing skills completely (Le Brun 1700: 226; see also Dym 2011: 147–148). In this episode, the prayer worked like a counter charm. While usual dowsers' charms implored the rod to move or asked God to grant it the power to move Olliva's prayer asked God to keep the rod from moving. This inversion narrative emphasized that dowsing had nothing to do with the dowser. It depended on the intervention of superhuman forces. Olliva was no witch – canon LeBrun never suggested that she could be a witch. She had used demonic forces unbeknownst to herself. We might see the Olliva episode as a rough parallel to the cases of female demoniacs in 17th century France: They

were the more or less passive and innocent victims of demons that manipulated the material world.

Miners seem to have been a lot more scrupulous than treasure hunters simply because mining was usually under the direct control of the state. After all, magic was, at least in theory, a punishable offense. Nevertheless, early texts about mining dating from the beginning of the 16th century already mention dowsing for minerals as a matter of course. This suggests that at least in the pioneer mining centers of Germany, dowsing had become an integral part of mining around 1500 at the latest. Authors sympathetic to dowsing do not tire of reminding us that Georg Agricola one of the founding fathers of the mining technology and modern engineering wrote at some length about the divining rod. However, many of them fail to acknowledge what Agricola actually had to say. Agricola's main concern was that dowzers used "cantonibus" [charms]. The engineer Agricola got suspicious when he learned that neither the exact shape nor the material the rod was made of mattered a great deal. To his practical mind this could mean only one thing: that the effectiveness of the rod was entirely based on the charms dowzers used. This proved that dowsing was magic. Therefore, Agricola explained he could not possibly repeat and write down the charms of the dowzers, even though he knew them. Agricola who did not hesitate to reveal and to spread sensitive and valuable knowledge concerning the cutting-edge technology of mining did not want to spread magical knowledge. The innovation he wanted to support required to break free from a questionable tradition of magic. A self-respecting Christian miner would never use anything that came "ex incantatorum impuris fontibus" [out of the impure wells of charmers]. Without the illicit charms, the divining rod would not work. Only simple folk working in the mines tried to dowse without knowing the right charms. Agricola's verdict was shared by a number of miners and mining entrepreneurs. Even though some schools for miners taught dowsing, they avoided using charms and incantations (Agricola 2003: 26–28, see also Barrett / Besterman 1926 S. 6–9; Knoblauch 1991: 74–77; Dym 2011).

Dowsing without invoking any superhuman beings and without talking to the rod: this might not have looked like magic anymore. But did it work? Obviously, even though a number of miners embraced it, the new practice of dowsing without charms was not enough. The innovative practice needed an innovative explanation.

Not everybody who advocated dowsing advocated the power of the divining rod. In 1693, LeLorraine de Vallemont, a Catholic cleric wrote a book on the exploits of Jacques Aymar, arguably the most prominent dowser of the early modern period. Vallemont explained that the divining rod merely helped the dowzers to concentrate and in a way to express what they felt. He argued that



certain particles rose from subterranean water as well as from mineral or hidden treasures which caused the movement of the divining rod. Vallemont explained that these particles were “les atomes” which had been described by the ancient Greek philosophers and more recently by Boyle. The particles entered through the pores into human bodies. Sensitive persons – such as Aymar – could feel the particles’ influence. Aymar did not need any charms. He never used any kind of incantation and tried not to interact with the spirit world. He could dowse simply because he had a talent for dowsing. He was more sensitive than ordinary persons and could feel what was quite outside of the reach of the senses of normal human beings (Vallemont 1693: 28–40). Alexander von Humboldt, the great naturalist and explorer, explained why the divining rod did not work in his hands: “I belong to the kind of people who are by nature so inferior that precious metals cannot excite them” (Sökeland 1903: 283).

Thus, in dowsing, the person of the dowser was all that mattered. Apart from the obvious chance to explain failures without questioning dowsing in general, this explanation had three major advantages. First of all, it helped to distinguish dowsing from witchcraft, indeed, it placed both activities firmly in totally different contexts. The idea that dowsing depends on the person of the dowser alone contradicted the interpretation of dowsing suggested by the Olliva episode. Demonology would always argue that the person of the magician did not matter at all, as Satan was behind all magic. According to the demonologists, the devil was the true author of all the seemingly miraculous feats of the witches. The witches themselves were the devil’s tools, expendable and unimportant. If you explained the ability to dowse as a natural quality of the dowser’s person which worked independently of all the charms and tools he might or might not use you implied that dowsing could not have anything to do with witchcraft. The suggestion that the ability to dowse is essentially a talent that some people have was strangely compatible with popular concepts of magical powers. Folk belief might still maintain that some kinds of people had magical powers, such as virgins and vagabonds, but it essentially accepted the idea that some individuals could have occult talents others simply did not have (Sperling 1668; Albinus 1704; Dillinger 2007: 51–54; Dillinger 2012: 153–163; Dym 2011: 65–66).

Secondly, if dowsing depended on a natural ability of the dowser only, one did not have to maintain that there was any connection between the rod and the object one looked for. There was no need to speculate any further about quasi magnetic forces that linked the rod with mineral veins, water or buried treasure. The exact shape and the material of the rod had never really mattered. A variety of rods seemed to work. They came in a number of forms and were made from different but mostly very cheap materials. In addition to that,

there were any number of suggestions about the right way to hold them. What all of these rods and techniques of using the rod had in common was that they were simple, cheap and meant for general use (Zeidler 1700: 40–46; Ruff 2003: 246–248; Agricola 2003: 26–28). It goes almost without saying that this added greatly to the appeal of dowsing.

If one assumed that the rod was simply an instrument the dowser used involuntarily to express what he felt, it was easy to understand why neither the form nor the material of the rod nor its exact handling mattered. If the divining rod moved at all, that was because of some reflex-like spasm in the muscles of the dowser. This spasm was in turn caused by dowser's sensitivity to elemental particles or as Vallemont had said "les atomes." Johann Gottfried Zeidler, an Enlightened Protestant theologian, poked fun at this notion by suggesting ever more ludicrous replacements for divining rods. Zeidler explained that you might as well use a sausage as a divining rod: "If you hold a Frankfurter the right way it makes a perfect divining rod and moves so strongly in your hand that it might break" (Zeidler 1700: 48).

Thirdly, if the success of a dowser depended on his personal talent alone, charms did not matter anymore. All the old charms of dowers had been about the rod, God and the saints and about the objects the dowser had hoped to find. Of course, the dowser himself was the charmer, so he played an active part insofar as he recited and used the charm. But the charm said nothing about the charmer himself. It was not designed to give him any special powers. Thus, the innovative explanation of dowsing that suggested that the success of the dowser depended on his sensitivity to minute particles made the entire tradition of charms obsolete.

With this kind of innovative explanation to support it, the popularity of dowsing soared. Even though in the early 16th century, dowers seem to have focused on finding metals or minerals, their work became quickly a lot more diversified. In the 18th century, they dowsed not only for minerals, water, and treasure troves. Dowers claimed that they could find all lost goods. In the 18th century, they searched for forgotten boundary stones, they found suitable sites for building, they searched for game in the nearly exhausted hunting grounds of the nobility, they used the divining rod to find an unoccupied place in the churchyard, dowers could even find out if a woman was pregnant. When they themselves had gotten lost, they could find the right way with their rods. They could even find mistakes in history books. In the 18th century, dowsing was not even about searching and finding anymore. The divining rod simply provided answers to all kinds of questions. At the beginning of the 18th century at the latest, it had become the all-purpose instrument of divination (Albinus 1704: 130–134, 494–499, 516–525; Zeidler 1700: 533–546).

This is how the divining rod survived. With the rise of the industrial, urban capitalist society traditional magical treasure hunting broke down. Modern treasure hunters are would-be historians or pseudo-archaeologists. They communicate with the dead not by using charms and incantations but by reading historical documents. Instead of trying to talk to the spirit world in order to find treasures, treasure hunters have become interested in historical narratives that provide clues which help to discover hidden or lost objects. The magic has turned into history; the communication of the charm into the interpretation of a source (Dillinger 2011: 178–210). Improvements and technical innovations in mining engineering marginalized dowsing during the 18th century. Experience and the increasing specialization of mining technology together with the rise of geology as an exact science transformed the whole industry. However, during the 18th century dowsing without the use of charms had become the universal technique of divination. It was cheap and simple. It could be done without charms, indeed without any of the complex magical lore the traditional treasure hunts had required. The very fact that dowsing was largely non-communicative seemed to be the key to its continuing success. As it was claimed that the ability to dowse depended entirely on the individual, inner and non-transferable qualities of the dowser himself the powers of the rod could be explained as being really the powers of the dowser. This helped to avoid the inconvenient question how exactly dowsing was supposed to work.

Dowsing survived mainly in two contexts: Water witching – a field in which comparatively cheap amateurs could still prosper – and the medical field understood in a very broad sense. Today, many dowsers claim to be able to detect so-called E-Rays – the mere existence of which is not recognized by science – which are supposed to make people ill. Dowsing for so-called ley lines became fashionable late in the 20th century. Others use the dowsing rod to find effective medicines or healthy food. The divining rod proved to be – in more than one sense – incredibly flexible. However, most of the dowsers of the 19th and 20th centuries followed the pattern established in the 18th century that suggested dowsing without the use of any charms (Prokop & Wimmer 1985; Knoblauch 1991: 182–266; Dillinger 2011: 157–159; Kivari 2016: 13–16).

Modern esotericism brought the charms back into dowsing. The divining rod or its more modern equivalent the pendulum are supposed to answer complicated and specific questions. The vocabulary of the rod and the pendulum is limited: They can move or point in a specific direction. This might be interpreted as yes, no, maybe. If the rod is supposed to solve a more complicated problem or even to help the dowser through a decision making process, the dowser needs to ask very precise, specific questions. If he or she cannot use charts or devices like the Quija Board he or she has to ask series of questions.

In the 1960s, the British Society of Dowsters recommended that the dowser should enter into a pseudo-dialogue with the rod. Any problem the rod was supposed to deal with had to be broken down into a series of questions that could be answered with yes or no (Bell 1965: 6–8). Of course, this dialogue was no charm or incantation. However, it suggested the idea that the dowser should address the dowsing instrument i.e. that he should talk to it. Of course, the dowsters maintained that they did not really need the rod to find what they were looking for: the dialogue with the rod was simply supposed to help them focus. Still, this analogy of communication became an important element of the preparation for dowsing in a way that was reminiscent of the old charms. As early as 1986, the idea that a dowser had to talk to a pendulum in order to “program” it like a computer figured prominently in a book about ‘spiritual dowsing’ (Lonegren 1986). Before the dowser could even know what the movement of the pendulum meant he had to establish some kind of rapport with it. In 1990, a book that recommended dowsing as a way to find healthy food stressed the same point. The dowser had to ask the pendulum what movement stands for ‘yes’ and which movement stands for ‘no’. Thus, the author suggested that the pendulum had a certain autonomy; he compared it to a dog that had to be trained. There were even mock questions that were supposed to test the reliability of the pendulum (Bailey 1990: 45–56). The analogy between the pendulum and a computer that had to be programmed seems to have been more convincing than the one between the pendulum and a pet that had to be trained (Ozaniec 1994: 13). In 1999, a guide for dowsters stressed how important it was to “interact” with the pendulum. This was more than a pseudo-dialogue. The dowsing instrument needed to be “programmed”. Indeed, “the technique for asking the pendulum questions is similar to that of using a computer.” One needs to “activate” it and to ask questions in a specific way. Only then could the dowsing instrument become an “extension of your psyche.” At any rate, it was a good idea to invoke some force of light before dowsing in order to ward off any kind of negative influence (Eason 1999: 16–22). The influence of digital technology on contemporary dowsing is obvious: precision and the right phrasing of questions matter. The prayer-like charms of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period have been replaced by programming, a stylized simplified language comparable to a computer language. *Dowsing: The Ultimate Guide for the 21st century* explained in 2010 that divining rods had to be disciplined. The book compared the divining rod to an unruly child. It needed to be told precisely what it had to do. The central element of dowsing was the art of asking the right questions in the proper way. The dowser should say out loud what he expected of the rod always adding a polite ‘please’. This seems to suggest that the dowsing instrument had become more than an inanimate instrument.

Still, it was not claimed that the dowsing instrument should be regarded as a living or conscious entity that by itself could have or gain any kind of information about the material world. All the dialogues with the rod were supposed to be simply a means to access the “vast hidden database of human awareness” (Brown 2010: 38, 61–70).

The little dialogues between dowzers and dowsing instruments modern esotericism so urgently recommends mirror the old charms. The communication with the rod has two aims: charge the rod with power and make sure that it answers every question correctly. Essentially, this is what the late medieval and early modern charms did, too. The charms invoked God and the saints. They seemed to remind the rod, the fellow creature of the dowser, that their creator wanted it to be effective and truthful. The example of the saints should teach the rod to tell the pure truth. After Agricola’s criticism, new quasi-scientific explanations for the presumed effectiveness of dowsing were formed that rejected the use of charms. The more these new explanations focused on the person of the dowser himself the more important became his or her concentration. The dowsing instrument helped the dowser to concentrate. In order to do this, it needed to be in perfect harmony with the dowser, in a way it helped him to realize what he knew or felt already. The modern dialogues with the dowsing instruments do not really reveal any objective fact. They are supposed to help the dowser to explore his or her own mind and to use his or her full potential. Neither the authority of God nor the reality of the material world matter anymore. In modern dowsing, the charmer charms himself.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Dowsing is just beginning to attract the attention of historians, see Dym 2011, Dillinger 2012, Dillinger 2017. Folkloristic studies, even if they work with some historical materials, do not use key secondary and primary sources, Kivari 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Tepl, Johann von: *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* (ca. 1400), [http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/?id=5&xid=2828&kapitel=1#gb\\_found](http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/?id=5&xid=2828&kapitel=1#gb_found).

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## DEALING WITH DANGER: THE PRACTICES OF KEEPING AND DISCARDING MAGICAL LETTERS

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Disposing of a piece of paper with a textual apotropaios might be even more problematic than storing or sharing it. A perfect example is a type of amulet named “heavenly letters”, “luck letters” or “chain letters”. Such a letter is often framed by its owner as an object or sacred/magic artifact which can act and produce non-beneficial effect on its own, without any human agency: one does not necessarily need to read or otherwise handle a luck letter to receive *bad* luck, while to receive *good* luck certain actions must be undertaken. Most often bad luck or a curse affects those who ignore or neglect a luck letter, and some of the later examples of this genre define at length different punishments for those who tear it or throw it away. Finding themselves in this situation, people turn to contemporary traditions of discarding sacred or malign artifacts. However, people often choose an intermediate strategy of giving a letter away, taking it to a specialist or discreetly passing it to a neighbor. The latter case is considered a malign magical activity. The intertwining between a luck letter as an autonomous force with a potential negative effect, “lay” senders and receivers and “specialists”, all bound together with the problem of discarding a magical object forms a complex and dynamic network of actors.

**Keywords:** apotropaios, chain letter, framing, heavenly letter, textual amulet, written folklore

The context of folklore transmission has been discussed by researchers for decades. The main object of these discussions has been oral folklore, the context being primarily the immediate situation of text (re)production such as social relations of the participants, environment, related activities and rituals. In this paradigm, the verbal component of the assemblage is considered to be the one shaping the interaction. Yet there are a large number of folklore genres where



verbal, visual, artifactual codes are so entangled that it can be difficult to say which of them is the leading one.

One of the most immediate examples is the genre of written charms, which function both as magical texts and protective artifacts (though the text seems to be the leading component, the charm can still be used as a *apotropaia* by an illiterate person who is not able to “activate” it). Another widely spread folklore form is the chain letter. These letters are programmed to circulate while retaining key elements of the text: many of them contain an explicit instruction not to change anything within the text, and all of them require the receiver to maintain the line of transmission in a certain way – that is, to copy the verbal text (sometimes illustrated) a number of times and pass the copies to others.

The requirement to pass on the copies – i.e., operate material objects – defines the artifactual functioning of the genre. If the text is considered sacred or magical, the artifact that carries it often shares its qualities, and this, in turn, defines the mode of interacting with it (keeping, moving, destroying, etc). Conversely, we can hypothesize that if a specific “magical” mode of interaction with an artifact is observed, the text is also considered as having some supernatural power. With a folklore form such as the chain letter which has dramatically changed its pragmatics over the course of its existence, this hypothesis can actually give an answer to the question of its place within the system of folklore at any given historical period. The examination of practices related to the materiality of the text can thus reveal the beliefs and ideas which ensure its very existence and longevity. In order to develop an idea of the chain letter as a genre with magical pragmatics, we will discuss the practices of sharing, keeping and discarding it over the course of a century.

In the early texts preceding the contemporary tradition of chain letters, it was prescribed to keep the text and share it with others and to copy whenever such request is made. This type of text is labeled *Himmelsbriefe*/Letters from Heaven/celestial letters (see Koehler 1912). These are texts which are claimed to be received from heaven. The appeal to copy and circulate them is secondary for this group of texts, although they describe both a profit for the obedient and a punishment for those who fail to meet the prescriptions.

Those who doubt and will neglect the truth of this holy writing... will be punished on the day of Last Judgement; and those who will tell about it will be blessed and cleared of all sins even these are as numerous as stars in the sky... Those who keep the letter piously in their homes, will be blessed, and neither an evil spirit, nor thunder, nor fire, nor plague, nor any other evil will ever touch them (Iosif, archbishop 1864: 73).<sup>1</sup>

To a large extent this type of prescription is defined by the type of transmission. “Letters from Heaven” were normally sold by wandering merchants or monks or copied by literate peasants from each other. In contrast with many other charms and amulets, it was considered beneficial to share such letters with others and advocate their magical powers. As a result, the appearance of such letter in one peasant’s household generally led to dissemination of heavenly letters throughout a village.

A heavenly letter was supposed to be kept by its owners and read on certain occasions. In the late 19th century Russian peasants normally followed one of two key practices. Following the first practice, the letter was perceived primarily as an artifact, its textual qualities being ignored. In this case one did not need to read it to prevent the house and its inhabitants from disaster and danger. Hence, the access to the letter could be rather limited, and the sheet itself was kept with sacred objects, normally behind icons:

During pastoral visits to his parish members, an experienced priest notices on the icon shelf a folded piece of paper, and to the hosts’ embarrassment, takes the letter (Znanie 1901: 584).

An indirect sign that the letters were considered as artifacts belonging rather to religious culture than to the area of magical artifacts, is the following evidence of handling it. In one of the villages of Penza region, a clergyman preached that the heavenly letters had no connection with Orthodox religion, contained false information and had, therefore to be burnt – which was a typical practice for destroying evil/magical/heathen objects to purify the space from them. Yet, one peasant woman transformed this prescription: “*Well, my father, do you remember how you spoke about the “Holy Mother’s Dream” and told me to burn it? So did I, and the ashes, so to say, I’ve put in the water, to make it right.*” (Bystrov 1895). By putting the ashes into water she frames the letter as an object with sacral qualities which have to be destroyed in such a way that its remains cannot be desecrated. In the last decade of the 20th century, burning, putting ashes in water and then pouring the water in a “clear” place where nobody walks (or simply burying the ashes in the same place), became a typical practice for dealing with unwanted consecrated objects – from icons to shells of Easter eggs and willow branches which were infused with holy water to any piece of paper with names of God or saints on it.

The extreme form of “artificialization” of a heavenly letter was its usage as a war amulet. Most often the power to protect soldiers was ascribed to the letter type called “Braker Himmelsbrief”, which involves an offer to divert bullets and to stop wounds from bleeding: *wehn das bludet oder sonst bludige wuden hatt, der lege den Brief daruf, das wird das Blut gestillt warden* (Kloberdanz 1988:

44). There are, however, some cases in which the power to protect at war was ascribed to a heavenly letter without such explicit information. One of those is the “Languedoc” letter (Radchenko 2015) which, according to a widely spread belief, was carried by victorious General Skobelev and protected its owner from bullets (Maslovsky 1882: 20).

Being perceived as a personal amulet, a heavenly letter could be kept folded in a pocket, sewn inside clothing, or worn in a piece of cloth over one’s neck. This practice survived till at least World War II. Below are two examples of this practice:

When Anastasia Ivanovna’s brother was sent in 1945 to clear mine fields in the vicinity, on his mother’s demand she copied the texts of the “Sunday prayer” and “God’s letters” in a small booklet 10 to 15 cm. This book her mother put into her son’s pocket. His safe return from this work was likely to support the belief of future healers in the power of “God’s words.” (Loginov 2009: 77).

In Mataev’s war biography there’re plenty of battles. He was wounded a few times. But he stayed alive in this bloodbath. “I was probably saved by the holy letter with a prayer which my mother gave to me when I was leaving. I wrapped it in a piece of cloth and attached it to the inner side of my shirt” – says Vassily Grigorievitch. (Shcherbinina 2012).

In case of emergency, the owners of a letter turned to those who could read it or knew the text by heart to reinforce the power of the amulet. This practice was based on an idea that a heavenly letter is primarily a prayer or a charm which is “activated” by reading it, preferably out loud. The letter which was primarily seen as such a text was either kept inside a prayer book or copied into a hand-written collection of similar texts, which in turn could be kept with other similar objects, e.g. in the box with clothes or cloth prepared for one’s funeral. It could be then taken out and read by a local “man of letters” or female magical specialist on certain occasions, e.g. during childbirth, illness, etc. (Bystrov 1895). The extreme variant of reading to activate the letter appeared in the second half of the 20th century when amulet wearing became a despised practice. It was understood as a practice of uneducated, conservative, and primarily elderly village inhabitants, so while the function of an amulet was not put in question, it could no longer be carried by its owner. In some cases, then, the letter was read over a glass of water, which then was drunk by the one who had to be protected or expected benefits from the letter. This practice changed the military apotropaic practices: “Today, if a letter is found, soldiers and commanders may laugh at it, so texts are read three times on a glass of water to be drunk by the soldier” (Loginov 2007: 76). A similar practice is also

found in the 1970s–2000s as a part of teenage girls' tradition of exchanging chain letters which promised love to the one who sent out a certain number of copies and either just drank some water or burnt the original copy, dissolved the ashes in a glass of water and drank it.

In other words, activation practices of textual amulets could vary from simply keeping it in a prescribed way to reading it out loud in situations when apotropaic power had to be reinforced. On certain occasions, their text could even be alienated from the artifact, which was destroyed and consumed to receive the promised benefits.

Since at least the first quarter of the 19th century, the model begins to change. Roughly in 1830s – 1840s the so-called “Jerusalem prayer” appears, which in the Russian tradition was ascribed to Archbishop Anthony of Voronezh. This type of letter includes a legend in which the Lord's voice is heard miraculously in Jerusalem, a prayer, and a prescription to pass the story and the prayer to nine other persons. The instruction to read or keep it becomes rare (see S-kiy 1905), giving way to another way to activate magical power contained in the letter – copying and transmitting them. It became the base for the formation of the chain letter genre in which this appeal is central, even to the point that in some cases it even displaces the celestial message itself. The letters prescribed to fulfill this instruction in a very limited number of days. Ignoring the letter, it was claimed, would result in danger to the receiver and/or one's family. Since the introduction of this strategy of multiplication of the artifact, the problem of the status of the original copy appeared. The receivers wondered if the original was included in the number of copies to be sent out, was it to be kept at home or discarded. In limited cases the letter included direct instructions on this, e.g. (ZMBOR 1928), but mostly it was left to the imagination of the receiver.

This model of transmission is different from the one typical for heavenly letters in a number of ways. Firstly, in it the receiver did not explicitly have the intention of receiving the letter and with it the responsibility for its proper handling. Heavenly letters were often bought with an intention to protect one's household; chain letters arrived unexpectedly. Secondly, this model requires much more effort from the receiver: one has to find a number of contacts to share the letter with. In 1908, a Syberian edition commented with subtle irony a story of a shop owner who received the prayer with a request to copy it:

The task was simple, but in these remote places it was undoable: with all his effort, the shop owner could not find nine literate persons neither in Ayan, nor in the area. This issue was of great concern for the superstitious shop owner. (Vinogradov 1908: 84).

To ensure that the letter is transmitted in this situation, it started to be enriched with more concrete promises of good and bad luck rather than just a list of possible consequences. In many variants of the “Jerusalem prayer” from 1910s there appears a list of “cases”: information about people who presumably received the letter but failed to follow its prescriptions and were punished. These cases are quite detailed but anonymous: no names of presumed victims of the letter are given:

The “facts” which are supposed to confirm the message, are also given: one inhabitant of Kharkov burnt this prayer and on the ninth day after this his only daughter was killed. Then it is related about some “young wife” in Petersburg who received the prayer, tore it apart and threw away, and on third day found the prayer undamaged on her table – but on this very day her husband was conscripted and went to war (S-kiy 1905: 766).<sup>2</sup>

The increase in the flow of chain letters in social networks with a limited number of available contacts led to the oversaturation of the social environment with chain letters: the chances that someone will receive the same letter several times from different senders increased significantly. In 1913, poet Alexander Blok writes in his diary: “In the evening I received the prayer which several days ago was received and sent to nine persons by Lyuba”<sup>3</sup> (Blok 1963: 206). Within just several days, members of one family have received the prayer twice – and may have received more, since Blok was extremely popular and had a vast number of correspondents. This oversaturation, in its turn, made chain letters more and more unwelcome by the beginning of the 20th century, and sending such a letter could result in certain social consequences. Due to this, people began to spread letters anonymously, sending them without the return address or leaving them at somebody’s door or in a mailbox. An interviewee informed that she avoided social shame by sending letters out to random people: “I’ve sent to various addresses... I knew the street, say, in Tomsk, and so I sent it there to a random house” (Interview 1, F55+, 2013). In other cases, people used the addresses from address books, private advertisements, etc., for the same purpose.

This transformation led to the reframing of chain letters: a paper with a magical text appearing seemingly from nowhere and having no authority of a magical/religious specialist or a relative to advocate its power personally to the receiver began to be perceived not just a nuisance but a danger. It started to be associated with malevolent magical intention to ‘spoil’ someone using an artifact. The text, offering bad luck to those who do not pass the letter to the others, supported this idea. A century later, one of our informants confessed that she would not pass this letter to someone she knew personally, the only

exception was a girl with whom she had quarrelled at school [Interview 2, F30+, Moscow].

The explicit threat described in the prescriptions and examples of chain letters and implicit perceived danger that was generated by the change of transmission mode are, however, only a part of the problem. As was already mentioned above, in the practice of handling chain letters magical danger is combined with very real social danger. In different periods of the tradition's development, this danger could vary from ridicule to repressions by authorities on all levels. In the 1930s, for instance, owning a chain letter was regarded by the authorities as keeping a religious (and hence counter-revolutionary) pamphlet, which, in turn, was a reason to cause legal proceedings on grounds of state treason against its owner, sometimes ending in the death penalty.

Thus, the letter became a double threat, even if one was going to fulfill the prescriptions. In other words, both strategies were understood as dangerous: keeping and transmitting the letter could result in criminal prosecutions; refusal to transmit and destroying it could lead to magical punishment. Before the 1980s this idea was continuously supported by exempla, which passed from the Jerusalem prayer to another text – the letter about a boy who met God:

Holy Letter.

Hail to Father and Son and holy spirit, holy Mother of God. Amen!

A boy of 12 years was ill, he met God. God told him: “copy this letter 22 times and send to various lands”. The boy did this and got better. One family copied the letter and got happiness, another family tore the letter and got grief. This was checked. Copy this letter 22 times and in 36 days you will get happiness and joy. But if you keep the letter for more than 3 weeks, you will get grief. Copying started in 1936.

Note on 36th day. (Author's collection, approx. 1988.)

Despite being non-specific, these exempla proved to be a powerful suggestive instrument. Thus, the campaign against superstitions, which went along the lines of anti-religious campaign, was forced to include some counterbalance to the chain letters' exempla and, more important, threats. Since at least 1960s, the critical press publications on chain letters are filled with “first-hand accounts” about receiving and ignoring chain letters. These texts were presented in the form of “letters to the editor” and included stories of how a particular person or family (names, ages, localities included) received one such letter, how they interpreted it and what happened (or rather, did not happen) to them:

Dear editors! I'm 49 years old and I'm a welder. As you understand, I work with fire, and when I work neither devil nor saint spirit can approach me. I consider myself an atheist and understand that my happiness is in my

own hands. I'm writing this to you because recently I received a chain letter, which says: if I copy it nine times and send to various addressees, I'll get happiness. And if I don't I'll get an incurable illness. Nonsense! I did not write to anybody, but instead I've written to your newspaper: I'm happy to live and work in the Soviet country! When I'm ill – I get cured in good hospitals, I go on vacations to Crimea and Caucasus! So, dear religionists, it won't work with us, you'd better take on some useful job instead of spreading nonsense. (Ivanenko 1983: 4).

This technique of exemplum concretization was then reflected in the chain letter tradition. In the 1980–1990s a new chain letter type appeared, which we will refer to as “The Letter from Holland”. It had a direct answer to the testimonials in the atheistic press – it contained names of people who presumably received it before, and detailed information on outcomes of nonfulfillment of the instructions. The type most probably started as a translation of a text in English, German or Polish, which contained exempla with particular names since at least the 1930s (Anderson 1938: 17).

This letter type very soon adapted to the cultural context. Instead of abstract and often weird names the new subtype of “Holland Letter” includes fake stories about prominent figures of (mainly) Russian history of the 20th century. Notably, all of them are presented as suffering punishment for disobeying the instructions of the letter. Marchall Tukhachevsky presumably burnt a letter and then was arrested and shot; Conan Doyle ignored it and got into an accident, his hands were amputated; Nikita Khrushchev threw it away (sometimes into the toilet) and was cast down by other members of the government; pop singer Alla Pugacheva copied the letter and won a significant contract with an American company.

Two aspects are significant in this list. Firstly, it exploits the knowledge about particular persons and context of Russian history as an authoritative source to support the power of the letter. Secondly, it forms an idea that the letter's “revenge” is symmetrical with the means of destruction of the letter – those who destroy the letter, die; those who ignore it or throw away, are devoid of something – from hands to political position; finally, following the instruction will also result in a very concrete form of luck – receiving an unexpected income.

Being put in this rigid frame, the receivers of the letters become even more concerned with the elimination of danger. Since the destruction of the artifact on which the charm is written means an immediate threat of death, the need appears to find a safer solution to the problem.

A very typical way to deal with chain letters throughout their history in 19th–21st centuries was to consult a local priest and ask him to destroy the

letter (Narodnoye sueverie 1892). Before the revolution, all documented cases of destroying the letter involved a priest. In the Soviet period there are very few such cases, but after 1991, when religious practices again became legitimate, this number is growing again up to almost 50% of documented cases in our database. Interestingly, in the late Soviet period some of the priests confessed that they recommended to ignore and burn these letters, but some used to collect a few of them and pass this collection to a representative of the Council for Religious Affairs<sup>4</sup> (Lebedev 1988: 11).

Notably, the particular practices of destroying the letter change over time as well. Before 1917 and after 1991 the most common practices were burning or tearing it apart. In the Soviet period the practice, which was propagated was ignoring the letter and throwing it away. In many cases, the way of destroying a letter after consulting a priest differed depending on who was actually destroying it. If a lay person was to do it, he or she was normally recommended to burn the letter (which returns us to the practice of handling sacral objects described above). In a situation when the priest did it, he normally tore the paper apart and in many cases said a short prayer or pronounced a religious formula (which may be a psychological manoeuvre to calm the anxiety of the person who brought the letter, yet proves to be more significant than that):

He took it and saying “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” tore the envelope and threw the pieces into the box with the candle ends. (Konstantinov 2008).

The letter gave me a buzz and I left it as a keepsake. And what do you think? Exactly in four days <time limit of this letter type – DR> I caught a bad cold, while it was +25 degrees Celsius outside! Normally I’m not superstitious. I’m not afraid of black cats and do not look for a trigger to quarrel if I spill the salt. But when you are pregnant you begin to look differently upon things. As for the ill-fated letter, I brought it to the church. The priest destroyed it, spoke a prayer to the Lord and advised not to circulate the letter (which I already thought myself). (Pargina 2002).

This confirms the idea that even when the clergy declines any connection of the chain or heavenly letter to religious texts, the practices of destroying it link the letter to either sacral or evil magical objects. In both cases, the letter is destroyed with obvious intention not just to get rid of it, but also to purge oneself and to disempower the amulet: a lay person does it by burning the letter, a clergyman by reading a prayer before or while tearing it.

The situation changed with the development of electronic communication networks which led to the almost complete extinguishment of paper chain letters. Going virtual, the chain letter obviously loses its artifactual dimension.



This dematerialization of the chain letter leads, on the first stage, to the erosion of its amulet role. At this stage, when the letter is mainly transmitted through email, the tradition does not consider it a problem that the text is saved onto the hard drive or in the “Sent” folder of the electronic mailbox. The instructions in the letter say nothing regarding the operations with the initial letter – the only instruction is not to ignore (i.e., in practice, not to delete it or leave it hanging in the mail list unprocessed) and send it out.

The tradition, however, begins to compensate for the loss. Since the early days of electronic chain letters, the users tended to decorate them with visual imagery, from ASCII-arts to photos. In the 2000s, chain letters in the form of Powerpoint presentations became popular. During the last decade, chain letters became more independent from the addresser. It is often enough to place it on one’s Facebook page (Voolaid 2013) and others would themselves repost it. Most of these texts are presented in a visual form and to a certain extent retain their amulet role. Once again, it becomes important to keep them and allow them to be viewed by others.

The next major change in the practice of handling chain letters is due to the fact that, while retaining its dangerous qualities it also can become a bother when the mailbox becomes full with letters. It can also bring social discomfort for the sender because of this, leading sometimes to consequences for one’s personal relations with friends and relatives and for one’s career. This means that despite state repression, chain letters continue to be a double threat to the receiver – both as a magical danger and a rational threat to one’s comfort and social status. To oppose these, a number of practices have been developed.

The users of these practices claim that the goal of these is just to prevent their contacts from sending them more chain letters; however, the practices also bear traces of reverting bad luck. The easiest options are sending the letter back or sending a number of copies of the same letter to the initial sender. A more exquisite form is sending a parody on chain letters or a parodying menace answer to it:

New game: send me a chain letter and be fucked off my contact list.

Send this message to your 10 friends and in a minute you won’t have 10 friends. If you do not send it in 10 minutes your feet will rot off. And then hands as well. Do not send back because I don’t want my feet to rot off. It’s true. One girl did not believe and died and all her family died and her cat died and her dog also died. And I’ve burnt her house.

In some cases, “anti-chain letter” charms in visual form are placed on personal pages on social network sites to prevent one’s contacts from sharing electronic chain letters with the owner of the page or sent personally. Notably,

the popularity of these forms is dependent on their size: the number of words is inversely proportionate to the average number of publications. Parodies up to 200 words are republished approximately three times less often than cliché menaces with a word count not exceeding 40, and pictures are more popular than word-only menaces.

In almost 200 years of heavenly/chain letter history, these items played a multifaceted set of roles. As a magical text and an artifact at the same time, they can be perceived both as an apotropaic and a dangerous item. In the first case, the text can be alienated from the artifact, but the tradition always returns to the material dimension of a magical letter in some way. The power of the magical letter is contained in this combination of reading and writing words. In cases, when a heavenly letter is stored with sacral objects or amulets, its power can be reinforced by reading it, preferably out loud. In the situation of total dematerialization of the letter in cyberspace, the tradition attempts to put the words into some visual frame to at least imitate the lost artifactual dimension.

The second quality of a heavenly/chain letter is that it can become dangerous – both in magical and social dimensions. In this case, it has to be avoided and if encountered it should be destroyed. Throughout the history of the genres of folklore text, audiences and authorities engage in a complex dialogue of testimonials considering safety/unsafety of discarding the text. In the case of refusal to interact with the artifact, specific practices and specialists are required.

Notably, the changes to the text, sometimes critical, do not affect these two qualities. Any given variant of a chain letter or even a subgenre retains the combination of two dimensions of an assemblage, verbal and artifactual, in which the text not only gives sense to the object and increases its value (for example, a prayer or a relation of a vision makes the letter not just an amulet but a valuable source of religious information, especially when the latter is limited), but also protects the object from destruction. The increase of opposition to chain letters is indirectly reflected in the change of their texts, both the prescriptions and exempla. The object, in turn, ensures the protection and transmission of the text. The danger associated with a magical or sacral object limits the possible ways of handling it: in many cases even the perspective of social risks associated with chain letters do not prevent them from being shared precisely because the profits and dangers of handling the apotropaicos are seen as more immediate and significant, and the counter-measures (be it consulting a priest or a counter-amulet) are perceived as risky, hard to get or unreliable. Seemingly, this combination of relatively flexible and interchangeable texts with fairly rigid practices of handling a magical object has at least partially ensured the survival of the genre through decades of repression by church and state authorities.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All translations of texts in Russian are made by the author
- <sup>2</sup> In 1905, the Russian-Japanese war was being fought, so the threat of the letter was quite immediate.
- <sup>3</sup> Lyubov Dmitrievna Mendeleeva-Blok (1881–1939), the poet’s wife.
- <sup>4</sup> A governmental body existing in the Soviet Union from 1965 to 1991, which was engaged into administration of all religious bodies on the territory of the state, with a special focus on the Russian Orthodox Church.

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## **TEXTUALIZATION STRATEGIES, TYPOLOGICAL ATTEMPTS, DIGITAL DATABASES: WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE CHARM SCHOLARSHIP?**

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In the article I present an overview of transformations in approaches to textualizing and typologizing folklore texts over the past 150 years using the example of incantations from anthologies to digital databases with a view to highlighting the new horizons digital databases can open up for research. In the first part of the article, I show how the textual characteristics of the incantation genre and the often implicit questions of researchers influenced the textological strategies of classic incantation editions. These primarily typological considerations largely determined subsequent potential interpretations. Using the dimensions of comparability established by Lauri Honko (phenomenology of tradition, the historicity of tradition, and ecology of tradition) I summarize recent attempts at classification by international folklore studies of charms pointing out the pitfalls and shortcomings of typologies as well as the fundamental incompatibility of the different typological conceptualizations. In the second part of the article, after briefly describing the responses of computational folkloristics to the textological, typological and comparatist problems of folklore texts I come to the conclusion that the elaboration of an international guide to textology, standardizing the textualization techniques of digital editions of incantations, would be more important for comparative studies than the creation of further national and international incantation catalogues. To this end and to generate discussion and debate I conclude with the outline of a set of possible multidimensional textological features to be taken into consideration in the creation of future digital databases of verbal charms.

**Keywords:** comparative methods, computational folkloristics, digital databases, digital editions, dimensions of comparability (Honko), international charm index, textualization of verbal charms, typology

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen to twenty years a renewed, international and interdisciplinary charm scholarship has emerged in Europe, the main motor of which is the Charms, Charmers and Charming Committee (hereafter: ChCh&Ch) established in 2000 as part of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (hereafter: ISFNR). Since 2003 researchers from across Europe, from Ireland to Hungary to Moscow, meet roughly on a yearly basis in order to discuss their most recent research results along various methodological and theoretical lines, in a comparative perspective and through the examination of national corpuses. The heightened interest can also be observed in terms of publications. In past years, charm collections were published in Europe by the dozen, from various historical ages from Antiquity to twentieth-century folklore collections.<sup>1</sup> Since the text material is closely related to ‘fashionable’ topics of cultural history (religion and magic, witchcraft, etc.), besides folklorists, there are participants from various other fields (such as classical philology, history, linguistics, literature, anthropology, religious studies). Folklorists in a classical sense actually constitute a minority at these international meetings. Nevertheless, the ChCh&Ch is a part of the ISFNR and one of its declared objectives – beyond having the researchers of verbal magic join forces – is to develop new methods for the structural and typological description of incantations and charms. These new strategies help the creation of national type catalogues that would eventually (and at last) culminate in the construction of an international charm index (Kuznetsova & Toporkov 2012: 178). The meetings and publications proved to be fruitful in this field; however, an international charm index has yet to be developed; moreover, the mushrooming text editions and their textual processes are all different from one another, depending on who and where they are published. Although there have been numerous debates about this topic;<sup>2</sup> propositions have even been put forward concerning the creation and the structure of a possible international charm index (Agapkina & Toporkov 2013); their real applicability on an international level, in the present and the future is questionable.

Nevertheless, ChCh&Ch has considered the creation of databases to be important from the beginning. Parallel to these efforts in 2005, the idea of the creation of a common, European verbal magic database arose within the framework of The Power of Words in Traditional European Cultures project led by Jacqueline Borsje (Borsje 2011). Nonetheless, currently, several national digital charm-databases are being developed (or have already been published) completely independently from one another: Mare Kõiva (Estonian), Jacqueline Borsje (medieval Dutch and medieval and modern Irish), Sanda Golopenția (Romanian love charms), Aigars Lielbārdis (Latvian), Andrei Toporkov (Russian),

and Éva Pócs & Emese Ilyefalvi (Hungarian). This state of affairs is what has led me to write this paper, the will to move beyond these isolated approaches. There are a number of questions that charm scholars can engage with in order to join the lively and innovative discourse on digital folklore databases.<sup>3</sup> What could computational folkloristics as a new branch of research contribute to understanding the phenomenon of verbal magic?<sup>4</sup> What distinctive problems does the genre of charms itself raise? What is the role of classical type indexes/catalogues in this process? Is it necessary at all to have analogous type and motif indexes/catalogues in the age of digital databases? Is there any point in registering typologies in digital databases? If not, how can we incorporate and apply the knowledge accumulated by folklore and textual scholarship on the genre and on orality?

My goal in this article is to critically review the classification attempts of recent years, and based on this outline some criteria regarding the creation of a multidimensional digital textual database specifically developed for the genre of incantations and charms. These considerations might serve as an aid in the study of charms and what's more they might open up new paths of interpretation for researchers. I suggest that developing an international textological guide, proposing standards for the textualization practices of digitally edited charms would be a much more significant milestone than creating analogous national and international charm indexes. Although at first glance this might seem to be a merely practical and technical issue, I will also discuss briefly the novel theoretical and methodological problems textualization practices based on databases give rise to, which should be considered carefully before proceeding to digitization.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP OF FOLKLORISTIC TEXTUALIZATION AND TYPOLOGIZATION**

Although the textualization of folklore texts has been one of the most elementary and most delicate issues since the beginning of the discipline, until recently it received very little conscious and reflexive attention from practitioners of the field.<sup>5</sup> This might be partly due to the fact that the vital importance of textological work for interpretation processes only became broadly accepted in the last few decades (McGann 2014: 19–20). Broadly understood, folkloristic textualization involves more than merely taking down, transcribing, and annotating folklore texts. It also includes theoretical considerations before going to the field (what needs to be collected and how) and subsequently the selection and classification of texts, that is, the entire preparatory process for publication, are integral parts, including the theoretical and methodological preconceptions.<sup>6</sup>

In view of the above, the issue of typology is closely intertwined with various textual strategies, as documented by the fact (even within charm scholarship) that researchers interested in classification questions are almost exclusively those who assembled anthologies and text collections in the course of their scholarly careers (Holzmann 2001; Roper 2004; Vaitkevičienė 2008; Kljaus 2009; Agapkina & Toporkov 2013; Pócs 2014b). Editors have to face the following questions in such cases: (1) How to classify the material? (2) How to resolve the problems resulting from the change of medium (oral to written; manuscript to print)? (3) What kind of annotation should the text be provided with? The answers to these questions are closely related to the characteristics of the genre being examined; therefore, before analysing charm typologies it is necessary to briefly discuss the most important textual features of verbal magic.

## **TEXTUALIZATION PROBLEMS OF VERBAL MAGIC**

1. Since the beginning of charm scholarship there has been a consensus among folklorists that the majority of texts cannot be interpreted according to textual folklore criteria in a classical sense, that is, merely based on form and content, because the most important defining feature of the genre is function (Pócs 2014a: 14; Kljaus 2009: 71). A conspicuous editorial practice directly follows from this; namely, that to this day – unlike other folklore text collections – in charm research the editions based on function dominate (Roper 2004: 128–131). At the same time, the early recognition of ‘function-text units’ resulted in the consolidation of heterogeneous types in academic discourse; sometimes the text, at other times the function playing the dominant role. Another consequence of the function-centred definition of the genre is that published editions contain a diverse range of text material differing from one another depending on where the editor of the text drew the line (according to the given research tradition) between prayer, archaic prayer, blessing, curse, magic spell, ditty, etc. and incantations/charms.<sup>7</sup>

2. As regards verbal magic, another special textual characteristic that 99 (if not 100) per cent of the texts collected by folklorists are basically recounts and evocations. The private nature of the text material (usually one- or two-person acts involving: healer and patient), the various degrees of secrecy, furthermore fieldwork methods in early twentieth-century folklore scholarship did (and still do) not allow the observation of charm practices in a primary environment.<sup>8</sup> This produces a pre-text (the charmer explains for the collector the rituals and gestures) before the actual charm text, which, in the primary context of application is presumably not present, or even if it is, it certainly is worded



differently. Moreover, with evocations one might create texts that only imitate charm texts, and are not the actual retelling of a once pronounced text, rather a spontaneous improvisation invented by analogy with the text used earlier (Pócs 2014a: 17). This is somewhat inconsistent with the fact that there exist genuine charms that consist only of describing the charm activity, and these can also be the improvised texts of an actual charming event.<sup>9</sup> For this very reason in many cases it is indeed difficult to draw the line between pre-text and charm texts. In most editorial practices the pre-texts are entirely missing, or only appear as an abbreviated summary by the editor; consequently they also play a lesser role in typologies and interpretations. Among more recent typological and interpretational propositions, however, several classifications consider the pre-text and the text as a ‘magical scenario’/‘charm plot’ and treat them as a unit.<sup>10</sup>

3. Another distinctive textual feature of charms is that there are two simultaneous traditions, a written and an oral one, which are inseparable and, in many regards, separate at the same time. The dynamic relationship of the two media also provides countless intermediary, transient forms.<sup>11</sup> While texts collected orally lack primary context, in the case of manuscript charm practices in a way the phenomenon can be examined in its primary context of application: that of the manuscript and the person using it. For this reason, instead of disintegrating the text of the manuscript and classifying the elements according to various criteria in many cases, editors of historical sources have undertaken the publication of entire manuscripts, basically applying the philological method of textual criticism in order to show the distinctive contexts of the different sources (Toporkov 2005, 2010; Timotin 2010; Ilyefalvi 2014b). Nevertheless, not treating written and oral traditions as dichotomous opposites should not erase the fundamental differences of the two traditions. Although written charms also exist in several philological variations, transposing directly the operating mechanism of the manuscripts’ variability and diffusion (for instance: establishing stemmata etc.), to the oral tradition would be misleading (Honko 1986: 106–107; Honko 2000a: 6; Niles 2013a; Frog 2013: 20–21).

The list above could surely be continued, but perhaps this short overview already gives an idea of how charm researchers from various disciplines took into consideration the textual specificities of incantations (to varying extent and degrees), which unquestionably influenced editorial practices, classification attempts and, thus, possible interpretations.

## **DIMENSIONS OF COMPARISON: ATTEMPTS AT TYPOLOGY IN CHARM RESEARCH**

The textual characteristics of a text corpus may not be the only factors shaping the typologies; the (often implicit) research problems the resolution of which the typologies are created can also play a role in shaping them. Therefore, the question has to be raised: why do we need to classify folklore texts; what is the aim of typology? On the one hand, this is a trivial question: every typology holds the possibility of comparability in itself. On the other hand, comparison in folkloristics (as in related disciplines) leads to complex and intricate methodological and theoretical dilemmas, the detailed exploration of which cannot be pursued in this paper.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is necessary to reflect on the fact – which by now qualifies as part of the history of the discipline – that the concepts of ‘comparison’ and ‘typology’ (with strongly negative connotations in some national folkloristics and, in some sense, in international folkloristics as well)<sup>13</sup> have been almost inseparably intertwined with the Historical-Geographic Method(s) that have defined the discipline for a long time.<sup>14</sup> Often seen as if they were the only way of comparison, as if the Historical-Geographic Method(s) was/(were) ‘the’ method of both folkloristics and ‘the’ comparative methods (Virtanen 1993). Although the historiographic reasons behind this stigmatization are clear, the problem of comparability is not unique to the Historical-Geographic Method(s). When discussing the issue of comparability, Lauri Honko emphasised the importance of distinguishing among types of comparison in order to see what type of mechanism, variability they are suited to analyse and interpret, and which characteristic of folklore phenomena can be captured by them (Honko 1986, 2000a, 2000b). Honko established three dimensions of comparison: (1) tradition-phenomenology; (2) tradition-history; (3) tradition-ecology (Honko 1986: 111–123). The typologies that charms studies have so far developed can be fitted into Honko’s comparative dimensions quite easily. As a result, in what follows – without aiming to be exhaustive and only highlighting some classification concepts – I will discuss the various typological attempts of recent years within this framework.

1. The tradition-phenomenological dimension captures an aspect of comparison in which the phenomena under scrutiny are not genetically related to one another; but through their etic, phenomenological categories they are capable of outlining the universal character of human culture. They allow the capturing of fundamental similarities and differences, distinctive cultural processes and focal points. The exceedingly popular and simply functional charm typologies (such as: stopping bleeding, averting hailstorms, stopping headache, protecting against demons, love magic, etc.) belong to this dimension. The fact can

be misleading that in a certain sense there are real written materials behind these functional categories, with their own, emic divisions since they follow the European Christian manuscript tradition where the authors of the manuscript recorded the texts serving various functions one after the other from a practical perspective. Nevertheless, extending the categories to texts collected from orality, and going beyond the cultural area of European Christianity, would be creating almost *etic*, mostly functionally classifying thematic units (such as healing charms, bewitching charms, stimulating charms, incantations stabilising social relationships). In fact, such classification of the texts only seems logical if one follows the literate, Christian, European intellectual tradition; thereby it is only suitable to formulate universals within certain limits (Sebeok 1974: 19).

The less popular kind of charm typology, involving the deep structural classification of texts, also contains the possibility of phenomenological comparison. Not surprisingly this aspect is applied mostly by those who study corpuses collected from oral traditions. In the case of such texts, basic grammatical and structural characteristics of the text material can be highlighted through the scrutiny of short and simple charm forms. Classification based on speech acts (wish, order, threat, dismissal, etc.), or grammatical structures (if, then...; so, as...; negation, opposition, comparison, enumeration, counting, etc.) brings to light the universal categories of magic and religion; their possible relationship to the transcendental world.<sup>15</sup>

Among present charm classification efforts there have been two attempts to explore deep narrative grammar. When examining the charms of Eastern Slavs, Russian literary scholar Vladimir Kljaus resorted to the theory of 'folkloric plot', a common approach in Russian folklore studies usually applied to longer, narrative text materials. He classified the texts according to 'plot themes', the typologies of which could be composed of the combination of the following three components: action, the subject of the action (personage) and the place of the action (Kljiaus 2009: 72). According to Kljiaus, all kinds of charms fit into this model. The Lithuanian folklorist Daiva Vaitkevičienė took Kljiaus's concept as her point of departure, however, since in most cases the Lithuanian texts did not develop into the above-mentioned three-component narrative plot, the author classified Lithuanian charms on the basis of the 'narrative function', how healing charms are supposed to work. With this she is, in fact, shifting the emphasis from the text to the belief content underlying the ritual, thereby defining deep structural categories such as 'separation-connection, expulsion, transmission, reciprocation, purification, destruction, locomotion-cessation, designation, redemption' (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 78–86). Vaitkevičienė's classification is perfectly applicable to the exploration of cultural frameworks and conceptual systems behind the texts within a given culture.

2. National and international catalogues and indexes prepared according to Historical-Geographic Method(s) can be placed in the tradition-historical dimension on account of their method of comparison. In the classical-type monographs, motif indexes seek to render the historic nature, diffusion in time and space of each imagined text type, by pointing out cultural borrowings and various cultural impacts, along with their respective directions. The ChCh&Ch's desire for an international charm index self-consciously positions itself within this comparative paradigm, since the international folktale catalogue by Aarne-Thompson is considered to be the highpoint of the approach, a well-trodden 'tested path' and an example to be followed (Roper 2004; Agapkina & Toporkov 2013: 86). Jonathan Roper's commentary claiming that we are not any closer to the goal than Ebermann was in 1903 suggests that we are trying to make up for a lack that arose more than a century ago (Roper 2004: 129. Cf. Ebermann 1903). Consequently, followers committed to this approach do not want to deviate from the typological tradition established in charm-research under the impact of the Historical-Geographic Method(s) in the first half of the twentieth century. Although occasionally even they are skeptical as regards execution,<sup>16</sup> they consider the creation of an international charm index feasible when it is the result of the combined efforts of the experts of the ChCh&Ch.<sup>17</sup>

The greatest problem with this approach, however, is what the critics of the Historical-Geographic Method(s) have formulated already: the types are rigid, arbitrary, artificial categories of research; their boundaries are uncertain and might vary by researcher, or even within the work of a single researcher. How do we define a type? Where do we draw the boundaries of a type?<sup>18</sup> Roper and Agapkina & Toporkov avoid answering these questions, and despite being aware of their omission, they fail to define in their writings the basis of the typology, what the constitutive and optional components of a type are. Typological problems are well known in folklore studies;<sup>19</sup> nevertheless, let us consider a few concrete examples as illustration. One of the best-known medieval, western European incantations usually applied for stopping bleeding is the Longinus-Segen.<sup>20</sup> So far, there is only a single Hungarian text from the mid-sixteenth century, which served to heal heartache (Hattyuffy 1891). Besides this, there are two further variants of the text published in the most recent Hungarian edition of charms containing approximately 3500 texts (and referencing a further 5000 variants);<sup>21</sup> or more precisely, there are two texts that can be connected to the Longinus charm, although neither of them were used for stopping bleeding (Pócs 2014b: 923). One of them is a twentieth-century text collected from oral tradition (but according to Éva Pócs, the origin is a manuscript remedy book), which alludes to the apocryphal story of Longinus, but does not name the soldier who pierced the side of Jesus on the cross. The other text coming from a

seventeenth-century remedy book from a noble family, does use the apocryphal story and Longinus is also mentioned by name, but the charm was not meant to stop bleeding. The blood and water from Jesus's heart is only attributed a healing property for sharp chest pain (Ilyefalvi 2014b: 106). If there existed an international charm index, would these two texts belong to the Longinus-Segen type? A similar problem is raised by the fact that the Flum Jordan charm-type<sup>22</sup> is completely missing from the Hungarian material, while the motifs of the River Jordan and the baptism of Christ can be found in numerous Hungarian narrative healing charms.<sup>23</sup>

The charm type and its artificial boundary fail in the case of book-based typologies when the classifying scholar is forced to assign it a place somewhere within a national corpus when in fact it could fit into several different types.<sup>24</sup> In Éva Pócs's Hungarian charm typology we also find innumerable examples of how the dynamic text tradition resists classification. From this perspective, it is very questionable whether there is in fact a similarity between texts classified next to one another in the different typologies. To illustrate this problem let us see an example of an uncertain classification. In the Hungarian charm corpus, Éva Pócs refers to more than 500 texts which allude one way or another to the following narrative: Jesus looks for shelter on Earth (sometimes accompanied by Saint Peter, sometimes alone) and goes to a 'gentle/disobedient' master and an 'angry/obedient' mistress where he is only given a bed of wattle and a pillow of stone for the night. Jesus retaliates for the lukewarm welcome, by bewitching the angry/obedient woman's breast. Later Jesus heals her (in some versions at Saint Peter's request) with an incantation, and his text often includes the motif of 'bed of wattle, pillow of stone'.<sup>25</sup> In the Hungarian classification the texts belong to a separate sub-type within narrative charms. (See examples in Appendix 1.) According to Éva Pócs, in some sense, they fit into the European group of encounter charms (*Begegnungs-Segen*) so termed by Ferdinand Ohrt,<sup>26</sup> but by comparison with the latter, the plot of the story is rather unconventional and has much more in common with legends about Jesus/Saint Peter walking on the earth (Pócs 2014b: 895). The problem is not even the international classification of this text but the fact that this is not the only type of charm in the Hungarian corpus that contains the 'bed of wattle, pillow of stone' motif. There are numerous texts within the Hungarian material that do not provide the origin of the above described plot, only allude to the motif of 'bed of wattle, pillow of stone'. In certain texts this is minimalized to such an extent that the only part of the narrative plot we find is that "this is Jesus's word: bed of wattle, pillow of stone"; or even less, we only encounter distorted residues of Jesus's "word", used as a textual amulet (Pócs 2014b: 896). These texts were only placed in another group because they carried 'rather more' of the features

of another type. (See examples in Appendix 2.) The same can often be said the other way around: the ‘bed of wattle, pillow of stone’ type examples could also be classified into other categories. The researcher using this kind of typology and the text edition cannot see these points of connection, except if they browse the collection of charms with extreme thoroughness and accuracy, or if they know the entire(!) corpus.

Since Roper and Agapkina & Toporkov have not defined the basis of the types they use, they primarily operate with types that already exist in the research tradition. These are the ‘well-known’ western European charm-types so what do we gain by having them?<sup>27</sup> Most of the main types established at the beginning of the twentieth century are healing texts which contain a narrative nucleus, a historiola. These charms are known from orality too – mostly through specialists –, but as regards their origin, they are parts of a written, Christian and Western European tradition. For this reason, the applicability of an international index based on a typological tradition that has no knowledge of Central and Eastern European charms is very narrow, even if we only wish to sketch the European and Christian tradition. Approximately 900 texts belong to the category of narrative charms from the more than 3500 texts published in the most recent anthology of Hungarian charms. From these 900 texts only a few hundred can be classified as one of the ‘well-known’ Western European types. If we take into consideration the variants in this ratio, then only 10–20 per cent of Hungarian incantations and charms can be classified within the deeply rooted Western European typological tradition. The ratios illustrate well the limits of the applicability of currently known and accepted types.

The tradition-historical dimension is undoubtedly an important and necessary perspective for discovering and understanding folklore phenomena. The research questions explored by Historical-Geographic Method(s) are in many cases legitimate and unanswered even today; these methods can be used for many kinds of investigation.<sup>28</sup> However, it is less certain that the most efficient ‘tool’ for this comparative method would be an international charm index modelled on the international folktale catalogue by Aarne-Thompson (AaTh) or by Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU).

Lauri Honko claims that both ‘tradition-phenomenology’ and ‘tradition-history’ compare and interpret phenomena from an intercultural perspective. They do so with data taken out of their contexts, therefore the connections are only seen by the researcher(s); they have no organic, active connection to the social functions and the variability of folklore phenomena.

3. Meanwhile, the comparative dimension called ‘tradition-ecology’ is suitable for discovering and understanding intracultural variability/traditions, which, unlike the former two aspects, has an active connection to the practices of a smaller

or larger community (Honko 2000b: 15). This type of comparison examines three aspects, “the tradition itself, the community maintaining it, and the natural environment embracing them both” (Honko 1986: 116), in order to uncover a system in which the traditions function, and that it would later transmit. This method requires the study of ‘thick corpuses’, which are capable of revealing the organic functioning of the folklore phenomena in question. Although Honko envisioned the application of this dimension to corpuses recorded over the course of long-term fieldwork using participant observation, it might be used for the thick interpretation of certain archival materials;<sup>29</sup> therefore I will illustrate this dimension with two historical examples from charms research. From the perspective of discourse analysis and cognitive theory, Anna-Leena Siikala, in her research on Eastern Finnish and Karelian incantations explores the limits of improvisation and, in this context, the ‘scheme/frame’ of incantations. Her main question was how charm specialists created their own texts by applying traditional motifs, lines, topics; whether the text followed any logic or whether it was a matter of completely free improvisation? Siikala needed this approach because the rich text variations of Eastern Finnish and Karelian incantations and the mode of their variation were impossible to explain by the catalogues and indexes of the Historical-Geographic Method (which, on the other hand, proved to be viable in the case of Western Finnish texts). Her analysis concluded that the textual patterns of incantations followed the structure of the incantation’s ritual; and although the charmer was not mechanically repeating but creating the text in the given situation, the improvisation was still not free. It followed the logic of mythical thinking and thereby the text variations and the mode of variation could be interpreted within this mythical association framework (Siikala 1986).

Lea T. Olsan, scholar of medieval English literature, studied a completely different kind of source (two fifteenth-century English and Latin manuscripts) and applied a different theoretical perspective (mostly relying on psychological studies of memory) reinterpreting the problem of function-text unity that has always played an important role in the study of charms. Olsan’s question was how and why certain motifs and text panels are (or can be) assigned to a certain need (such as stopping bleeding)? She approached the issue from the perspective of the person copying-using the manuscripts, in other words, of those who practice charms. With the study of ‘semantic chains’ she was able to demonstrate that what we have here is not the ad hoc use of texts for various needs. Rather, in many cases the chain had been broken such a long time ago that the association field is very difficult to decipher (Olsan 2004).

Clearly the intracultural perspective does not aspire to create an international charm index. Rather, on the one hand, through the examination of their

own, more limited material, they point out the limitations of classical typologies, that is to say, that they cannot answer the questions the researcher is seeking answers to; on the other hand, with their innovative typological insights they discover connections that bring us closer to an in-depth, “emic” understanding of the cultural practice of verbal magic.

At the end of this overview the reader can no doubt see that even the author of this study could not resist the fundamental human urge to classify the phenomena under examination, in this case, the various charm typologies. My aim with this short review was simply to show the incompatibility of existing typological concepts. It should be noted though that the more ambitious charm typologies try to accomplish the impossible with the inclusion of various indexes and seek to navigate between at least two dimensions (for example, the tradition-phenomenology with function indexes and the tradition-history with the classification of types). The multidimensional catalogue by Éva Pócs systemising the corpus of Hungarian charms basically tries to alloy these two dimensions (Pócs 2014a, 2014b). Pócs begins the definition of charm-types with grammatical structures; she goes from simple forms towards more complex ones while noting the most typical contaminations of these forms. Nonetheless, she discusses and classifies narrative charms in a separate chapter, which takes them out of the logical context of the typology; but, in the introduction to narrative charm texts, she also describes their structural-grammatical features. One can search according to the function of the charm in the index at the end of the book; and at the same time, if certain types are characterized by a close function-text relationship, their description also figures in the introduction, as well as the related rituals and underlying belief contents. She also tries to include the tradition-ecological dimension wherever she can do so on the basis of her own field experience or of thick descriptions and corpus by others. Navigation, however, is not guided by the typology, but by the very informative summary of the introductory studies written in light of the approximately 8000 (!) texts. In this overview, Éva Pócs demonstrates the affiliation of various types with each other; the motivic or structural networks connecting a type to other types; the diverse or uniform combination of rituals associated with certain types; and the belief contents acting as the motor of these texts.

According to Lauri Honko, we need all three dimensions for a complex understanding of orality and folklore phenomena (Honko 2000a: 15–35). With what procedures, methods and tools can we achieve this? What comes after the three major textual paradigms of folklore studies: (1) when form did not matter, only the content: “pre-text”; (2) when only the text was at the centre of research: “text is king”; (3) when performance and context stands above all:



“performance is king”?<sup>30</sup> According to computational folkloristics, the only thing left is: “data(base) is king”!

## **COMPUTATIONAL FOLKLORISTICS: DIGITAL DATABASES AS A NEW TEXTUALIZATION PARADIGM**

Folkloristics has undoubtedly arrived at a new paradigm with the possibility of digital textual scholarship. Although folklore studies have already produced innumerable attempts and a prolific literature on this topic, it is still at an early stage in terms of theories and methodology.<sup>31</sup> The truly tangible results of computational folkloristics have only begun to appear in recent years.<sup>32</sup> In what follows, from among the many attempts, theoretical and methodological considerations, I will only reflect on issues closely related to the main focus of my study, such as textualization practices, concepts of typologising, and comparability.

In the first half of the article I briefly discussed how important textualization practices as primary explanatory processes were in the typologisation as well as interpretation of charms. This has to be taken into account in the case of digital textualization as well; however, there are two fundamental differences between analogous (for instance: a critical edition's) and digital (for instance: a scholarly database's) textual processes. The first is that in the case of digital databases the (attainable) goal of textualization is to render the data analysable not only for the human mind but also for computer programs. Thus, the assemblage of data can also be interpreted by computer programs and not only by the scholars. (The advantages and consequences of this in folkloristics, as in any other field of digital humanities, are unforeseeable at this time.) The second fundamental difference, related to the first, is that while in the case of a critical edition we find that textual processes depend greatly on the scholarly background, interests and objectives of the editor(s), digital textual scholarship wishes to integrate the accumulated knowledge and the questions of a variety of earlier paradigms (Tangherlini 2016: 66). Consequently, the focus of the latter is not a single research problem; it does not have to choose, for instance, among the comparative dimensions of tradition-phenomenology/-history/-ecology. The aim is, in fact, to be able to provide answers to more diverse research questions by executing multidimensional textual processes on the text material, and subsequently presenting these texts/data in the form of a multimodal network. Naturally, digital textual scholarship is not devoid of preconceptions, ideologies and institutions either.<sup>33</sup> It is especially for this reason that it is important for folklore studies to review and establish their digital textual strategies taking

into consideration the most recent textual practices and cooperating with practitioners of related disciplinary fields (such as linguistics, literature, library science, etc.).

How can comparative dimensions be realized in digital databases, and what textual processes are required for this? It transpires from the above that the central problem and one of the most important criteria of digital textual processes is to produce computer-readable texts in order to be able to analyse them. For the textualization problems outlined in the first part of this paper to remain traceable in a folklore database, the method of text input has to be carefully monitored; otherwise the texts at the disposal of the programs will be simplified versions, which will result in more loss than gain. Creating computer-readable texts is the most expensive and time-consuming part of the digitization process, however, this is the part where the most important issues are decided. Selecting the longest lasting and most compatible file format (in order to ensure interoperability and comparability) is a fundamental criterion.<sup>34</sup> After deciding on the technical aspects of text input, the second most important task is investing the text with as many kinds of metadata as possible. What external, yet closely related essential data do we want to record with a given text? Due to the existence of many different approaches within digital humanities this is the part where the greatest disparities might occur. A folklore-centered digital text edition requires quite different types of metadata than editions with a linguistic or literary history focus. The basic metadata for folklore databases, for instance, are as follows: location/time of collection; name of collector; name, sex, religion, language, nationality, occupation, etc. of informant.<sup>35</sup> According to the logic of the Historical-Geographic Method(s), the typological classification of texts would also constitute such external metadata. Is it necessary, though, to record the type as metadata? How do existing folklore databases use international catalogues and motif indexes, the heritage of Historical-Geographic Method(s) in a wider sense?

Folktale research, due to its privileged situation (since it already has several international catalogues), continues to be in a pioneering role in testing and formulating new folkloristic methods and procedures. For understandable reasons, several of the folktale databases with scholarly requirements have adapted the AaTh and the ATU type numbers.<sup>36</sup> Why should a relatively useful scholarly achievement be neglected, set aside or left out if it is a great reservoir of information and if it had inspired and oriented hundreds of researchers and thousands of works? Moreover, automatisms have already been developed to determine international folktale types, therefore it would not necessarily be a manual classification; the programs would take care of the laborious, often mechanical work (Muiser & Theune & Meder 2012; Meder 2014). Nonetheless,

the more than two decade-long efforts of Theo Meder and his colleagues to digitize Dutch folktales raise at least three questions regarding the applicability of motif indexes and type catalogues. (1) Of the database currently containing more than 42 000 texts, they were able to classify into folktale-types only about 60 per cent, despite having used not only the AaTh and ATU catalogues, but even other typologies. (2) The primary goal of the Dutch database is to become an instrument of international comparative research. In order to achieve this aim, however, (seeing that the catalogues were not helpful enough) they have taken a new approach. Currently, with the FACT (Folktale as Classifiable Texts) project their investigations concentrate on the development of computational processes that are able to show the narratives that contain motifs, sequences and other narrative building blocks, which help the programs to conduct automatic cluster analysis (Meder & Karsdorp & Nguyen & Theune & Trieschnigg & Muiser 2016: 79). (3) Going beyond the problem of folktale databases in a narrow sense, it seems that there is a greater need for the creation of legend databases or aggregate databases containing folk narratives and integrating several genres (personal story, legend, folktale, belief narrative, etc.) (Meder 2014: 126; Meder & Karsdorp & Nguyen & Theune & Trieschnigg & Muiser 2016). Leaving the rigid boundaries of genres behind, typologies play even less of a role in these databases.<sup>37</sup> What is the solution then if there is no available and accepted typology? How can the corpuses become comparable and internationally interoperable if there are no types?

I have shown in the first part of the article in relation to analogous text editions that comparability is partly determined by textual strategies, which is also true in the case of digital databases. As regards digital textualization, the corpuses become comparable from a variety of points of view due to the metadata. The greater the number and variety of metadata included in the database, the more diverse and complex the analysis can be. A part of the external metadata has to be recorded manually during the textual processes (name of the collector, location of collection, type of source, etc.); however, whenever possible, one should seek automation, since manual annotation is not only time consuming and costly, but also the risk of error is very high, from simple typos to the fact that, given their human nature, different persons carrying out the annotation (might) have different ways of annotation.<sup>38</sup>

Finding similar textual parts can be achieved through further annotation of the texts recorded in the database. There are two ways to do so in the databases in the field of digital humanities: (1) supervised semi-automatic annotation or (2) unsupervised automatic annotation.<sup>39</sup> For the former it is necessary to be aware of earlier folkloristic paradigms, structural and typological concepts regarding folklore texts and genres. This is important because semi-automatic

annotation requires the accumulation of the features and elements from which researchers had developed the various types earlier. At the same time, the second method, proposed here, does not aim at creating types, since it is not our intention to squeeze the dynamic text tradition into prefabricated, artificial etic categories. We only indicate the simple characteristics that are considered to be the fundamental, inner, essential elements of the texts. The frequency and diversity of the network connection points among the different characteristics will be revealed by computational programs through various visual displays of the data. Thus, in this procedure it is still the researchers who determine what they want to get annotated with automations in order to connect the data with one another, this is what they target with various algorithmic procedures.

In the field of digital humanities, however, it is still debated what is worth annotating (McGann 2016); what is more, it is even questioned whether there is any sense in annotating at all, because if everyone has different annotating practices then the corpuses will be dissociated from one another. Another argument against annotation is that even this controlled indexing process is laborious and expensive; moreover, the real research only begins after the annotation is completed. Martin Wynne, an expert in digital humanities at the University of Oxford, argues that in these cases, instead of the interpretation of the actual data, we are focusing on future possibilities of interpretation; and this can only be avoided if we work on the development of better and faster instruments necessary for a completely automated annotation instead (Wynne 2012). In this case, the programs execute the indexing process on the corpus through various algorithmic procedures (using frequency and other statistical data, running a stemming and keyword generating software and other text mining methods) (see Jockers & Underwood 2016). Based on efforts seen so far in computational folkloristics, it appears that for the sake of more complete analyses both are necessary (Abello & Broadwell & Tangherlini 2012). Although there is a lot of debate around annotation, it is clear that real interoperability among corpuses can only be achieved if the makers and the designers of the database annotate the same metadata and if these markups are recorded in similar, or at least compatible, systems.<sup>40</sup> This would also eliminate another persistent issue of comparative research in folklore studies, namely that it would no longer be necessary to translate national corpuses into a common language (for instance, into English), because the programs would find the similarities and connection points without translation, on the basis of the markups. International standards in folklore studies are yet to be developed, although several authors have recently pointed out their necessity. In addition, at the 2015 meeting of the SIEF Working Group on Archives in Zagreb the plan of a

guideline that would standardise the recording of metadata and annotations in folklore databases was also suggested.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear from the above that we are only at the beginning of a process; nonetheless, its significance can already be seen as regards the dimension of comparison/comparability. Unlike rigid type catalogues computational folkloristics with digital textualization and automatic and controlled annotation holds out the possibility that instead of imposing our own pre-fabricated categories on the dynamic folklore materials, instead of the researcher deciding what is similar to what, it will rather be computer programs that will process appropriately textualized data which in turn will bring to light the complex and complicated network of relationships between texts. The multifarious and innovative visualisations of the material's latent connections, not readily noticeable without computer programs, will allow us to pose brand new questions.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the buzzwords of computational folkloristics will replace linear structures, hierarchical unidirectional typologies and classifications with flexible, multimodal networks, graph and hypergraph systems, which will ensure easy navigation among its connection points (Abello & Broadwell & Tangherlini 2012: 65–66; Holger & Schering & Schmitt 2014: 72–83). The leading figures of digital humanities, and, thus, of computational folkloristics, claim that this will fundamentally change and (possibly) rewrite our concepts and understanding of similarities, of how and in what way things (for instance, folklore texts) can be similar to each other (Tangherlini 2016: 7; Meder 2014: 126). This opens up the possibility of a new dimension of research in addition to the existing comparative dimensions.

## **DIGITAL CHARM DATABASES**

In the study of charms two databases have been developed thus far which are accessible for research. I will present both of them. I will start with the database of Sanda Golopenția classifying Romanian love charms, then will continue with the international verbal magic database project of Jacqueline Borsje and discuss how they were able to make use of the above outlined opportunities (Golopenția 1997; Borsje 2011).

Sanda Golopenția, a researcher working in the USA studying francophone linguistics and literature, published a Romanian Love Charm Database on the internet.<sup>43</sup> This relatively early initiative offers interesting lessons for future research (the database has been available on the Brown University's website since 2004). The database contains only 119 Romanian texts on the basis of the bilingual, Romanian-English charm collection edited by Golopenția (Golopenția 1998). One can clearly see that it is a very small corpus, which, due to its size,

precludes any spectacular result. The texts, techniques (that is, the ritual), the frequency of the ritual's repetition, certain formulae, and cases where the charm did not come directly from the informant but from a second-hand description, were registered and annotated separately in the database in XML file format.<sup>44</sup> The database can be searched according to speech acts, magical actions, magical adversaries (devil, the supernatural in general, witch, animal, human, etc.), magical aids, magical objects, magical plants, magical substances, the informant, the function, the region and the language. It is a great disadvantage that there are no complex search options within the database, the visualisation of the data is very rudimentary, and although it presents the material from several aspects with the help of the above-listed search options, these are actually external categories created to match the personal interests of Golopenția.

Jacqueline Borsje is a religious studies scholar at the University of Amsterdam; she introduced her database of European verbal magic in a 2011 paper, she developed it from her own field of research (medieval Dutch and medieval and modern Irish charms) but envisioned its extension to an international level. Borsje primarily called attention to problems caused by changing the medium (reality → manuscript → printed text → digital environment); in other words, she focused on showing the textual processes. She underlined the importance of the manuscript's context and the position of the charm in question within the manuscript containing it (marginalia, last page, etc.); this is why she encouraged the inclusion of the photos of the manuscripts. She also pointed out that earlier editions often 'upgraded' or 'supplemented' the texts, as a result, there are manuscripts that have different print versions, moreover, the original manuscript might not even be available for research (Borsje 2011: 131). This is not only a problem when entering medieval/early modern manuscript data into a digital database, the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century text material of most folklore archives (including charm texts) also has several manuscript and print versions.<sup>45</sup> This cannot be overwritten by a scholarly database; on the contrary, it is an explicit requirement that the persons using the database should be aware of the diverse textualization phases of the text they are looking at. While in the case of previous textualization paradigms, folklorists tried to hide their metadiscursive practices (Briggs 1993), one of the declared objectives of digital scholarly databases is to discover these practices, since it is indispensable information for the interpretation of the data. Borsje laid great emphasis on the accuracy and the method of text input; however, she was less interested in folkloristic aspects; consequently, her initiative can rather be considered as a common, digital working surface, than a folkloristic database. Although the cooperation and networking among researchers in a virtual research environment would undoubtedly yield significant results, Borsje's digital surface does

not exploit the real potential of digital databases. Comparability, for instance, would only be ensured by having access to the English sample material of certain national texts through a common platform (Borsje 2011).

## SUGGESTIONS FOR POSSIBLE TEXTUAL GUIDELINES FOR DIGITAL CHARM DATABASES

Drawing upon the above-described initiatives, in the remainder of the article, I will present some suggestions for the realization of possible textual guidelines for digital charm databases (focusing on metadata and annotation). For the time being, this is only a possible project; hopefully a future professional dialogue can result in the creation of a set of actual guidelines that would help synchronise the efforts of researchers working on the digitization of charms, in the hope that the databases would be able to simultaneously realise the different dimensions of comparability. Although this article discusses textual scholarship, typology and comparability especially in relation to charms, its most important message can be applicable to digital textualization dilemmas of other folklore texts regardless of their genre. As I have previously underlined, creating aggregate databases is a much more important goal than arriving at a rigid division by genre. The Hungarian charm-database being developed within the framework of the “East–West” Research Group (Vernacular religion on the boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: continuity, changes and interactions. ERC project No. 324214) is identical in its basic structure to the belief-text database, which is also in a preparatory phase; precisely so that later it should be possible to integrate one into the other. None of the metadata below are charm-specific, therefore they might in fact be almost mandatory for any folklore database:<sup>46</sup>

### List of basic metadata

1. <i>type of source</i> (a. folklore collection, collection-manuscript b. marginalia, codex, witch-trial, notes of secular or religious authorities, letters, anti-superstition literature, household notebooks, treasure-hunting magical books, etc.)
2. name of <i>collector / scribe</i>
3. time and place of <i>collection / recording</i>
4. (age, language, religion, occupation, nationality, place of residence of) <i>informant</i>
5. <i>language of the text</i> (for example: Hungarian, Latin, Hungarian-Latin, Gibberish)

6. <i>location of text</i>
7. <i>editions of text</i>
8. <i>secondary literature</i>

The real textological problems start after this, with the input of actual texts. Among the known folklore databases some carried out the digitization of a publication or publication series.<sup>47</sup> In many cases there is no other way, since the field notes, previous clean copies, manuscripts, voice recordings, etc. are not available for research. While critical editions implicitly subject the texts to uniform textual processes, the scholarly databases incorporating various editions and manuscripts should not standardize them, or they risk making metadiscursive practices disappear even further. Therefore, one should not annihilate earlier textual procedures in databases; the texts must be uploaded to the letter and if there are more than one philological version of a text, they all have to be registered. In the case of pre-nineteenth-century texts, for instance, we have entered at least two philological versions into the Hungarian charm-database: the diplomatic transcription of the manuscript and the modernized, interpreted transcript.

That the text is the joint creation of the collector and the informant is well-known since the performative and contextualist turn of folklore studies during the 1970s. Similarly, we are aware that interpretation requires the given folklore text to be recorded with as much context as possible even if the text comes from an artificial collection situation. Nonetheless, the method of recording the context and the interaction is less obvious and constitutes a constant source of problems (Fine 1984: 95; Honko 2000a: 11–15). Although there are no restrictions concerning the size of a database, the editors still have to decide where to draw the line as regards the context of the texts. For the Hungarian charm-database we chose the solution of at least recording the direct linguistic ‘co-text’ of the texts if it was available. In the case of texts collected from oral tradition this ‘co-text’ meant the interview questions since it was not unimportant to know what the text was giving an answer to and the explanations, additions pronounced directly after the text. We applied the same process to manuscript sources. The wider context of the text was included in the comment section, for instance the circumstances, objectives and methods of collection, or the most important information about the manuscript, such as its short description and the charm’s position within the manuscript. This is often a ritual instruction specifying how the text should be pronounced. The vernacular terminology of the text’s co-text has to be standardized, regardless of whether it refers to a function, or explains what the given text was used for or the how the rite had to be executed.



Carrying out the above-described metadata input and the semi-automatic annotation of the co-text represents immense progress as regards charms research: the perspective of the research can be quickly and easily changed, free from the pressure of decision-making imposed by book publications. One can rearrange the text material based on function/source/location at any moment. It will also be possible to formulate questions that used to be less conventional, that were practically absent in previous edition practices. For instance, to list and display on a map the texts in the database, which are accompanied by certain rituals (such as casting water or spitting), or to list the emic terminology of the text material, or to compare it with research categories. The option of posing complex research questions has to be ensured when developing the database.

Identifying the similarities among texts requires the previously described, additional annotation. The annotation list below was greatly inspired by the multidimensional typology created by Éva Pócs's for Hungarian charms, and by the typological and structural results of international charm research discussed in the first part of this article.

#### List for advanced annotation

- |  |
|--|
| 1. Performativity – (speech acts): <i>assertion, negation, request, coercion, command, curse, menace, scold, prayer, imploration, dismissal, counting, enumeration, etc.</i> |
| 2. Structural characteristics: <i>comparison, opposition, impossible condition, chain structure, etc.</i>  |
| 3. Narrative scene: <i>plot, actors, function of actors in the plot</i> (bewitcher – healer – helper – mediator)   |
| 4. Canonical text ( <i>prayer, hymn, or fragments from them</i> )  |

As regards the content of the text:

- |  |
|--|
| 5. Places/locations: <i>no man's land, mountain, river, forest, rock, Heaven, gates of Heaven, Hell, Nazareth, Paradise, River Jordan, holy garden, wilderness uninhabited by people, etc.</i> |
| 6. Plants: <i>basil, hazel rod, etc.</i>   |
| 7. Objects-elements: <i>cross, holy candle, five wounds of Jesus etc.</i>  |
| 8. Fixed formulae: <i>“where no dogs bark”, “where no bread is baked” etc.</i>   |
| 9. Animals: <i>dog, rooster etc.</i>   |
| 10. Colors: <i>red, black etc.</i>   |
| 11. Numbers: <i>3, 7, 77, 9 etc.</i>   |

12. Time: <i>Friday, Saturday, in the evening, in the morning</i> etc.
--

13. The world turned upside down: <i>taboo words</i>
--

Each one of the above can be automated by the application of text-mining tools (standardization, lemmatization, stemming etc); therefore, one should not worry about the meticulous annotation of millions of texts, the programs have only to be taught to recognize and automatically index them.<sup>48</sup> The new comparative dimension, the completely automated annotation can only be realized if a significant amount of text is uploaded to the database, therefore the results cannot yet be foreseen.

However, it is already clear that computational folkloristics with digital folklore databases offer a tool for novel and simple solutions to problems raised at the beginning of this article. With their help the dream of the Historical-Geographic Method(s) might come true: the visual representation of millions of charm texts in space and time on a map; and all this without having to think in terms of the much-criticized rigid types or having to translate anything into a common language. The future integration of various databases and corpuses into one another (in the case of charms, for instance, prayers, religious chapbooks, belief-texts) will allow the creation of thick corpuses necessary for the in-depth interpretation of data.

### **(IN LIEU OF) A CONCLUSION**

Synchronizing goals, procedures and techniques stemming from various types of grant funding, individual undertakings and institutional digitization projects might seem to be at least as utopian an idea and venture as the creation of an international charm index. Nevertheless, I think that discussing textualization strategies of folkloristics in the digital age is a primary and necessary task of the discipline, and, thus, of charm-research. At the beginning of the twentieth century – corresponding to the technical options of the age – an international type catalogue (AaTh) was able to catalyze research. Today, the same effect could be achieved in twenty-first-century folkloristics by developing textual guidelines through thorough consideration by a group of international experts (for instance the ChCh&Ch), leading to standardization of the procedures of digital text editing. For this reason, the list above is only an initial draft of features that seem relevant from a folkloristic and from a general textual point of view, and that in my view, should be examined when registering charms in a database.

The database in itself obviously does not solve all problems;<sup>49</sup> the new technology, procedure and theory leaves at least as many problems and questions

unanswered as it solves. All this, however, will be the problem of the coming paradigm. In the present a multidimensional, digital text preparation would open the gates to new interpretations and analyses, which would bring us closer to understanding the compound and complex phenomena of folklore texts, such as charms.

## **APPENDIX 1. THE ‘BED OF WATTLE, PILLOW OF STONE’ SUB-TYPE**

### **A. Mellfájás gyógyítása**

A beteg háromszor mondja:

Mikor Krisztus Urunk Szent Péterrel a földön járt, möntek egy szögén embörhön, szállást kértek. A gazda ajálta, hogy ad, de az asszon ajálta is, nem is. Az asszony gyékényt terített, és követ tött a feje alá. Jézus azé szépen nyugodott, Szen Pétör is. Ezután éccaka elkezdött [az asszonynak] a mellye fájni. Főkeltek korán. Jézus Pétörrel elmöntek. Mikó möntek ed darabon, aszondta Pétör: “Uram, Teremtóm! Gyógyítsd mög annak az asszonnak a mellyit! Látod, hogy egész éccaka jajgatott!” – “Nem, Pétör, hagy szenvedjön!” Mógén elmöntek ed darabon, aszondja Pétör: “Uram, Teremtóm! Gyógyítsd mög annak az asszonnak a mellyit! Látod, hogy egész éccaka jajgatott!” Akkor aszondta Jézus: “Pétör, eredj vissza. Mondjad néki:

Engödelmes gazda,  
engedetlen gazdasszon.  
Gyékénágy, küpárna,  
Isten mondta szó.”

Azonnal mögtért a fájdalom.

Három Miatyánk, három Üdvözlégy.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Curing breast-ache***

*The patient says three times:*

*When our Lord Christ walked on the earth with St Peter they went in to a poor man’s house, asking for shelter. The man was inclined to offer, but his wife was not so keen. The woman spread a mat on the floor and put a stone as a pillow. Jesus nevertheless fell asleep and so did St Peter. During the night the breast of the woman began to hurt. They got up early. Jesus left with Peter. When they had gone a little way, Peter said: “Lord, my Creator! Cure the breast of that woman! You see she screamed*

*all night!” “No Peter, let her suffer!” They went on for a while, says Peter: “Lord, my Creator! Cure the breast of that woman!” You heard how she whimpered all night! Then Jesus said: “Go back Peter and tell them:*

*Obedient master,  
disobedient mistress,  
bed of wattle, pillow of stone,  
word of the Lord.”*

*That very minute the pain stopped.*

*After this the patient repeats the Lord’s prayer and the Hail Mary three times.*

## **B. Gyógyítás**

Istennek mondom parancsolatjából,  
az te szent hatalmaddal, Szentháromság Úristen.  
Elindula Urunk Jézus Krisztus egy zsidó városban,  
vete őnéki egy zsidó leány kővánkost, gyékénylepedőt,  
mint Urunk Jézus Krisztus nem maradhatott kővánkoston, gyékény-  
lepedőn,  
úgy ne maradjon keserves fájdalmad az csontjaid vagy más  
tagjaidban!

Azután pedig a Miatyánkat is el kell mondani. Anno 1752. die 3. Junii coram figura iuris praedeductam orationem recitavit, et quod contra morbos ea usa fuerit, fatebatur, tendebuit [---] licere super infirmam iam susurando, sed cupienti etiam clara voce recitavit. A genitrice didicit hanc orationem, qua [?]tta.<sup>51</sup>

### **Healing**

*I say this by the command of God,  
by your holy might, Lord God of the Holy Trinity.  
Our Lord Jesus Christ set out in a Jewish town,  
and a Jewish maiden laid him a pillow of stone and a bed of wattle,  
just as our Lord Jesus Christ could not rest on a pillow of rock and a  
bed of wattle,  
let this bitter pain likewise not find rest in your bones or other limbs.*

*And then you need to say the Lord’s Prayer. On June 3rd 1752, she recited the above quoted prayer in front of the court of law and related that it was used against disease and recommended it [---] to be spoken in a whisper over the sufferer, but for the curious she now also spoke it in a full voice. She had learnt this prayer from her mother, which [---]*

### **C. Pokolvar ellen**

Mikor az Úrjézus itt ezen a földön járt, útazott.  
Bemént egy jámbor gazdáhon,  
Haragos gazdasszonyhoz szállást kérni.  
Adott néki szállást gyékényponyván még kóvánkoston.  
Mint hogy az Úr Jézus ezen a gyékényponyván és kóvánkoston helyit  
nem találta,  
Úgy itt ez a fájdalmas pokolkelet pokolvar  
Vagy akarmiféle támadás itt, ebben a testbe  
Helyit nē tanálja!  
Mēnjēn lē a föld alá fájdalma!  
Oszlassa el az Atyaisten!  
Oszlassa el a Fiúisten!  
Oszlassa el a Szentháromság Egyisten!  
Mēnjēn lē a föld alá fájdalma!<sup>52</sup>

### ***Curing growths***

*When the Lord Jesus walked and travelled on Earth,  
he went into the house of a gentle master,  
and of an angry mistress, to ask for shelter.  
She gave him shelter on a bed of wattle and a pillow of stone.  
Just as the Lord Jesus could find no place  
on this bed of wattle and pillow of stone,  
so may this painful growth or any such kind of lump here  
not find its place in this body!  
May the pain go down under the ground!  
May God the Father disperse it!  
May God the Son disperse it!  
May the one God of the Holy Trinity disperse it!  
May the pain go underground!*

### **D. Kelés ellen**

Az Atyának, Fiúnak, Szentlélők Úristen nevibe körösztollek sēmminek.  
Gyékénykáká,  
Kópárnája,  
Krisztusnak tuskös lepedője,  
Sajttalan kásája.  
Krisztus mondása:  
Múljon el a támadása!  
Atyaisten, oszlassd el!

Fiúisten, mulaszd el!  
Szentlélek Úristen, vidd el!<sup>53</sup>

### ***Against growths***

*In the name of the Father, the Son and God the Holy Ghost I baptise you as nothing.*

*Bed of wattle,  
pillow of stone,  
a thorny sheet for Christ,  
and porridge with no salt.  
Christ's word:  
May this growth go away!  
God the Father, disperse it!  
God the Son, disperse it!  
God the Holy Ghost, take it away!*

### **E. Imádkozás mellfájásra**

Kúpárna, gyékényágy,  
Sajtalan kása.  
Jóakarátú embör,  
Rossz szándékú asszony,  
Az Isten szava, mondása.  
Ez lögyön a csöcsfájósok  
Orvossága.

Valaki szállást kért. Aszonták, engedjék be éjszakára. Aszonta az asszony: nem kő, vagyunk itt ölegen. Nē engedjük be! Ó, aszongya, hát majdcsak valahun macsarítunk neki egy kis helyet. Igazítsál ide. Tödd lē a gyékényt, oszt rá egy párnát vagy valamit. Osztán lētött egy gyéként, osztán a feje alá egy téglát tött az embörnek. Aszt azé van ez az imádság.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Prayer for curing pain in the breasts***

*Pillow of stone, bed of wattle,  
porridge with no salt.  
A man of goodwill,  
a woman of ill intent.  
This is God's word.  
May this be the remedy  
for people with pain in the breast.*

*There was someone who asked for shelter. He asked to be let in for the night. The wife said, 'No, there is enough of us here. Let's not let him in!' 'Oh, we'll make some room for him somewhere. You listen to me! Put down the wattle mat and a pillow on it or something.' So she put down a mat of wattle and put a brick down to go under the man's head. So that's why we have this prayer.*

## **APPENDIX 2. "BED OF WATTLE, PILLOW OF STONE" MOTIF UNDER DIFFERENT CHARM-TYPES AND SUB-TYPES**

### **1. Igézet gyógyítása**

[...] Szem megnézte,  
szív megigézte,  
ezer angyal látta,  
s ezer angyal jöjjön a megvigasztalására a kicsi Véricének,  
hogy meg ne nyugudjék az igézet benne,  
**mint az Úr Jézus Krisztus**  
**a gyékényágyon s a kőpárnán meg nem nyugudt!**

Újra Miatyánk és Üdvözlégy, minden parázs bedobásakor. [...] <sup>55</sup>

### **Curing "the evil eye"**

[...] *Eyes had looked at her,*  
*heart had bewitched her,*  
*a thousand angels had seen her,*  
*may a thousand angels come and comfort little Vérike,*  
*so that the evil eye may find no rest in her,*  
***just as the Lord Jesus Christ***  
***could not find rest on the bed of wattle and the pillow of stone!***

*Again Our Father and Hail Mary, while throwing in each ember. [...]*

## **XI. Naming the perpetrator + wishes, commands, supplications, blessings, curses (curing the evil eye)**

11. Naming the perpetrators + supplication, blessing, reference: the Virgin Mary  
Typology according to Éva Pócs (Pócs 2014b: 691–708)

## 2. Ficam gyógyítása. *Curing sprains*

Elindula Urunk Jézus	<i>Our Lord Jesus Christ set out</i>
Jerikóból Jeruzsálembe.	<i>from Jericho to Jerusalem.</i>
Általmene kőhidon,	<i>He went across a stone bridge</i>
ő lován, ő szamarán.	<i>on his horse, on his donkey.</i>
<b>Haragos gazdasszony,</b>	<b><i>An angry housewife,</i></b>
<b>jámbor gazdája,</b>	<b><i>a gentle master,</i></b>
<b>gyékényágy,</b>	<b><i>a bed of wattle,</i></b>
<b>kőpárnája,</b>	<b><i>a pillow of stone,</i></b>
<b>kőkenyere,</b>	<b><i>a bread of stone</i></b>
<b>fakése,</b>	<b><i>a wooden knife,</i></b>
<b>ez az Isten mondása:</b>	<b><i>this is God's saying:</i></b>

“Ezen jószág semmi ízébe, tagjába

*“In no part or joint of this animal*

ficemlés vagy nyílamlás meg ne maradjon,

*should there be any sprain or twist left,*

hús húshoz,

*flesh to flesh,*

csont csonthoz,

*bone to bone,*

tag taghoz,

*part to part,*

ín ínhöz,

*vein to vein,*

vér vérhöz, ér érhez.”

*blood to blood, vein to vein.”*

Krisztus Jézusnak maga szájából származott

szent igék által gyógyuljon meg!<sup>56</sup>

*May she recover through holy words*

*spoken by the very mouth of Jesus Christ.*

## XII. The stumbling horse/donkey (second charm of Merseburg)

2. Jesus with the Virgin Mary – they do the healing

Typology according to Éva Pócs (Pócs 2014b: 709–793).



### **3. Szentantaltüze gyógyítása**

Elindult a szentantal  
hét fiával,  
hét leányával,  
hetvenhétféle unokájával,  
tüzes orbáncos dagadott sebeivel,  
fene farkasaival,  
vad oroslánjaival,  
hogy Jusztinának gyenge szüvit elszorítom,  
piros vérit ott megiszom.  
Térj meg, szentantal,  
kérek a Jézus Krisztus keserves kínszenvedéseire,  
öt mélységes sebeire,  
eredj el az erdőkre,  
ott a vad oroslányoknak gyenge szüviket szorítsd el,  
piros vérüket ott idd meg!  
Térj meg, szentantal, vagy akármiféle eredet vagy!  
Mikor Krisztus a földön járt,  
hegyek nőttek,  
kövek tőttek,  
Krisztus mennybemenetele után mindenek megtértek,  
térj meg te is, akármiféle eredet vagy!  
**Az Úr Jézus Krisztusnak**  
**gyékényágya,**  
**kópárnája,**  
**sütelen kása,**  
**főtelen pogácsa,**  
**ez a Krisztus Urunk vacsorája,**  
kérek erre a keserves kínszenvedésekre,  
térj meg, akármiféle eredet vagy!  
Édes Jézusom, nem az én akaratom szerint;  
miképpen mennyben, úgy legyen a földön!  
Ha te akarsz, mutasd meg a te irgalmasságodat,  
ne nézd bűneinket, sok ellened való cselekedeteinket, édes Jézusom!<sup>57</sup>

### **Curing St. Anthony's fire**

*St. Anthony set out  
with his seven sons,  
and his seven daughters,  
seventy-seven kinds of grandchildren,  
his fiery, swollen erysipelas wounds,  
his terrible wolves,  
his wild lions,  
saying 'I'll squeeze out Jusztina's gentle heart,  
I'll drink her red blood'.  
Turn around, St. Anthony,  
I beseech thee by the bitter sufferings of Jesus Christ,  
by his five deep wounds,  
go into the woods,  
squeeze the gentle hearts of the wild lions,  
drink their red blood!  
Turn around, St. Anthony, or whatever kind you might be!  
When Christ walked on Earth,  
here were mountains growing,  
there were rocks emerging,  
after Christ's ascent to heaven all people converted,  
you convert, too, whatever kind you are!  
**The Lord Jesus Christ  
has a bed of wattle,  
a pillow of stone,  
raw grain  
unbaked scones,  
this is our Lord Christ's supper,**  
I beseech you by all of these bitter sufferings,  
convert, whatever kind you may be!  
Sweet Jesus, do not as I will,  
but just as it is in heaven, so be it on earth!  
If you choose to, please show your mercy,  
regard not our sins, our numerous actions against you, sweet Jesus!*

### **XIII. Encounters of sacred and evil figures (*Begegnungssegen*)**

#### 1. The migration of the evil figure

Typology according to Éva Pócs (Pócs 2014b: 709–793).

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Few example: Golopenția 1998; Agapkina & Levskievskaja & Toporkov 2003; Vaitkevičienė 2008; Kõiva 2011; Pócs 2014b. From historical sources: Lecouteux 1996; Braekman 1997; Holzmann, 2001; Bozóky 2003; Schulz 2003; Toporkov 2005, 2010; Timotin 2010; Ilyefalvi 2014b.
- <sup>2</sup> [http://isfnr.org/files/Responses\\_to\\_Toporkov\\_and\\_Agapkina.pdf](http://isfnr.org/files/Responses_to_Toporkov_and_Agapkina.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> See for instance: Voigt 2006; Holger & Schmitt & Janssen & Schering (eds.) 2014; *Oral Tradition*, 2013, 28(2) special edition of *Archives, Databases, and Special Collections*. <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/list?id=59#59>
- <sup>4</sup> On the current state of computational folkloristics see Abello & Broadwell & Tangherlini 2012, and other programmatic studies by Timothy R. Tangherlini 2013, 2016 and the special issue of the *Journal of American Folklore: A Special Issue on Computational Folkloristics*. *JAF* 2016: 129(511). <http://muse.jhu.edu/issue/33349>
- <sup>5</sup> Some important overviews and thought-provoking studies on the subject: Fine 1984; Briggs 1993; Foley 1997 [1995]; Gay 2000; Honko 2000a, 2000b; Barna 2003; Voigt 2004, 2006; Landgraf 2006; Niles 2013a, 2013b; Katajamäki & Lukin 2013. The textual guideline of Hungarian folklore studies: Voigt & Balogh 1974.
- <sup>6</sup> See Lauri Honko's (Honko 2000a: 17) overview about the factors of textualization.
- <sup>7</sup> Some consider the ditty about encouraging ladybirds to fly away to be such (Roper 2005), others mention them as being on the borderline between genres (Pócs 2014b), and there are also editions that publish even canonical prayers (Vaitkevičienė 2008). On the etic, artificial nature of separating prayer, archaic prayer and charms see most recently: Kapaló 2011a, 2011b: 190–191; Pócs 2014a: 14–18.
- <sup>8</sup> All this does not mean that some nineteenth-century folklorists would not have considered all this a problem, or would not have tried to get closer to the original context. See for instance: Stiùbhart's 2014 study on the charm-collecting journeys of the Scotsman Alexander Carmichael in the second half of the nineteenth century (Stiùbhart 2014). However, in general, it can be said that the editors of twentieth-century charm collections paid less attention to the description of the rituals connected to the texts, they rather concentrated on the text material. The methodological problem stemming from the difficulty of collecting charms in action still exists in the twenty-first century, for more on this cf. Takács 2015: 15. It is relatively rare, even in the case of longer fieldwork based on participant observation, to be present at the original act of the charm, unless the person is the one treated by the charmer. In relation to this cf. the anthropological fieldwork experiences of James A. Kapaló (Kapaló 2011b: 171–172).

- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Pócs 2014a: 17, 39. Cf. also Lauri Honko's statement about the charmer never memorising and reiterating lines during the composition process (Honko 2000b: 24).
- <sup>10</sup> In her pragmatic typology Sanda Golopenția classifies the entire 'magical scenario'; similarly, Vladimir Kljaus considers the pre- and post-texts joining the concrete texts as parts of the 'charm plot' and builds his classification on the ensemble of these (cf. Golopenția 2009; Kljaus 2009; Vaitkevičienė 2008).
- <sup>11</sup> Pócs 2014a: 22–30; Ilyefalvi 2014a: 21–23. For the dialectics of the two traditions see the relevant studies in recently published collections of essays: Roper 2004, 2009; Kapaló & Pócs & Ryan 2014. Daiva Vaitkevičienė, however, points out in relation to the Lithuanian material that no manuscripts or chapbooks containing charms are known in Lithuania before the twentieth century (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 94).
- <sup>12</sup> See the introductory study by Linda Dégh (Dégh 1986) and the studies of the *Journal of Folklore Research*'s special 1986, 23(2/3) edition entitled "The Comparative Method in Folklore". See also Virtanen 1993; Wolf-Knuts 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Frog 2013: 18, 22; Katajamäki & Lukin 2013: 9. At a roundtable discussion organised in Vilnius in 2013 at a congress of ISFNR with the title "Why Should Folklore Students Study "Dead" Legends?" underlined the importance of researching archival folklore material. The discussion also included the re-evaluation of Historical-Geographic Method(s) and the reinterpretation of the problems of archiving-typologization-comparison from various national perspectives. See the entire discussion and the problem-raising presentation of Terry Gunnell (Gunnell et al. 2013).
- <sup>14</sup> Frog pointed out in his study that, in some national folklore disciplines, there is incoherence in the use of the term 'Historical-Geographic Method'. The related methods do not constitute a uniform methodology, yet in some cases they used the term to refer to a certain methodology. In order to bypass these inconsistencies and to avoid misunderstandings, Frog introduced the term "Historical-Geographic Method(s)". In agreement with Frog, I will use this terminology throughout the study (Frog 2013: 19).
- <sup>15</sup> Sebeok 1974, also see the speech act-based categories of Gorovei, Artur: *Descântecel românlor, Studiu de folklor* (1931, Bucuresti: M. O. Imprimeria Nationala). Referenced by: Golopenția 2004: 152.
- <sup>16</sup> Jonathan Roper rather encourages the monographic presentation of certain types following the model of the charm entries in the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (hereafter HwDA). However, he considers the main types identified within the English charms corpus to be possibly extended to become the foundation of an international catalogue (Roper 2004: 139–140).
- <sup>17</sup> This is also why at the international conferences of the society there is an emerging tradition of having separate panels on certain well-known European types. The latest such panel was in May 2016 in Cork in the section *Flum Jordan / Jordansagen*, or earlier in 2011 in Moscow the panel on texts to heal fever (*Fiebersegen*).
- <sup>18</sup> Theo Meder, Dutch folktale researcher conducted the following experiment: five researchers were asked to identify the main motifs of one version of the Cinderella. The story contains 124 sentences and the researchers found a total of 68 minor and major motifs, which would suggest that there is a motif in at least every second sentence;

moreover, what was even more surprising is that there were only three motifs that all researchers identified and considered essential: the cruel stepmother, the glass slipper, and the slipper test (Meder 2014: 123).

- <sup>19</sup> In Hungarian folklore studies cf. the study by Ildikó Landgraf about the impossibility of classifying historical legends into types (Landgraf 2006).
- <sup>20</sup> The first known texts of the Longinus charm are in Latin and in German, documented from the tenth century. Cf. Roper 2004: 130; HwdA: “Longinussegen”. For English text see: Olsan 2004: 76–77; Roper 2005: 112–114.
- <sup>21</sup> Pócs 2014b: 923. Éva Pócs still discusses this in a separate sub-type within narrative texts.
- <sup>22</sup> The *Flum Jordan* charms were used mostly to stop bleeding or to heal bleeding wounds; the text has been known from the twelfth century throughout Western and Eastern Europe as well, in both written and oral traditions. See *Flum Jordan* type developed for a possible international charm index in Agapkina & Toporkov 2013: 89–91.
- <sup>23</sup> Pócs 2014b: 713, 942. In the Hungarian material these motifs are mostly related to texts healing bewitchment. See, for instance, group XV of Hungarian charms where Jesus is bewitched and Virgin Mary or a saint heals him with the water of the River Jordan (Pócs 2014b: 809–855).
- <sup>24</sup> Daiva Vaitkevičienė also points out that in her classification many texts could have been classified into at least two categories (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 85).
- <sup>25</sup> For the overview and examples of the sub-type see Pócs 2014b: 895–914. According to Éva Pócs, this sub-type was diffused in the southern part of the Hungarian Great Plain and in Moldova, and she also knows about Italian, Romanian, Serbian and Croatian parallels, therefore she suspects that the text material had in the past spread over a wider Mediterranean and Central European region.
- <sup>26</sup> Ohrt 1936a. For a short Hungarian overview of encounter charms and the related Hungarian texts see Pócs 2014b: 709–793.
- <sup>27</sup> By ‘well-known’ Western European types I mostly mean the charm types that became known from the research carried out by Oskar Ebermann (1903), Ferdinand Ohrt (1936a, 1936b, 1938) and other scholars in the first half of the twentieth century. See the charm type entries in the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* handbook (Hoffmann-Krayer & Bächtold-Stäubli 1927–1942).
- <sup>28</sup> The various uses of Historical-Geographic Method(s) in current folkloristic research has most recently been discussed in Frog’s study (Frog 2013: 23–30).
- <sup>29</sup> This essentially contradicts what Honko had formulated on several occasions, namely that archival folklore texts are “dead artefacts” which had lost their meaning, however in 1986 Honko himself did not preclude the possibility of using archival materials as “dense” corpuses, but he was also calling attention to its difficulties (Honko 1986: 116; cf. Anttonen 2013: 159–161; Gunnell et al. 2013: 173). Anttonen stresses that meanings can be found and analysed contextually in archival folklore materials if we ask the right questions instead of making the archival materials accountable for the lack of information that only becomes relevant to future paradigms (cf. Anttonen 2013).

The use of archival texts as a thick corpus is best modelled in the recent Finnish and Scandinavian historical folklore studies.

<sup>30</sup> This is how Lauri Honko defined the three major textual paradigms of folklore studies (Honko 2000a: 5–14, 2000b: 6–18). John Foley gave a similar definition of textual paradigms with a detailed description of theories in the 60s and 70s that shaped the reconsideration of the problems and limits of folklore text editions, especially in Western European and American folklore studies. Foley considered three theories to be important: (1) the oral-formulaic theory of a research studying epic poetry at Harvard University; (2) the approaches of ethnography of speaking and ethnopoetics; (3) and performance studies (Foley [1995] 1997). In Hungarian, and in many cases in other European folkloristics, the above theories have not changed the previous practices of archiving and editing folklore texts, aside from a few pioneering attempts. Most of the European folklore archives continued to function, to this day, in the archiving system set up in the early-twentieth-century golden age of the Historical-Geographic Method(s) when folklore archives were established. See for instance: the comments of Fredrik Skott about Swedish archives at the Vilnius roundtable discussion (Gunnell et al. 2013: 199–200).

<sup>31</sup> In light of the changes in the textual procedures of folklore studies, including textual paradigm shifts, several authors point out that they mostly stem from the new technical options of recording and storing orality (Voigt 2006: 309–311; Katajamäki & Lukin 2013: 11; Frog 2013: 23). Although computational procedures to analyse folklore texts have been conducted since the 60s (see: Voigt 1981), the paradigm-shifting role and significance of technological developments related to computer science only became evident in the past 10–15 years with the appearance of the internet and the mass diffusion of online databases.

<sup>32</sup> See the programmatic overview of the objectives set by computational folkloristics, as a new disciplinary approach: Abello & Broadwell & Tangherlini 2012: 63.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for instance: Niles 2013: 221.

<sup>34</sup> Within the framework of the present study there is no room to discuss concrete technical problems in detail. The digital folklore databases known today have used standardized developments of XML (Extensible Markup Language) and TEI (Text Encoding Initiative), which proved to be the most popular and long-lasting among the various markup-languages so far. See for instance Holger & Schering & Schmitt 2014. For Hungarian references see the comments of István Csörsz Rumen at the 2003 textual folkloristic roundtable discussion, where he outlined the opportunities of XML-based processing of popular poetry (Barna 2003: 67–72).

<sup>35</sup> According to Tangherlini, since the beginning of research the folkloristic ‘equation’ consists of connecting and interpreting the three main actors: people (storytellers and scholars), places (where stories were collected and mentioned in stories), and stories (or folkloric expression in general) (Tangherlini 2016: 65).

<sup>36</sup> See for instance the WossiDiA directed by Christoph Schmitt (Holger & Schering & Schmitt 2014: 69; Meder 2014; Tangherlini 2016: 66).

<sup>37</sup> Meder 2014: 124; Tangherlini 2013: 15–20. The limits of the applicability of typologies is also apparent where the basis of the database is the complete bequest of a prominent

collector and not a specific genre, such as the WossiDiA (Holger & Schering & Schmitt 2014), or the ETKSpace and Danish Folklore Nexus (Tangherlini & Broadwell 2014).

- <sup>38</sup> About the various error types, the error ratio of manual annotation and the possibilities of automated annotation in relation to the Dutch folktale database see Muiser & Theune & Meder 2012; Meder & Karsdorp & Nguyen & Theune & Trieschnigg & Muiser 2016: 82–87.
- <sup>39</sup> The ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches termed by Timothy R. Tangherlini also cover these two types of annotation; cf. Abello & Broadwell & Tangherlini 2012.
- <sup>40</sup> There are countless initiatives within digital humanities (for instance: Dublin Core Metadata Initiative: DCMI, Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting: OAI-PMH, CLARIN) for the standardisation of these meta-data in hope of new exchanges (Meder 2014: 125).
- <sup>41</sup> For instance: Meder 2014: 124; Katajamäki & Lukin 2013: 13. See the objectives of the SIEF Working Group on Archives here: <http://www.siefhome.org/wg/arch/>.
- <sup>42</sup> Timothy R. Tangherlini introduces the term ‘distant reading’ into computational folkloristics research, borrowed from the literary scholar Franco Moretti (originally used for the study of literature). According to ‘distant reading’, and contrary to the former ‘close reading’, computer programs create the possibility of a wider/more distant reading in which the directions, the processes and the frameworks of the levels above and below the text, which otherwise would not be perceivable for the researcher, can be outlined. Cf. Tangherlini 2013: 10–11; Abello & Broadwell & Tangherlini 2012: 62.
- <sup>43</sup> <http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/romanianCharms/>
- <sup>44</sup> The syntax of the markup-language can be reached at this link:  
<http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/romanianCharms/tagDoc.html#markupsyntax>
- <sup>45</sup> This problem in terms of nineteenth-century Hungarian folktale material was pointed out by Judit Gulyás (Gulyás 2012: 335). Timothy R. Tangherlini published the manuscripts of field notes, correspondence and finally the publication end product in the ETKNexus database processing the material of Evald Tang Kristensen (Tangherlini & Broadwell 2014).
- <sup>46</sup> The international catalogue project of Jonathan Roper and Tatjana Agapkina and Andrei Toporkov is a good starting point for the definition of basic metadata (Roper 2004: 52–89, 2005; Agapkina & Toporkov 2013: 82). For the basic metadata of the Dutch folktale database see: Muiser & Theune & Meder 2012.
- <sup>47</sup> Such as the Finnish Runot database, which processed in a digital database 27,000 pages of the 34 volumes of *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (SKVR) published between 1908 and 1948. See: <http://skvr.fi/>
- <sup>48</sup> For more detail see: Muiser & Theune & Meder 2012.
- <sup>49</sup> “Practicing computational humanities only makes sense if we develop questions that computers are better able to answer than are researchers.” (Meder & Karsdorp & Nguyen & Theune & Trieschnigg & Muiser 2016: 93).

- <sup>50</sup> First published by Lajos Kálmány in the late 19th century from Egyházaskér (Pócs 2014b: 896).
- <sup>51</sup> From a witch trial (1752, Pécs) (Ilyefalvi 2014b: 203–204).
- <sup>52</sup> Collected by Zoltán Polner in 1976 from Királyhegyes (Pócs 2014b: 900).
- <sup>53</sup> Collected by Zoltán Polner in 1976 from Szőreg (Pócs 2014b: 907).
- <sup>54</sup> Collected by Zoltán Polner in 1973 from Tápé (Pócs 2014b: 907–908).
- <sup>55</sup> Collected by Lajos Balázs in 1999 from Csíkszentdomokos (Pócs 2014b: 672–673).
- <sup>56</sup> First published by Áron Szilády in the late 19th century (Pócs 2014b: 698).
- <sup>57</sup> Collected by Zsuzsanna Erdélyi in 1971 from Felsőnána (but informant were resettled from Hadikfalva (Dornești), Romania) (Pócs 2014b: 732–733).

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## **THE TERRORS OF THE NIGHT: CHARMS AGAINST THE NIGHTMARE AND THE MYTHOLOGY OF DREAMS**

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This article takes a semiotic and structuralist approach to understanding the characteristic nightmare package of imagery, or image-constellation, which appears also in charms, curses and lullabies to do with disturbed sleep. Elements of the nightmare package – its mythos – is related to a spectrum of charms and related belief-narratives. Charms against the nightmare are investigated, as are sleep charms as representative of the nightmare narrative of threat coming close to fruition. Detail is provided on spiritual beings believed to attack the sleeper, as well as on charms as methods to ward off such attacks. Psychological explanations are considered, such as the nightmare antagonist being a disguised avatar of the self.

Keywords: body, dreams, dream imagery, lullabies, *mara*, metaphor, nightmare, sleep, spells

### **INTRODUCTION: THE NIGHTMARE AND CHARMS**

“Let’s use a charm ... Quiet sleep, or thou shalt see / The horrid hags of Tartary ... And Cerberus shall bark at thee ... And all the Furies ... lash thee ... And therefore sleep thou peacefully”

Thomas Randolph, *The Jealous Lovers*, III. v (1632)

“No one hears the words spoken in dreams”

Dogon saying (Calame-Griaule 1965: 146)

The experience of nightmare has for centuries been mediated through and expressed by a characteristic package of imagery, which appears also in charms, curses and lullabies to do with disturbed sleep. This imagery constitutes a tenacious visual rhetoric, framing nightmare-related phenomena in terms of dream-demons, figures of impossibility, and nonsense; using the same figurative transformations (condensation and displacement) typical of dream imagery generally (Freud 1978 [1900]).<sup>1</sup> The imagery used in charms to repel or invoke invasive dreams also delineates the shapes and habits of the mythic agents believed to be responsible. The forms and actions attributed to these agents, and the rhetoric used to describe them, parallel in structure the psychological experience itself. As nightmares in real life are rooted in the dreaming self, certain kinds of strangeness and impossibility in their representation reflect the fragmentation and duplication of the ego in dreams.

The approach here is broadly structuralist and semiotic; we are looking for a distinctive set of elements, manifesting in variable patterns, across different media and contexts.<sup>2</sup> The methodology is qualitative rather than quantitative, reflecting the terrain of research on nightmare beliefs and imagery. Some groups of data have attracted generations of scholarly study, in depth and detail: the folklore of the Scandinavian *mara* (Sydow 1911; Tillhagen 1960; Raudvere 1995), or the corpus of Babylonian texts (cf. Foster 1995, 2005). Other kinds of material have much smaller literatures: such as lullaby imagery (e.g. Daiken 1959; Achté et al. 1990). Details of archives and collections are given in the notes. As agendas, classificatory schemes and theoretical frameworks vary across disciplines, the materials presented here are not usually interrogated primarily as dream-representations. My aim is, at least, to consider side-by-side imagery from a range of complex representations, all of which deal in some way with the nightmare.

The sections that follow explore evidence for a general tradition of nightmare representation as a consistent, adaptable package of elements – an image-constellation (cf. Milne 2016) – in charms, spells and lullabies. Examples are drawn from a wide chronological and geographical range – from ancient Mesopotamia to twentieth century Pennsylvania – the better to indicate both the longevity and ubiquity of the template, and its remarkable adaptability. Nightmare imagery appears in many guises, over a very long period of time, in otherwise very different regions and cultures.

## **WHAT IS A NIGHTMARE?**

In its oldest form, the nightmare is conceived of as an attack during sleep, by a supernatural being. The entity responsible is often characterised as a hybrid

being with animal extremities, such as teeth, claws, or horns. The nightmare is defined by the fear and terror which accompany this scenario of attack. It is thus a type of affect-laden dream: a dream carrying a strong, ego-shattering emotional charge (Milne 2010, 2011, 2014). The other main classes of this kind of dream are the erotic dream and the ecstatic dream-encounter with a god. The three may blur together. Cultural templates, context and expectation are used to fill in the contours of the dream figure. These determine whether the charge of desire (affect) is experienced as positive or negative. They also ascribe the source of the desire to a place or persona in the dream-text: relocating it, as it were, away from the dreamer herself. The affect thus may be attributed to the demon, to the dreamer, to a third party, or even outwith the dream-scenario itself.

For example, an Alexandrian text describes how the magician Nectanebo constructed a divine sexual dream for Queen Olympias:

‘Who is the god with whom you tell me to sleep?’ He said, ‘The horned, wealth-bringing Ammon’, She said, ‘...what type of man is he?’ He replied, ‘He is middle-aged, his hair is gray and he has a ram’s horns on his forehead. You will see the god making love to you ... this night in a dream’. [Then] Nectanebo left the palace ... [in] the wilderness [he] picked plants suitable for the sending of dreams [and] made a decoction. He modelled a female body out of wax and wrote Olympias’s name on [it and] made a little bed also from wax and laid the doll of Olympias on it. He kindled a lamp, threw the plant juice into it and invoked with oaths the demons [for] this purpose ... he bewitched Olympias’s sleep ... [so] Olympias ... saw Ammon embrace her and sleep with her in a dream. Then he [Ammon] rose up from the bed and said, ‘Woman, you have your avenger [in] your womb.’ (Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alexander Romance*, 1–7, 12, early 3C; trans. Ogden 2009: 56–57).

Following Nectanebo’s charm, the god duly arrives and impregnates the Queen in her dream: the child is Alexander the Great. Now, this is not represented as a nightmare, though Ammon acts as an incubus, and has horns. It is not in fact represented as an affect-laden dream: the close encounter with the god is shorn of emotion, and the Queen’s feelings are not part of the text. But, read in any Christian context, the ingredients of this dream register immediately as diabolical. A suitable reaction of horror or terror would be evoked and folded in to the account, and the result would be recognisably nightmarish.

Depending on cultural expectation, then, the “same” dream text can be construed as negative or positive. In some cultures – even within the same dream text – the dream-demon may morph from negative to positive or vice versa.



The narrator of the Akkadian poem, “The Righteous Sufferer” (c. 1500–1000 BCE; Foster 2005: 392), describes his recovery from illness as the replacement in his dreams of an inimical god by a helpful one, who then dispels a whole group of disease spirits.<sup>3</sup>

Heavy was his hand upon me, I could not bear it!  
Dread of him was oppressive, it [--- me].  
His fierce [pun]ishment [---], the deluge,  
His stride was [---], it [---]  
[Ha]rsh, severe illness does not [---] my person,  
I lost sight of [aler]tness, [---] make my mind stray.  
I gro[an] day and night alike,  
Dreaming and waking [I am] equally wretched.  
A remarkable young man of extraordinary physique,  
Magnificent in body, clothed in new garments,  
Because I was only half awake, his features lacked form.  
He was clad in splendo[u]r, robed in dread ---  
He came in upon me, he stood over me.  
[When I saw him, my] flesh grew numb.  
[---] ‘The Lady(?) has sent [me]’,  
[---] A second time [I saw a dream].  
In the dream I saw [at night],  
A remarkable purifier [---],  
He pronounced the resuscitating incantation,  
he massaged [my] bo[dy].  
A third time I saw a dream.  
[---]  
[He applied] to me his spell  
which binds [debilitating disease],  
[He drove] back the evil vapo[u]r to the ends of the earth,  
He bore off [the head pain] to the breast of hell,  
[He sent] down the malignant spectre to its hidden depth,  
The relentless ghost he returned [to] its dwelling,  
He overthrew the she-demon, sending it off to a mountain,  
He replaced the ague in flood and sea,  
He eradicated debility like a plant,  
Uneasy sleep, excessive drowsiness,  
He dissipated like smoke filling the sky.  
(Foster 2005: 402–404).

We will encounter again this apotropaic pattern, wherein a third, benevolent figure is introduced, to intervene between the dreamer and the nightmare entity. Note also the multiplicity of the demons: another recurrent element.

Charms enter into nightmare discourse most straightforwardly as a means of protection, to fend off bad dreams, or dispel whatever threat such dreams might pose. Again, this tradition is very old. An Akkadian prayer deals with an ominous dream in this address to Nusku, courier of the gods:

O Nusku, you are companion to the sun,  
You are the judge, judge (my) case!  
This dream which was brought to me in the evening,  
midnight, or morning watch,  
Which you understand but I do not,  
If it is propitious,  
may the good (it portends) not pass me by,  
If it is evil, may the evil (it portends) not overtake me,  
It is not for me!  
Just as this pulled-up reed cannot return to its place,  
And (as) this hem cut from my garment,  
Being cut from it, cannot return to my garment,  
So may the evil (portended by) this dream,  
Which was brought to me in the evening, midnight,  
or morning watch,  
Not overtake me, it is not for me!  
(Foster 1995: 252).

The speaker is unsure about the portent of his dream, so his prayer covers both possibilities. If the dream brings luck, he wants it; if the opposite, he invokes a simple piece of sympathetic magic to avert evil consequences.

In the context of amulets and other apotropaic visual media, charms against dream-demons may take the form of an image of the demon itself, or imagery with similar demonic properties. In Mesopotamia, the grotesque head of Humbaba (Figure 1a) became a common apotropaic symbol. This monster first appeared to Gilgamesh in a dream, following which, Gilgamesh and Enkidu found and killed it (cf. Lambert 1987). The head of Humbaba is a prototype for the gorgon mask (*gorgoneia*; Figure 1b), which fulfilled the same functions in the Classical world (Hopkins 1934; cf. Vernant 1991). The gorgon, of course, was turned to stone on seeing its own reflection in Perseus's mirror-shield; it is an image of protective duplication.

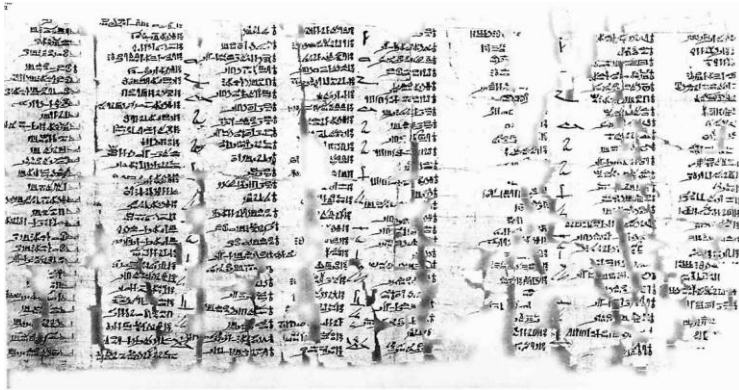
In Ancient Egypt, the King's Scribe Qenherkhepshef (19th Dynasty, c. 1210 BCE) owned a dream book including spells against nightmares (Figure 2a;



*Fig 1a: Humbaba, 1800BCE–1600BCE (Old Babylonian), Abu Habba, South Iraq. Fired clay mask. 8.3 x 8.4 cm. British Museum, London. Museum number: 116624. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.*



*Fig. 1b: Gorgoneion within arched frame, c. 500BC, Campania, Italy. Terracotta antefinial. H: 29 cm. British Museum, London. Museum number: 1877,0802.4. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.*



*Fig. 2a: Hieratic dream book, 1245–1190 BCE, Dynasty XIX. Papyrus, black & red ink, cursive hieratic. Chester Beatty III, sheet 3, recto, columns 8–11. British Museum, London. Museum number: EA10683.3. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.*



*Fig. 2b. Headrest of Qeniherkhepeshef, carved with protective figures of Bes, 1225 BC, 19th Dynasty, Deir el-Medina, Egypt. Limestone, 18.8 x 23 x 9.7cm. British Museum, London. Museum number: EA63783. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.*



*Fig. 2c. Headrest of Qeniherkhepeshef, carved with protective figures of Bes, 1225 BC, 19th Dynasty, Deir el-Medina, Egypt. Limestone, 18.8 x 23 x 9.7cm. British Museum, London. Museum number: EA63783. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.*

Chester Beatty III, sheet 3, recto, columns 8–11). His funerary head-rest depicts the grotesque dwarf-god Bes, waving snakes to fend off dreams (Figures 2b and c); the inscription reads: “a good sleep within the West, the necropolis of the righteous” (Pinch 1994: 43, 58–59; cf. Milne 2010: 178). Many such head-rests, used into the Roman era, have been found; some ceremonial and destined for tombs, others used in everyday life. An early and popular protection against nightmares was thus to repel the demon with a representation of itself.

## THE WORLD-VIEW OF HEALING CHARMS

The ancient world thus developed and bequeathed a rich culture of beliefs concerning demons, charms, curses, dreams, nightmares and disease. From the emic point of view, all such practices take the existence of spirits as a given. Spirits are endemic in the world. They present themselves in dreams, cause illness or bad luck. We can interface with them – to bind, repel or compel them to our desires – through charms. From the etic point of view, spirits are cultural constructions: it is the culture of charms which effectively conjures the spirits into being. In this perspective, measures against spirits are counter-representations which delineate the contours of the agencies addressed. Spirits achieve visibility – enter representation – at and through the interface whereby they are summoned or repelled. Similarly, in the belief-constellation of the nightmare, the shape and habits of the demon are represented in negative, as it were, through the measures used against it.

Supernatural bad dreams are located and defined in the discourse of spirits in various overlapping ways. Dreams may be perceived in terms of a demonic visitation with a personal, prophetic or emotional significance, as in the ancient examples above. Or nightmares may be seen as one among several symptoms, connected with afflictions involving insomnia, hallucinations or fever. For millennia, any kind of illness was commonly perceived as caused by supernatural agents. Any sick person was half in, half out of the shadow of death, and so in the power of those who ruled that domain. Charms against disease are a thus good place to look for demons associated with dreams and nightmares.

Healing charms may conceive of spirits either as sending illness, or as the illness personified. So, for example, for Siberian shamans, Smallpox is a spirit personage. Some medieval charms personify fever demons as Seven Sisters, and address them by name. For instance, the Blæsinge amulet (c. 1075–1300) from Zealand, Denmark (Simek 2011: 34; cf Bozóky 2013: 102–103) carries this injunction:<sup>4</sup>

+ I conjure you, seven sisters [---] Elffrica (?), Affricea, Soria, Affoca, Africala. I conjure you and invoke (you?) through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you may not harm this servant of God, neither in the eyes nor in the limbs nor in the marrow nor in any joints of the limbs [---] agla.

From an earlier long incantation (c. 1000; Codex Vaticanus Latinus: 235), we learn that these sisters are “shivers and fevers”, with dominion over (among other things) different times of day:



Fig. 3: *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*, detail, 1170–1200, *Passionary of Weissenau* (*Weissenauer Passionale*), 127, fol. 125v. *Fondation Bodmer*, Coligny, Switzerland Cod. Photo: Bodmer.

The midday ones, the nightly, the daily, the bi-daily, the three daily [---] or whatever sort you are: I conjure you [---] you may not have leave to harm this servant of God by day or night, neither waking or sleeping [---]. (trans. Simek 2011: 36).

A modern Udmart healing charm involves making the sign of the cross with scissors and needle over the hurt – understood as the site where part of a body or organ has been “pulled off” (i.e. magically dislodged from its proper position) – while addressing the powers by the times they rule:

The spirit of an open space,  
The spirit of the dusk,  
The spirit of the morning,  
The spirit of the night,  
The spirit of the afternoon,  
Take away all his/her diseases/illnesses.  
(collected 1975, Panina 2011: 148).<sup>5</sup>

The “spirit of the night” here is one among a host of temporal personifications.



The opposite of troubled sleep is untroubled sleep. When the “mini-myth” of a charm conjures up spirit entities as mediators or protectors, these may specifically relate to sleep. A common convention in medieval healing charms was to invoke the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus against illness implicitly caused by demonic agencies. The Seven Sleepers legend – derived from a Greek original, and transmitted by Gregory of Tours (c. 538–594), among others – circulated widely in manuscripts from the 9C on (cf. Figure 3). The oldest extant vernacular version is in Old English (BL MS Cotton Julius E vii; Magennis 1991). The Anglo-Saxon *Wið dweorh* (*Against a dwarf*, c. 1000; BL MS. Harley 585) charm begins by ritually naming the Sleepers:

Wið dweorh man sceal niman VII lytle ofloetan, swylce man mid ofrað, and writtan þas naman on celcre ofloetan: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion.

*Against a dwarf one must take seven small holy wafers, such as one makes holy communion with, and write these names on each wafer: Maximian, Malchus, John, Martimian, Dionysius, Constantine, Serafion* [i.e. the names of the sleepers] (Griffiths 1996: 188).

As well as invoking the Sleepers, this charm names the genus of the attacking spirit: a dwarf. Anglo-Saxons attributed various types of pains and wounds to the actions of malevolent spirits and their weapons.<sup>6</sup> We will return to the dwarf of this charm, and the peculiar illness he causes. But let us first consider some common characteristics in the framing rhetoric of charms generally, and their links to the conventions of dream representation.

## THE RHETORIC OF IMPOSSIBILITY

In the prayer to Nusku, just as the pulled-up reed and the cut-off hem cannot return to their places, so may the evil pass by the supplicant. This rhetoric of impossibility is a standard feature both of charms (Bozóky 2013: 101–17; Pócs 2013: 165–198) and oneiric imagery (cf. Milne 2013, 2018: Chapters 1 and 3). *Adynata*, or *impossibilia*, are figures of speech which denote the end of the world and/or the suspension of natural law: so the lion will lie down with the lamb, or the seas run dry before such-and-such an event can come to pass. In myth and folklore, *adynata* are also used as liminal signs, denoting magical space and time. Nonsense shares terrain with *impossibilia* in proverbial speech and certain folk narrative genres, such as tall travellers’ tales (cf. e.g. Haavio 1959: 210; Milne 2018: Chapter 3). Dream imagery too is characteristically distorted – made nonsensical, mysterious, surreal – through the twin

processes of condensation and displacement, acting on the matter of personal memory through cultural templates, such as folk-tales (Freud 1900: 381–419; 1913). Visualisations of demons and other spirits in apotropeic art and imagery are produced through comparable condensations and displacements: thus Bes is a bestial figure with no neck, Humbaba and the *gorgoneia* are grotesque, exaggerated and disembodied faces (Figures 1a and b), the young man in the Righteous Sufferer’s dream is impossibly “clad in splendo[u]r, robed in dread”. And the effect of nonsensical figuration in charm imagery is also oneiric (cf. Stewart 1989).

Nonsense in verbal charms – strings of syllables, garbled words – is similarly generated by condensing and displacing normative language, as in *abracadabra*, *abraxis* etc.<sup>7</sup> Charm formulae may be written backwards or bucephalus fashion; letters may be shuffled or transposed.<sup>8</sup> In the Vatican MS charm quoted above, the names of the Fever Sisters are coded in this way: “klkb, rfstklkb, fbgblkb, sxbfpgllkb, frkcb, kxlkcb, kgnbwe...” (Simek 2011: 37). We see all these figurations – nonsense, impossibilities, oneiric imagery, and the dream-demon among them – together in the next set of examples, drawn from the genre of the lullaby, which itself can be regarded as a kind of sleep charm.

## LULLABIES AS SLEEP CHARMS

Oneiric transformations operate in the lullaby genre<sup>9</sup> on several levels. Lullabies resemble magical incantations in that they often open with a rhythmic nonsensical or “meaningless refrain” (Rogers 2008; Wilce 2006); as does the oldest lullaby in English, based on a Latin ancestor:<sup>10</sup>

Lollai • lollai • litil child whi wepistou so sore.  
nedis mostou wepe • hit was iSarkid þe Sore.  
euer to lib in sorow • and sich and mourne euer •  
as þin eldren did er þis • whil hi aliues were.  
Lollai lollai litil child • child lolai lullow •  
into uncuþ world icommen so ertow

*Lollai, lollai, little child, why do you weep so bitterly?  
Necessarily you must weep, it was prepared long ago for you  
ever to live in sorrow, and sigh and ever mourn,  
as your elders did before this, while they were alive.  
Lollai, Lollai, little child, child lollai, lullow,  
into an unknown world so you have come.* (Rogers 2008: 89–97).

There are lullabies with no dark imagery, which present what we might call wish-fulfilment or daydream scenarios. There are lullabies which envisage the death of the baby, or liken sleep to death (Achté & Fagerström et al. 1990: 193–204); these might be regarded as nightmarish in a mantic or apotropeic sense. A subgenre expresses the idea of an attack in sleep, and/or evokes the presence of a supernatural bogeyman figure. This group manifests components of the traditional nightmare in a genre whose ostensible goal is to produce untroubled sleep. The object of the charm is the baby, who is – paradoxically – threatened with impossible nightmare imagery as a punishment for not sleeping. Daiken (1959: 21) refers to this subgenre as “the lullaby of threat”. Such lullabies embed the nightmare package in a structure resembling a charm, framing and arranging the elements of the mythos anew, for a different purpose.

The oldest I have found is a Babylonian charm to calm a baby, invoking Kusarikkum, a household god with the head of a bison:

e rum wāšib bīt ekletim  
lū tatta âm tātamar nūr šamšim  
ammīn tabakki ammīn tuggag  
ullikīa ammīn lā tabki  
ili bītim tedki kusarikkum iggeltēm  
mannum idkīanni mannum ugallitanni  
e rum idkīka e rum ugallitka  
kīma šātū karānim kīma mār sābītim  
limqutaššum šittum

*Little one who dwelt in the dark chamber [i.e. the womb],  
You really did come out here, you have seen the [sunlig]ht.  
Why are you crying? Why are you [fretting]?  
Why did you not cry in there?  
You have disturbed the household god,  
the bison(-monster) has woken, (saying),  
‘Who disturbed me? Who startled me?’  
The little one disturbed you, the little one startled you.  
‘As onto drinkers of wine, as onto tipplers,  
Let sleep fall upon him.’*  
(trans. Foster 2005: 172; Farber 1990: 140).

In modern European languages, the threat takes various forms: French lullabies name *Le Loup Garon* (werewolf); the Bretons, *Le Grand Lustucru* (ogre); the Russians have the Little Grey Wolf.<sup>11</sup> This Italian *ninna-nanna* (lullaby), recorded in Tuscany in 1965, contains the wolf, a plague, the three Fates and a historical battle:

Ninna nanna il mio ciocione... Il mugnaio non è venuto lo potesse mangiare il lupo e il lupo e la lupaia li venisse l'anguinaia. L'anguinaia l'è mala cosa e più su ci sta una sposa e più giù ce ne sta un'altra una fi la e una l'annaspa. Una fa il cappellino di paglia per portarlo alla battaglia la battaglia e 'l battaglino dettero foco a Barberino. Barberino corri corri dette foco a quelle torri una torre la si spezzò il bambino s'addormentò (collected from Caterina Bueno, 1976; Giudice 1988: 271–272).	<i>Rock-a-bye, my suckling The miller has not come may he be eaten by a wolf and the wolf and the wolf's lair may he be struck by the plague. The plague is a terrible thing and up above there is a bride and down below there is another one weaves and the other winds. One makes a little hat of straw to take to battle the battle and the small battalion set fire to Barberino. Barberino, run, run! did set fire to those towers, a tower fell asunder and the baby fell asleep</i>
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The lullaby of threat can also transform historical human enemies<sup>12</sup> into supernatural agents, as in this early 19C British example:

Baby, baby, naughty baby,  
Hush you squalling thing, I say.  
Peace this moment, peace, or maybe  
Bonaparte will pass this way.  
Baby, baby, he's a giant,  
Tall and black as Rouen steeple,  
And he breakfasts, dines, rely on't,  
Every day on naughty people  
Baby, baby, if he hears you  
As he gallops past the house  
Limb from limb at once he'll tear you  
Just as pussy tears a mouse  
And he'll beat you, beat you, beat you  
And he'll beat you all to pap  
And he'll eat you, eat you, eat you  
Every morsel, snap, snap, snap  
(Opie and Opie 1951: 59).

Napoleon Bonaparte, popularly (though erroneously) known as a short man, is represented as black and gigantic; he is a beater and devourer. The change in scale is a standard oneiric device, the beating and devouring elements are typical of the emotion-laden action central to nightmare fantasy (Milne 2010, 2014, 2018). Bonaparte thus underwent assimilation into the folk template of legendary creatures identified as nightmares. The details of his guise as bogeyman and dream-monster – and the ease with which an otherwise visually dissimilar real-life figure could be recuperated in this way – lead us back to some curious features of the nightmare demon template itself.

### **THE NIGHTMARE CREATURE**

Consider the characterisation given to the forces of the night in this Old English *Journey Charm*:

Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode  
wið þane sara stice, wið þane sara slege,  
wið þane grymma gryre,  
wið ðane micela egða þe bið eghwam lað,  
and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare.  
Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege [---]  
ne me mere ne gemyrre ne me maga ne geswence,  
ne me næfre minum feore forht ne gewurþe [---]

*I lock unto me this stave and entrust*

*[myself] in God's protection;*

*Against the stab of the pains, against the blow of the pains,*

*Against the terror of the grim ones,*

*Against the great horror that is hateful to everyone,*

*And against all loath [things] that fare in upon the land.*

*I sing a victory chant, I bear a victory-stave [---]*

*May the mare [night-mare] not mar me [---]*

*Or ever be fearful against my life [---]*

(Mid-11C, Corpus Christi College MS 41, 350–353; trans. Hill 2012: 148).

The key elements here include stabs and blows (the attack), plus terror and horror (the ‘affect’ experienced by the subject). The responsible otherworldly agencies are vague in form but clearly demonic in nature: the grim ones, the horror, the loath things, the *mare*. In fact, this vagueness is an endemic characteristic of such demons, for the body of the archaic nightmare creature is peculiarly malleable in shape. The fixed element of its template is that it has

teeth and claws: extendable points at which, and through which, it threatens its victim with penetration (cf. Milne 2010).<sup>13</sup> One variant of this is the sexual attack, which also, of course, involves the idea of breaching the sleeper's body (recall here the tale of Alexander's conception). Apart from the points of attack, it seems that – as for Napoleon – the figure of any suitable supernatural entity – werewolf, siren, faun, devil – may be cast as a nightmare, and its known form used to fill in the contours of the attacking entity.

Or the central part of the entity may be left blank and mysterious, as in the *Journey Charm*, and this emptiness is part of the mythos too. The thirteenth century demonologist, Caesarius of Heisterbach, described the incubus as hollow, with only one surface, which faced the dreamer:

Demons, as I have understood from another vision, have no hinder parts... [when] a woman asked a demon why he always walked backwards when he went away, [he] replied: 'We are allowed to take the human form, but nevertheless we have no backs' (Caesarius of Heisterbach, ch. VI, 132).

Issobel Goudie, a Highlander on trial for witchcraft in Scotland in 1662, testified that, while she travelled at night with the spirits (cf. Milne 2013, 2014), she saw:

In the *Elfes howsiss* [in the Elf's house] [---] little ones, hollow, and boss-backed [i.e. with concave or hollow backs]. They speak *gowstie lyk* [gruesomely] (Hall 2004: 182–183; Pitcairn 1833: III, 607).

These backless small spirits, with their “gruesome” speech, supplied Issobel and her companions with magic darts, or elf-shot, capable of wounding or killing humans and beasts. Ascribing hollowness to the creature, or an amorphous form, or the capacity to shapeshift, or to radically change size and enter through keyholes or chinks; all such traditions characterise the dream demon in terms of its interface, and concentrate its identity at, or on, the surface it presents to the dreamer.

## CURSES

Looking again at the *Journey Charm*, notice the resonance between the image of the staff, with which the speaker girds himself (figuratively and materially; cf. Hill 2012: 153–154; Milne 2014: 158), and the acts of stabbing and beating – the “marring” – threatened by the “grim ones”. The staff is borne by the speaker, yet the feared stabs or blows come from the other direction. This conflation of external and internal, subjective and objective attributes is an important aspect of nightmare representation, with parallels in charm imagery, especially (and unsurprisingly) in curse imagery. For example, an Aramaic curse written on an



*Fig 4: Incantation bowl, 6–8C, Iraq. Ceramic, with Aramaic inscription. 15cm diameter. British Museum, London. Museum number: 91771. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum.*



Fig. 5a and Fig. b: Lead curse tablet (*defixio*), c. 1–4C, discovered on Telegraph Street, Moorgate, London. British Museum, London. Museum number: 1934,1105.1. Photo and drawing: The Trustees of the British Museum.



incantation bowl (Figure 4) instructs a deity to unleash a horde of supernatural agents – including fever-spirits and wild animals – to torment the speaker’s enemy in dreams:

[I pray] that you send against him fever and shivering, male and female, and headache and groaning, against Mar Zutra son of Ukkamay and against his male heirs and female heirs, and [send] impious amulet spirits, male and female, and demons and devils and liliths, male and female... and idol spirits, male and female. And send... hoofed animals and... release dogs from bushes and cubs from (their) chains. They will heat him and inflame him and set him on fire and affright him – and they will subdue him. *They will not give him sleep for his eyes and they will not give him rest in his body in his dreams and in his visions.* (Emphasis added. Late Sasanian, 6–8C, BM 91771; trans. Segal 2000: 039A.)

Across the Roman empire, we find the widespread practice of inscribing curses on small tablets, which were then offered at shrines, thrown into rivers or buried. Here is a *defixio* (Figures 5a and b) – a curse on a lead tablet – buried in the late Roman era and discovered under Telegraph St. in London:

I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts and memory; thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed, nor be able [---]. (BM 1934, 1105.1).

Typical of the *defixio* genre is the mix of immaterial (mind, memory) with physical body parts (liver, lungs): the victim is gagged with the threat of a chaotic scrambling together of all her parts (cf. Versnel 1998).

Among the formulae commonly used in Romano-British *defixio* texts, there are references to sleep as a part of health and life,<sup>14</sup> as in this tablet found at the sanctuary of Uley, Gloucestershire, England:

To the god Mercury (from) Docilinus [---] Varianus and Peregrina and Sabinianus who have brought evil harm on my beast and are [---] I ask you that you drive them to the greatest death, and *do not allow them health or sleep* unless they redeem from you what they have administered to me [---]. (Emphasis added. Uley 43; Hassall & Tomlin & Frere 1989: 329–331, no. 3).

In another example from the same site, a man called Biccus goes further, declaring that:

[The thief] may not urinate nor defecate nor speak *nor sleep nor stay awake* nor [have] well-being or health, unless he bring (it) in the temple

of Mercury; nor gain consciousness (sic) of (it) [---]. (Uley 4; Tomlin 1988: no. 2).

Such texts set up a kind of contract with the deity, wherein the thief's life and bodily functions – including sleep, consciousness and mind – are delivered into the hands of the god until restitution is made. This late fourth century example wishes loss of mind, among other things, on the victim:

Lord Neptune, I give you the man who has stolen the solidus and six argentioli of Muconius. So I give the names who took them away, whether male or female, whether boy or girl. So I give you, Niskus, and to Neptune the life, health, blood of him who has been privy to that taking-away. *The mind which stole this and which has been privy to it, may you take it away.* The thief who stole this, may you consume his blood and take it away, Lord Neptune. (Emphasis added. Found on the shores of the river Hamble estuary, Hampshire, England; Burnham & Keppie et al. 1997; Tomlin 1999).

Many Classical spells express the desire to deprive the victim of sleep. This is so common in sex spells that a subcategory, *agrypnetika* (sleeplessness), has been created for them (Versnel 1998). Such curse-like spells are of interest here because they combine violent desire, demonic agency and sleep. Thus, one Theodoros, lusting for the woman Matrona, first provides a demon of the dead with pieces of her hair and nails, and then instructs it to:

Go to her and seize her sleep, her drink, her food [---] Drag her by her hair, by her guts, by her soul, by her heart until she comes to Theodoros and make her inseparable from me until death, night and day, for every hour of time. Now, now, quickly quickly, at once, at once (Jordan 156; Versnel 1998: 24).

Norse texts are particularly rich in dreams of violence and desire (Kelchner 1935; Milne 2011). In the ninth century, a Sami ritual specialist is described committing magical murder as the victim sleeps, using a dream-demon. To strangle the Norwegian King Vanlandi in his bed, in revenge for his affair with her daughter, the sorcerer sends a curse in the form of a *mara* (nightmare):

[---] to visit the brother of Vili [=Oðinn], the creature of magic arranged for Vanlandi, when the troll-related night Hildir [=witch] was to tread underfoot the enemy of the band of men; and that necklace-destroyer [=king], whom the nightmare strangled, [was] burned [i.e. his funeral was held] on the bank of the Skúta [---]. (*Ynglingatal* 3 (9C), in *Heimskringla* (13C); Finnur Jónsson 1912: I, 7; Lindow 1995: 10).

The *Journey Charm* (*Íc gyrd me...*) also refers directly to the *mara* in this sense, as a personification of nightmare.

So far, we have considered a spectrum of spirits related to disturbed sleep: spirits of fever and disease, demons of place and time, agencies of desire. The *mara* and its kindred have more specialised roles in nightmare traditions and belief-narratives. The *mara* may be spoken of as a bringer of bad dreams, or as a bad dream incarnate, or as a malevolent nocturnal *doppelganger* of a human, or simply listed generally among the terrors of the night.

## THE MARA

What is a *mara*? The word is Old High German and Old Norse, related distantly to Old Norse *mǫra* (giantess). Its Indo-European root (Mallory & Adams 2006: 372–373) is *\*mer-* (crush, pulverise, smash). It thus carries the sense of a blow from outside, whose outcomes range from distortion of form (crush), to disintegration (smash). From this we have Anglo-Saxon *maran*, Old English *mære* (Hall 2007b: 299), and, in modern languages, *nightmare*, *cauchemar* etc.

In Scandinavian folklore, the *mara* is the supernatural double of a human: one who can externalise malevolent desires (*starka tankar* – strong thoughts) in tangible forms (Raudvere 1995: 47). This kind of *mara* is a double entity: wounds inflicted on a *mara* body are seen on the human counterpart body immediately or the following day, proving they are the same creature. This is ATU motif H56 (recognition by wound), found also in Norse saga stories about shapeshifters (cf. Milne 2011: 91–92).

A *mara* may take the shape of an animal (cat, mouse, magpie) or an object (pitchfork, needle).<sup>15</sup> The most common forms are cat and pitchfork; note that both of these have tooth-and-claw elements. Among the ‘formless’ types, the most common is ‘something hairy’ (i.e. bestial). In its human form, the *mara* is far more likely to be a woman than a man. Subcategories include wicked, erotic, hairy or red-haired women; also women with intergrown eyebrows (Tillhagen 1960: 319–321). The term for the *mara*’s assault on human victims is *maritt* (= to be ridden by the *mara*); since it rode or pressed down upon its human prey, causing feelings of suffocation and anxiety.<sup>16</sup>

The main body of lore about the *mara* is composed into analogy legends: so, a *mara* “attacked the neighbour’s horse in the form of a pitchfork” (Raudvere 1995: 51; SKS Rajajärvi 114; Tavastland 1936); or, a hunter shot a magpie and an old woman fell from the tree in its place, revealed as a *mara* (Raudvere 1995: 49; Sydow 1911: 601). Raudvere noted the “remarkable violence” exhibited in these stories: “deep wounds, cut limbs” (1995: 49). The direct, penetrative violence turned on the *mara* in the legends is differentiated from the nature of

its attacks on people (suffocating anxiety). Evidence comes also from material culture. Tillhagen (1960: 322–325) collected 2,406 items dealing with protective measures against the *mara* in Sweden and Swedish Finland. The most popular charms involved the use of steel, especially edged steel – often a scythe – hung above the victim. The *mar-besom*, or nightmare-bush (= witch-besom, mar-sheaf) – a spiky, twiggy growth on tree branches – was thought to mark places where a *mara* had perched, and could be used to fend off attacks. Again, the visual shape of the cure mimicks the shape of the threat. Birds of prey and magpies could be nailed up as protection (beaks and claws once more). A mirror could be used against an animal suspected of being a *mara* (Tillhagen 1960: 324–325); so, like the gorgon, it would be repelled by its own image.

Naming the *mara* – in other words, correctly identifying the human who was sending the double – was thought to have great power. A hair plucked from the head of a *maritt* sufferer, placed in a fence-post, would act as a decoy and trap the *mara* at that spot; note here the shift of scale. And there were also verbal charms, such as this one from South-Central Sweden, designed to deflect the creature into an infinite task:

Mara, mara, minne!	<i>Mara, mara, mind!</i>
Du får ej bli härinne	<i>Thou may'st not enter here,</i>
förr än du räknat	<i>Until thou counted hast</i>
fåglar i skog,	<i>Birds in wood,</i>
fiskar i flod	<i>Fishes in river,</i>
alla eketrär	<i>All the oak trees,</i>
och Guds ord!	<i>And the words of God!</i>

(From the province of Nerike (Nörke), Archives of the Nordic Museum, No. E. U. 786; Tillhagen 1960: 323; cf. Forsblom 611ff.).

Let us keep in mind the structure of this formula (and indeed the detail of the hair), for it recurs in our evidence.

There are other names for the *mara* further south and east. In Northern Croatia, the spirit which attacks in the night is called *truta*. According to an informant in the Lepoglava region, to defend against the *truta*:

Take a board and drive several nails into it so that the points stick out on the other side. They must stick out. And put that board on yourself. And somebody [who did this] said that he felt something on his back, but it went away immediately. And she [the *truta*] no longer came [---]. (Dronjic 2014: 199).

The *trute* are related both to the spirits of the dead and to unrequited sexuality (cf. Milne 2008; Barber 1997): “Our dad told us that *trute* were bachelors

and spinsters. [And] that is their task since they did not have anybody in this world, they seek other people to plague [now] they're dead" (Dronjic 2014: 199). This back-story recognises the element of negative (or unfulfilled) desire in the nightmare complex, and locates this in the attacking entity.

The modern belief-complex of *mara*, or *trute*, thus configures the elements of the nightmare mythos into a protective pattern. Sharp extremities (teeth and claws = pitchfork, beak, nails in a plank) are retained as defining characteristics, but displaced or reattributed. The agency of penetration is switched, so it is the *truta* or the *mara*'s uncanny double which suffers the attack. The "strong thoughts" (i.e. the affect) are ascribed to the *mara* rather than the dreamer. The scope, nature and direction of the attack are rearranged; a subjective, internal threat (the nightmare) becomes an objective, external fulfilment (the *mara* experiences the harm).

In both its negative and positive shapes – as attacking spirit and as the representation of that spirit in apotropeic lore and legend – the nightmare mythos in all its manifestations thus conserves a package of elements, whose elements can be variously arranged (Milne 2010, 2013, 2016) depending on genre and context: in spell, healing charm, lullaby, curse or analogy legend. Of course, this capacity for rearrangement within a constellation or belief-structure is not unique to the nightmare. But there are certain semiotic oddities in the structure of charms and beliefs about nightmares which seem to stem from, and give shape to, the umbilical relationship between the terror-filled dream and its dreamer.

Bear in mind that the nightmare is essentially a phenomenon of the split self. The dream-attacker is an alienated and disguised avatar of the self. From this etic viewpoint, it must be the dreamer who invests the latter with agency and (negative) desire. In actual nightmares, tension is focused at the interface between two main avatars: the one which the dreamer identifies as him/herself, and the attacking avatar, which he/she cannot identify. The attacker may come very close to breaking, but not actually break, the distance or interface between the two,<sup>17</sup> for, were it to do so, the two would become one, in a burst of released affect (fear), and the dreamer would awake (cf. Milne 2010: 198–199).

Real-life nightmare narratives are rarely extrapolated beyond this point, to the rending of the subject. It is the focus and location of this potential rending which cultural re-writes of the nightmare displace or postpone. Lullabies supply details of coming destruction; folded alongside, rather than inside, sleep; couched as threat, not present action. In *mara* analogy legends, decisive rending is an obligatory feature; applied, of course, to the dream-creature, not the dreamer. In beliefs concerning the *mara* or the *truta*, the protective action of charm, analogy legend, or both, reverses the direction of the attack, dispelling and dispersing its violence onto other elements of the constellation.

## CHARMS AGAINST NIGHTMARES

Something of the kind seems to be happening in *Wið dweorh* (*Against a dwarf*). After the passage quoted earlier (concerning the wafers with the names of the Seven Sleepers), the prose instructions continue. The user must sing the charm:

œrest on þæt wynstre eare, þœnne on þæt swiðre eare, þœnne [b]ufan þæs mannes moldan. And ga þœnne an mœdenman to and ho hit on his sweoran, and do man swa þry dagas; him bið sona sel.

*First in the left ear, then in the right ear, then upon the top of the [patient's] head. And then go to a maiden and (let her) hang it [presumably, the packet of wafers plus verse] around his neck, and do so for three days; it will speedily be better for the patient* (Griffiths 1996: 188).

Then comes the charm itself:

Her com in gangan, in spiderwiht,  
hæfde him his haman on handa, cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære,  
legde þe his teage an sweoran. Ongunnan him of þæm lande liþan;  
sona swa hy of þæm lande coman, þa ongunnan him þa liþu colian.  
þa com in gangan dweores sweostar;  
þa geændade heo and aðas swor  
ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian ne moste,  
ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte,  
oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe. Amen. Fiað.

*Here came walking in, in here, a spider-creature [?] –  
he had his coat in his hand, said that you were his horse,  
laid his reins on your neck. They began to travel away from the land;  
once they came from the land, then the limbs began to feel cold.  
Then came walking in the dwarf's sister;  
she made an end to it and swore oaths  
That this [riding] would never be permitted to harm the sick one,  
or one who could obtain this charm, or know how to chant this charm.  
Amen. Let it be so.*

(Glosecki 1952: 186–187; Dobbie 1942: 121–122; Grattan and Singer 1952: 160–162).

Though there is little consensus about the opening line – Griffiths (1996: 188 n.47) considers it garbled beyond recovery – some of its difficulties become clearer in the light of the contexts we have been discussing. The *dweorh* is a nightmare creature, whether he comes in spider form (Nelson 1982; Glosecki 1952), or dressed in a winding sheet (Grattan 1927), or is merely qualified as

“powerful” (Griffiths 1996). He has with him a *haman* (coat, skin; cf. *hamr* = shapeshifting power); either he is wearing this guise, or he uses it to turn the victim into an animal. The next phrases are unambiguous: the *dweorh* puts reins on the victim, who is now his steed. The *dweorh* is therefore a kind of *mara*. If we identify him as such, what follows is a dream-ride; the two “move away from the land” – that is, the creature rides off with the soul of the victim – and the comatose body left behind becomes cold. That the soul is detachable in this way, and capable of journeys during sleep, is another ancient and widespread motif (ATU E72i.1), central to beliefs in night travels (cf. Milne 2013, 2014).

The third figure, the “dwarf’s sister” (*deores* or *dweores sweostar*; Gay 1988: 175; Dobbie 1942), or possibly Earth’s sister (*Eares sweostar*, i.e. *Eostre*, goddess of the dawn; Grattan 1927: 5–6; Bonser 1963: 166 ff.; Nelson 1982: 17), is harder to account for. She is a helper, certainly, but, if she is the dwarf’s sister, why does she come to assist his victim? It has even been suggested (Gay 1988) that she comes rather to help the *dweorh*. I suggest that “sister” here may carry a more general connotation of kin; so this new actor is simply characterised as a being equal in supernatural rank to the dwarf. There is an action of doubling in her entrance, a turning point; reminiscent, in concentrated form, of the turn from negative to positive in the dream encounters of the Righteous Sufferer. She swears oaths to protect the victim (details are not given), and she underwrites the power of the charm to protect anyone, as long as it is correctly voiced.

By the later middle ages, in Germanic Europe generally, a great many creatures of the night could be mentioned as connected with bad dreams. A thirteenth century Middle Dutch encyclopaedic poem places *nacht merien* (nightmares) and *haghetissen* (witches) in a list of nocturnal phenomena, together with stars and fires in the sky:

Vanden nacht ridderen, ende van anderen  
duuelen, die in die lucht maken vier [---]  
Nacht ridders, so heten si [---]  
Haghetissen, ende varende vrouwen Godelinge [wichte] oec, en trouwen  
Cobboude, nickers, aluen, maren [nacht merien]  
Die hem tsmorghens openbaren  
Ende connen wel halen vier  
Nacht merien heten wise hier  
Minne, dit sien duuelen alle [---]  
*About the night-riders, and about other  
devils, which make fire in the sky [---]  
Night riders, they are called [---]*

hagetissen, *and wandering women*,  
*goodlings* [protective spirits] [-beings] *also*,  
*indeed, cobalds, water-monsters, aluen*,  
*maren* [night-maren] *who make themselves known in*  
*the morning, and know well how to get fire.*

*We call them night-maren here,*  
*indeed, these are devils all* [---]

(Anon., *De natuurkunde van het geheelal* (The Nature of the Cosmos),  
lines 707–730; trans. Hall 2004: 177–178; for the whole poem see, Jansen-  
Sieben 1968: II, 274–433).

The text of the Middle High German charm, known as the *Munich Nachtsegen* (14C MS, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 615, 127r.), though garbled, clearly also presents such spirits as multiple, listing them *en masse*:

Ir sult won hinnen gangen,	<i>Alb, and Elbelin</i> [little Alb],
Alb vnde elbelin	<i>you shall go away and</i>
Ir sult nich leng bliben hin	<i>stay no longer.</i>
Albes svestir vn(d) vatir	<i>Alb's sister and father,</i>
Ir sult uz varen obir de(m) gatir	<i>you shall go out over the gate;</i>
Albes mutir trute vn(d) mar	<i>Alb's mother, trute and mar,</i>
Ir sult uz zu de virste vare	<i>you shall go out by the roof-ridge!</i>
Noc mich dy mare druch	<i>Let the mar not oppress me,</i>
Noc mich dy trute zriche	<i>let the trute not pull me,</i>
Noc mich dy mare rite	<i>let the mar not ride me,</i>
Noc mich dy mare bescribe	<i>let the mar not mount me!</i>
Alb mit diner crummen nasen	<i>Alb with your crooked nose,</i>
Ich vorbihte dir aneblasen	<i>I forbid you to blow on [people],</i>
Ich vorbite dir alb ruche	<i>I forbid you Alb to deal with me,</i>
Cruchen vn(de) anehucchen	<i>to croak and blow [at someone].</i>
Albes kind ir wihtelin sin	<i>Alb's children, you, his gnomes</i>

(Simek 2011: 44).

The *alb* (elf) here has not just a sister but a whole family; *mar* is lumped together among the *trute* and *alb* (elf). Both these texts share a sense of multiplicity, the idea of a buzzing flock of nocturnal creatures. This multiplication, too, could be regarded as a kind of deflection, dissipating the impact of the dreamer/ avatar encounter.

A fifteenth century English charm (MS Bodleian Rawlinson C506f., 297), with many extant variants throughout the British Isles (Simpson 2009: 100–107),



invokes St. George as a champion against a nightmare: here seen as a single entity (like the *dweorh*), and female (like the typical *mara*). The saint pursues the creature:

[He] walkt by daie, so did he by night  
Until such time as he hir found  
He hir beat and he hir bound  
Untill her troth she to him plight  
She would not come to hir that night  
(name of St. George three times)  
(Scot 1930 [1584]: 49; Simpson 2009: 102).

In Northern British and Shetland versions, St. George is replaced by Arthur, or simply by a “man of might”. Northern charms provide this knight with a naked sword and a candle, and have him bind the “mare” with his own hair; the Shetland charm is performed by the charmer pulling out her own longest hair (Simpson 2009: 103). Recall in this context the use of hair as a decoy for the *mara* in the Swedish material. As well as the relation of contagion, or metonymic magic, the oneiric change of scale is part of the trap. The motif of impossible binding with a hair is a found elsewhere in Gaelic folklore.<sup>18</sup> Note here again the imagery of beating (explicit), and penetration (implicit, in the presence of the knight’s sword); both switched to a protective function. The charm works by assigning these violent elements to the supernatural protector rather than the attacking spirit. Note also the spatial element: the knight protector seeks the (female) creature “by day and night”; temporal terms used to imply spatial distance. The encounter takes place in what seems to be a kind of no man’s land. There he does to her what the *mara* is supposed to do to its victim. After this transposed violence, he either binds her with an oath (magic words), or more literally and analogically, with the hair (magic material).

Taken together, these details recall the structure of *Wið dweorh*: the journey away from the land, the magical bridle, the intercessory third entity. The latter in both cases speaks binding words, a charm within the body of the charm – a kind of meta-charm – the content of which is not given. The charm narrative points inwards to this hidden core, affirming the action and power of magical speech, while cordoning it off. Many protective charms and curses, of course, use the figurative trope of great or impossible distances, the better to dispatch a supernatural enemy. But, in charms specifically aimed at the nightmare creature, we can perhaps discern an extra semiotic layer or turn, a further warping of space and time.

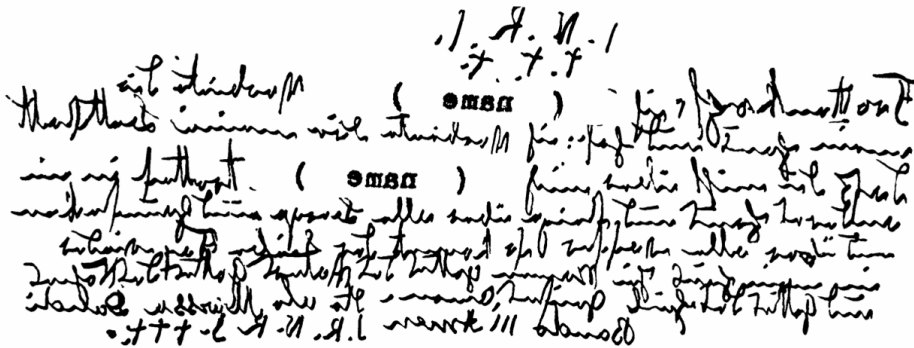


Fig. 6: Hexzettel charm, late 19C-early 20C, Berks. County, Pennsylvania. After Mahr (1935).

### THE TROTTEKOPF

In my final example, it was exactly this kind of detail – a specific type of *adynaton* – which enabled the American folklorist August Mahr to identify a somewhat garbled charm as originally directed against the nightmare. In the 1930s, copies of a *hexzettel* (anti-witchcraft) charm were found in an old sofa by an antique dealer in Berkshire County, Pennsylvania (Figure 6). Dealers found such charms regularly in the couches, beds and sofas of the Dutch (i.e. *Deutsche*; German-speaking) Pennsylvanians. The charm was in mirror-writing, starting with INRI and the nonsense formula *Ito alo Massa Dandi Bando*. The text reads as follows:

I.N.R.I + + + Trottenkopf, ich (name) Verbiete dir mein Haus und Hof: ich Verbiete dir meine Bettstatt daß du nicht über mich (name) trottest in ein anderes Haus und steige über alle Berge und Zaunstecken und über alle Wasser so kommt der liebe Tag wieder in mein Haus. Im Namen Gottes des Vaters Gottes des Sohnes und Gottes des Heil(igen) Geistes. Amen. Ito alo Massa Dandi Bando /// Amen I. R. N. R. I.

*Trottenkopf, I, (name), forbid thee my house and my courtyard; I forbid thee my bedstead so that thou wilt not ‘trot’ over me, (name), into another house: and climb over all mountains and fenceposts and over all waters. Then the good day will come back into my house. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen. (Mahr 1935: 215–216).*

Mahr traced the origins of the charm first to a slightly less confused version, in a German book published in 1820 in Pennsylvania, intended for the use of local hex-doctors (popular magicians). In this book, the charm was already misunderstood, and advertised as a protection against witchcraft. The 1820 text reads:

Trottenkopf, ich verbiete dir mein Haus und meinen Hof; ich verbiete dir meinen Pferde- und Kuhstall; ich verbiete dir meine Bettstatt, daß du nicht über mich trotttest; trotte in ein anderes Haus. Bis du alle Berge steigest, alle Zaunstecken zählst und über alle Wasser steigest, kommt der liebe Tag wieder in mein Haus. Im Namen des Vaters, des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes. Amen.

*Trottenkopf, I forbid thee my house and my court-yard; I forbid thee my horse and cow stable; I forbid thee my bed-stead so that thou wilt not trot over me; trot into another house. Until thou climbest over all mountains, countest all sticks in the fences, and walkest across all waters, the good day(light) will be back in my house. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. (Mahr 1935: 217–218).*

The different key detail here is the requirement to “count all sticks in the fences”, not simply climb over them. The same charm turns up in a German almanac from 1839, where the wording specifically addresses the demon *Drudenkopf*; presumably a being with the head of a *Drude*. The *Drude* is a woman who can leave her body and sexually assault men in the night; in other words, she is a type of *mara*. The derivation *Drudenkopf* was used as another synonym for *alp* (elf) which, as we saw in the Munich charm, was in use as a synonym for nightmare-bringer by the fourteenth century. The Pennsylvania form of the name, *Trottenkopf*, probably originated in Württemberg or Switzerland. In 1864, Kuhn published a sheaf of variants – from the Netherlands, Henneberg, Bohemia and Westphalia – of this charm. All include the counting prescription; for instance, to count all the stars in the sky. We previously encountered a Swedish version. Here is another from the Harz Mountains:

Mahrte, ehr de mick wutt berien,  
saste erst alle barge un dälér owerstrien,  
alle grasspiere inknicken,  
alle loofbläre afficken,  
alle steern am himmel tellen,  
iindess werd wol dag sien  
Mahrte [night-mare], *before thou ridest on me,*  
*thou shalt first stride across all mountains and valleys,*  
*break all awns of the grasses,*

*lick all leaves of all trees,  
count all stars in the skies;  
in the meanwhile day will have come.*  
(Mahr 1935: 222–223).

As Mahr (1935: 225) comments: “the outstanding characteristic of all charms against nightmares is the assigning [of] tasks which assure the absence of the demon until daybreak [---] [so] applied to any other type of witch-craft than night-mare, it naturally becomes nonsensical [---]”. And so it does. The recursive nature of the crucial counting device appears to be specific to the nightmare. British children used to be told to count sheep in order to go to sleep. Anyone who has tried this knows that the number of the sheep becomes impossible to visualise after the first dozen or so; though one may carry on counting above that for some time, the numbers become abstract. The point of the counting prescription is that it is open ended and potentially endless.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen the elements of the nightmare package – its mythos – disposed in a spectrum of charms and related belief-narratives. The *dweorh* reins and rides the dreamer, then is blocked and parried by the “sister”. The *mara* of analogy legends presents the classic case of a safe (re)distribution of nightmare parts. Lullabies situate nightmare imagery in fully oneiric terms, culminating in the fantasy of being devoured or torn apart. As sleep charms, they represent the only genre discussed here where the nightmare narrative of threat comes close to fruition. But of course it is not actually realised; rather, it is distanced by the use of fantastic markers (such as change of scale), and split off from actual sleep. The baby who wakes the bison-headed god, whose life is to be full of sorrow, or who will be eaten by Napoleon, is, in a sense, confronted with nightmarish imagery as a kind of prophylactic, before he or she enters sleep. Often explicitly safeguarded by future tense, or conditional mode – an (absent) miller may be eaten, Napoleon may pass this way – gory consummation in the lullaby is thus abstracted from the frame of a sleep which has not happened yet. In the St. George charms, the *mara* is pursued beyond the realm of day and night, and bound (in the Northern variants) again with an oneiric trick, another change of scale. In the Scandinavian and Germanic charms, the *mara* is diverted into an infinite counting task.

Beyond the normal rhetoric of impossibility common in charms, there is a specific flavour in the *adynata* of charms against the nightmare, involving spatial and temporal displacements, whose folding character corresponds to

the peculiar *dédoublement* of the split or disguised self central to the nightmare experience. In all of this material, there is a kind of Möbius twist in narrative and imagery. The dream threat must be turned outwards, away from the subject; the semiotic labyrinth of endless counting, or multiple dimensional framing, works to do this. Yet the threat cannot be completely closed down, or sealed up, as the nightmare antagonist is, in fact, a disguised avatar of the self; it draws its power, its affect, from the subject's own desire. This is why, perhaps, we are not given the words spoken by the "sister" of the *dweorh*, or the oath the *mara* swears to the knight. These enigmatic *lacunae* are a way of marking what Freud (1900: 186 n. 2) called the navel of the dream: the inadmissible point of touch, where the nightmare, releasing its load of affect, climaxes and dissolves at the point of touch, back into the mind and body of the dreamer.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur (88–89) explains Freud's insight in terms of the semiotic nature of dreams: "to say that dreams have meaning is to assert that they are an intelligible, and even intellectual, operation of man; to understand them is to experience their intelligibility ... [Freud's] thesis signifies that one can always substitute for the dream account another account, with a semantics and a syntax, and that these two accounts are as comparable to one another as two texts". I follow this line of analysis by treating manifestations of nightmare belief-structures as texts. This paper forms part of an ongoing study of the cultural history of the nightmare, presented to date in a series of papers: Milne 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> For methodology and definitions, see e.g. Sperber (1975) on symbolism in ritual, Frog (2014) on the nature of mythic culture.

<sup>3</sup> Dating from the Babylonian mature period, between 1500–1000 BCE, possibly early 13C BCE (Foster 2005: 392).

<sup>4</sup> Full Latin text:

+ Coniuro vos, septem sorores ...  
Elffrica (?), Affricea, Soria, Affoca, Affricala. Coniuro vos et contestor per Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, ut non noceatis [i]stam famulum Dei, neque in oculis, neque in membris, neque in medullis, nec in ullo comp [ag]line membrorum eius, ut inhabitat in te virtus Christi altissimi. Ecce crucem Domini, fugite partes adversae, vicit l eo de tribu Juda, radix David. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, amen. ++  
Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat, Christus liberat +,  
Christus te (et?) benedicat, ab omni malo defendat. agla. Pater noster +  
(Simek 2011: 34).

See also: <http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Bl%C3%A6singe-blyamulet>

<sup>5</sup> Folklore Archives of the Faculty of Udmurt Philology (Udmurt State University, Izhevsk, Russia), Folklore Expedition 1975, copybook 5, sheet 17.

<sup>6</sup> The complex question of elves and elfshot is dealt with in detail in a series of publications by Hall (2004, 2005, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Bozóky 2003, and synopsis in Klaniczay 2013: 285–286.

<sup>8</sup> Or arranged as images, like the medieval SARTOR AREPO magic box (Simek 2011: 26–28); cf. MacLeod & Mees 2006: Chapter 6 for a sample of possible derivations of garbled formulae.

<sup>9</sup> The literature on lullabies mainly consists of edited anthologies (e.g. Daiken 1959); studies from the perspectives of education, psychology or educational psychology (e.g. Weisner 2000), music practice (Kimball 2012; ECA-EC 2013), or ethnomusicology (e.g. Fukudo 1960); folkloric and ethnographic studies, generally focussing on specific regions (e.g. Giudice 1988), or periods (e.g. Farber 1990; Rogers 2008), or dealing with lullabies as part of a wider ethnic corpus (e.g. Vahman & Asatrian 1995). The dissertation of Fukudo (1960), for example, presents New World materials, analysed musicologically. There is no comprehensive international index of lullaby motifs comparable with the ATU system. The European Choral Association-Eua Cantat (ECA-EC 2013) project, *Lullabies of the World*, offers a selection from 41 countries.

<sup>10</sup> Latin as follows:

Lolla / lolla paruule • cur fles tam amare •  
Oportet te plangere • necnon suspirare  
Te dolere grauitur • decet uegetare,  
Vt parentes exules : nexerant ignare  
Lolla, lolla paruule • natus mundo tristi:  
Ignotum cum maximo • dolore uenisti •

<sup>11</sup> Russian transliteration:

Bayu-bayushki-bayu	<i>Baby, baby, rock-a-bye</i>
Ne lozhisya na krayu	<i>On the edge you mustn't lie</i>
Pridyot serenkiy volchok	<i>Or the little grey wolf will come</i>
On ukhvatit za bochok	<i>And will nip you on the tum</i>
I utashchit vo lesok	<i>Tug you off into the wood</i>
Pod rakitovy kustok	<i>Underneath the willow-root</i>

<sup>12</sup> In the British Isles, examples include Oliver Cromwell and Judge Jeffreys, in France, Bismarck, the Dukes of Marlborough and Wellington at various periods (Daiken 1959: 25; Opie 1992).

<sup>13</sup> From the twentieth century on, these dream weapons are often modernised as knives, spikes etc. (Milne 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Out of the 27 British curse tablets (some largely illegible) published by the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, Oxford University, five mention sleep: a) Uley 4 (Biccus; Tomlin 1993: no. 4); b) Uley 43 (Docilinus; Hassall & Tomlin & Frere 1989: 329–331, no. 3); c) Marlborough Down (Anon; Hassall & Tomlin et al. 1998: 378 no. 3); d) Pagans Hill A, no. 7 (Anon; Hassall & Tomlin & Frere 1984: 339); e) Wanborough (Rea et al 1972: 363–367). These find sites are all in south-west England. See: <http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/>

- <sup>15</sup> These categories are drawn from Tillhagen's study of 5,000 recordings – mainly made before 1942 and containing data from the second half of the nineteenth century – held in Swedish archives of popular tradition. See his statistical tables (Tillhagen 1960: 317).
- <sup>16</sup> Since Hufford 1982, the medical syndrome of 'night-terrors' or sleep-paralysis is often cited in reference to suffocation, pressure, paralysis etc. in nightmares; cf. e.g. Davies 2003. However: a) *mara* traditions are not universal, b) in the West, the ways in which nightmare demons and their actions are envisaged demonstrably change over time, c) for people born into cultures with a *mara* tradition, belief may generate syndrome, rather than vice versa, d) methodologically, we should not identify deeply acculturated processes such as the waking recuperation of terrifying dream-imagery as explicable in terms of a physiological condition assumed to be universal.
- <sup>17</sup> The exception is ecstatic initiation, wherein the supernatural avatar may well actually penetrate, and even dismember, the dreamer's body (i.e. his/her body image in the dream), as in the case of shamanic initiation visions. But this takes us beyond the scope of the present discussion; see n.1 above.
- <sup>18</sup> A hag, a hunter, his dog and her hair form the central motif in a group of tales (*Sealgair Shraith Eirinn is a' Chailleach* [The Strath Dearn Hunter and the Witch]; *Cailleach Beinne Bhric* [The Carlin of the Spotted Hill]), where the *cailleach* (= supernatural hag, or witch) tries to trick the hunter into binding his dog with a hair of her head. This tale is apparently known in the Caucasus as well as Gaelic Scotland (Campbell 1900–1902 [2005]: 207–210).

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# A SHARED INHERITANCE: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIVINATION AND CHARMING IN 21ST CENTURY CANADA

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This paper explores the relationship between divination and charming in twenty-first century Canada. Drawing upon my ongoing research with Canadian divination practitioners, primarily in the province of Alberta, I focus on the ways in which these connections are created and utilised within contemporary divinatory acts. Doing so provides insights into how and why these practices are being adapted to new contexts, the individuals who undertake them, and the communities that they serve. By recognising this ongoing process of integration, it is possible to gain insights into the needs that these combined acts meet within modern communities and identify the gaps in current social structures, particularly in relation to health and healing, that lead individuals to seek out and adapt these traditional practices for a modern audience.

**Keywords:** Canada, contemporary practices, divination, healing, hidden knowledge, survival of charming

## INTRODUCTION

Divination<sup>1</sup> and charming have a long and intertwined history, found nestled together in archives and folk collections, as well as in our own memories of plucked petals and chanted incantations to reveal a potential true love. Moving beyond the storehouses of our communal and personal pasts and into the borders of twenty-first century Canada where I am conducting research with divination practitioners, the methods that dominate Canadian, particularly urban, divination (primarily tarot, astrology, numerology, and palm reading) are not always overt examples of charming. Yet, as this paper shows, it is present and, therefore, the question is not, “has it survived?”, but “what has this relationship become?” and “what does it mean to a contemporary audience?”

The practice of charming has frequently been found to be decreasing as time progresses, shifting from broader cultural uses to rural or peasant communities throughout Europe (Pócs 2013: 165; Stark 2009; Davies 1998: 50), but its loss is by no means assured. In Canada, its survival has been recently explored by Martin Lovelace in his work with charming in Newfoundland (2011), a province that has a small population and is typically associated with rural, or outport, life due to its relative isolation and history of fishing. My own research within Canadian cities has found that it has, in fact, become integrated into the repertoire of diviners. While both of these practices, as undertaken within modern urban centers in Canada, have not received much academic attention, turning one's focus to these spaces reveals new ways in which they are transformed in order to meet the needs of the participants and ensure their ongoing survival.

My work on divination has been primarily with practitioners in central Alberta, Canada, focusing on the province's capital city of Edmonton and the surrounding area. Situating my research in an urban centre provides the opportunity to explore the ways in which old traditions are adapted to new environments. This paper, therefore, examines the ways in which the practitioners I interviewed bring together charming and divination to address the needs of their communities, paying particular attention to the interplay between their verbal and physical forms, their relationship to secrecy and hidden knowledge, and their central role within acts of healing and accompanying narratives of victimhood and empowerment. Furthermore, I contend that charming is important to those I work with not only because of their direct relationship, but also because the scholarship around and approaches to charming help reveal new depths to the acts of divination.

## **BORROWING AND INTEGRATING**

Divination, being a conscious act, is a pragmatic one even if it is frequently dismissed as ineffective or frivolous entertainment by many within the societies where it is found. Patrice, one of the participants in my research who uses tarot cards in her own life but does not read them professionally, explained to me that the common thread throughout all of her spiritual practices is that it is "all about divinity, but divinity at a very practical and personal level". An interview with Jean, a mostly-retired tarot reader who has taught Patrice, echoed this approach. We were discussing the information sought and how people use it:

**KARI:** So there's that practicality to doing a reading.

**JEAN:** Well, if it isn't usable, if it isn't practical, why are we doing it? You know, why are you paying me ... Why are you taking your time?

There is a commonly acknowledged trinity of topics that lead people to seek out insight through a divinatory reading: love, money, and health. In other words, utilitarian information that can be brought into one's life to make everyday decisions. Charming is, at its core, also a functional genre (Fuller 1980: 164; Pócs 2013: 67; Kapaló & Pócs & Ryan 2013: 2) and has been implemented for these same purposes, integrated into ordinary life with the purpose of improving it. In order to do so, both practices must be malleable, adapting to those who utilise them.

A significant element of this flexibility, of equal importance to both charming and divination, is situated in their ability to take on both verbal and material forms. T. M. Smallwood defines charms "as objects (good luck charm), ritual actions, superstitious actions associated with attendant words, letters and words themselves being used magically" (2004: 11), which emphasises this mutability and a capacity to exist outside of the verbal. The charm extends beyond the text itself (Klyaus 2009: 17; Klaniczay 2013: 284), allowing it to "circulate with rapidity and astounding adaptability", which Edina Bozóky writes about in relation to medieval charms (2013: 108) but is equally applicable within other, more contemporary contexts. Divination also encompasses tangible and intangible forms created, combined, and altered to accommodate individual requirements. It is, therefore, not surprising that these two systems continue to be brought together and their verbal and material components interwoven to produce the desired results.

## **THE VERBAL**

Gus, who began to read tarot a few years ago and does not yet do so professionally, highlighted one of the central verbal components of divination – the question:

I think one of the key things that I find really important when I'm doing readings for people is to make sure that it's really clear what we're doing and that there is a purpose. Like I mentioned before, the birthday reading that I do, that's because you want to know what your next year is going to be like. So there's a very clear purpose inside of that reading.

But then also, one of the ones that I've done a couple times is when people are about to embark on their – well I was working with students, right, and that was the last thing they did as their undergrad. So like, what's it going to be like? I'm going to try to get a job now, what's that going to be like? So they had that question and I'd, I didn't let them go, 'what's my future going to be like?' No, it's kind of like, let's nail that down,

let's be more specific. Are you worried about a relationship in your life? Are you worried about your career? Are you worried about something in your love life? What really is the thing that's, you know, if you're losing sleep, what is it that's causing you to lose sleep?

So really, it's really kind of making sure that I nail all those things down and then at the same time really let the symbols and the cards and those things speak and then keeping in mind that I'm really giving them a narrative to give them cause to reflect on what the future could be. Because I think that's what actually is being divined out of this; it's not a future that's written in stone. It's a contemplation of what could be. And then being that there is that relationship of it's, what could be, really presenting the complexity of those things.

For him, the proper construction of the question, the verbal component of the divinatory act, is essential for the success of the ritual and in shaping its outcomes. Our lives are complex, and any act that seeks to reveal a part of it or to support a change within it means that the language must be precise and focused, moving beyond the superficial to the real heart of the matter.

If we adapt Jonathan Roper's concept of charming as "the verbal element of vernacular magical practice" (2004: 1) – setting aside the relationship between magic and divination<sup>2</sup> – a parallel can be made between charming and divination with the former as the key verbal element of the divinatory act. In much the same way, Éva Pócs writes about impossibility formulas within charming as "a verbal means of magic which express (as is common in incantations) the wish to attain a particular concrete aim" (2009: 27). While the questions within divination are not incantations, their formation must be crafted carefully in order to articulate the purpose of the reading and desired outcome.

Individual readers develop their own systems for creating questions and the rituals surrounding them. Options include writing down the question and burning it after the reading, as I was taught at one workshop, or speaking them out loud or, conversely, quietly focusing on them during the reading. The question may be shared between the reader and client before the reading, or not, and topics range from a specific concern to the broader, such as Gus' birthday reading which looks at what the year holds in store for the individual. From these questions emerge the method to be used and, in the case of tarot cards, the layout for the cards (the positions they are placed in during the reading). Without attention to the question or the charming component of divination, the message, especially from complex methods such as the tarot, will not be successful and the problem will not be resolved.



## **THE MATERIAL**

In a follow-up email, Patrice provided the following explanation of her use of Self-Mastery cards, a deck of cards that contain a spiritual quality on each one:

Every New Year's Eve, John [Patrice's husband] and I and another couple engage in a ritual with the Self Mastery Deck. We pick a card from the full deck for each month of the next year. My card for this month is balance. It's wonderful to have a quality to focus on each month because it helps bring it to life. It's a really great way of raising consciousness. I shared this process with other friends, so there are four more of us doing it together. We check in with each other on the first of each month, sharing the qualities each of us will be exploring that month. Then we support each other in living with those qualities. This is predictive, I guess. It's interesting to see what qualities are in focus for the year ahead because it helps map out themes of growth. For example, compassion came up for me three times at the end of this year, so I'm going to be focusing on compassion for three whole months this year. It's striking to have that repetition, because there are lots of cards in the deck. To draw the compassion virtue three times, all at the end of the year, it's intriguing. What am I coming to?

This practice can be done with a variety of decks including tarot, angel, and oracle that lay out key themes or issues to be confronted or worked with during the month. The words or images on these cards become a charm, a verbal, pictorial, and/or material object that is the result of the divinatory process. This charm is then carried by the individual through the month, encouraging their self-growth and development much like the inscribed papers tucked away in amulets.

Donna, a professional medium and tarot reader in Edmonton, explained to me that the objects she uses, such as tarot cards, serve as an entry point into the divinatory act but are not (always) required in order for her to access the requested information; a perspective she shares with many others. For some, the cards are read intuitively, embedded in the context of the reading, for others, they are there for the client, to act as a point of contact for everyone involved. Solomon Nigosian, in his study on divination in the Old Testament, observes how these objects serve to both separate the role of the diviner from others and facilitate the reading: "diviners differ from both prophets and seers or visionaries in having to rely on objects such as charms and amulets, which they use as mediums for obtaining the necessary information from the supernatural order (2008: 18). While not all of my interviewees required material objects, for many they were important, particularly because so much of divination deals with the

intangible – our interior world and potential futures – that the intermediary provides a foundation upon which such topics can be recognised and addressed.

Treva, who is not a professional reader but uses divinatory methods including runes and pendulums in her own life, spoke to me of the multipurpose nature of these tools. She always carries a talisman or charm with her that helps keep her “grounded”; frequently it is a pendulum tucked in her pocket. During our conversation, we both reflected on how this tool becomes a medium for obtaining the information she seeks within herself:

TREVA: So I don't know if these would be talismans or divination. I think these would be more divination.

KARI: I think a lot of times it's how you use it.

TREVA: Yeah.

KARI: They're all just tools.

TREVA: They're all tools, exactly. That's right. And this [the person] is the greatest tool; this is where the wisdom lies. This [the pendulum] just helps to open up, to get through all the critical levels, thinking levels to get down into the source.

We later returned to our discussion of pendulums, and again she reflected upon their identities commenting that “I don't know if those would be talismans too, but a pendulum, I might just get a yes or no or use it for more of a quick answer” before concluding that “I like it though; it just feels good. It feels good”. The tool of divination does not have a fixed identity but is capable of flux and change and has the capacity to become a charm within and outside of the divinatory ritual. What matters most in the context I am examining is that it is useful and meaningful to the person who employs it. When Treva carries her pendulum, she sometimes needs it for divination and other times as a charm. It, therefore, provides a system of protection and guidance so that when this single object is in her pocket, she is never without either.

“Talismans in general”, writes W. F. Ryan in *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, his seminal work on divination and magic in Russia, “can cross the boundaries between what have variously been called learned and popular, high and low, or great and little cultures”, as well as other religious and linguistic boundaries (1999: 217). In part, this flexibility comes from their ability to be formed from everyday objects (see *ibid.*: 218–221), a feature shared with divination. While the tools used by many of the practitioners I have worked with are more complex, such as tarot cards, any object can be used – food, leaves, parts of the body, dreams, books and words, water, stones – one is only limited by one's imagination. Consequently, something that is a charm can also be adapted

to a divinatory act and vice versa allowing practitioners to take advantage of this creative potential to form the best method for a particular circumstance.

Recognising that the role of creating talismanic charms “may involve a written as well as an oral dimension (the most obvious example of this being the existence of spellbooks)” (Roper 2003: 50), parallels to contemporary divination practices are again found. Several of those I interviewed keep journals (not the same as spellbooks but serving similar preservation functions) where they write down their own meanings and interpretations of readings. Beyond serving the practical functions of recording specific acts for posterity and to be reflected on to determine whether or not they were effective, divination journals also become part of the process of self-development. Mélanie, a member of the United Church of Canada who works a great deal with dream interpretation, explained to me that:

I remember one dream that was very vivid. Really, really vivid, and I wrote it all out and I never figured it out. And it felt like an important dream but I never got the “ah ha!” from it. Never really, you know, so I still have it, you know, and every once and a while I’ll pull it out just see if it means anything, because that’s the other thing. Because time is of no – you could have a dream twenty years ago and if it comes to your mind today, that’s when it, because it’s not time bound – so I think if there’s a message, let’s call it the universe. If the universe is trying, is wanting to tell you something, that’s not time bound. But you might have an experience that reminds you of a dream from twenty years ago, you know, and it comes together because I don’t believe in coincidence ... So there are no coincidences, so you just look for connections.

Information provided through a divinatory act, whether it comes from a requested dream or a tarot reading, is not always immediately applicable. The act of writing down the information, of inscribing it, creates a charm that holds this meaning until it is needed, whether it is twenty minutes or twenty years later. These journals become talismans of knowledge and discovery that are part of a continual process of transformation and a representation of information unfolding throughout time as one returns to read it again and apply it to new contexts.

## **THE HIDDEN**

Returning to the functional nature of both divination and charming, they often signify that the hidden and secret moments of our lives we seek to uncover are not those that grant us insight into the grand mysteries of our universe but

are instead rooted in the questions of our everyday life: an illness; a disaster; or the loss of a job, relationship, or loved one. The services of charmers and diviners have long been sought out by those hoping to understand, control, or heal the parts of their lives that feel subject to random chance. After all, they both share a foundation of secrecy, of engaging hidden knowledge, and using or revealing connections and meanings many cannot see or choose to ignore.

Charmers have a long tradition of keeping their knowledge to themselves, contending that if it is shared the power will be lost (Davies 1998; Lovelace 2011). Conversely, divination is a process of uncovering information that is unknown, but its sources have frequently been shrouded in mystery. With the growth of the publishing industry and the ease by which books about divination are obtained, however, the secrets of interpretation are accessible to almost everyone. Yet, many readers also develop their own systems of meaning that belong to them alone in part because it is built on their subjective experiences and intuitive understanding of the specific reading and client.

Irene, who has been a professional reader for several decades and resides in Edmonton, strongly recommends that practitioners create their own decks and not share the full meanings with anyone. The two main reasons for doing so are because “it’s so original and unique; you get really proud to know you can do some of this stuff, right. And it’s really kind of cool, but the power within you gets stronger because they’re your cards, literally your cards”. This approach parallels the secrecy of knowledge many charmers have upheld. Power comes from the exclusive relationship one develops with their tools and systems. Furthermore, it recognises the mutable nature of these methods that causes them to slip into a state of unknowability as new uses remove them from past contexts and meanings.

In his article “From the Power of Words to the Power of Rhetoric: Nonsense, Pseudo-Nonsense Words, and Artificially Constructed Compounds in Greek Oral Charms”, Haralampos Passalis focuses on the incomprehensible words in charming. They are, he writes, “subjected to multiple modification procedures and new words that have been adapted to the morphological linguistic system of the performers” (2012: 11–12). Unlike concepts of mystery within esoteric or occult practices wherein the secret knowledge exists independent of those who seek it out, meaning here becomes unknowable to the outsider because they do not share the performative moment within which the interpretation has emerged. In other words, this hidden knowledge is contextually dependent since it is “not accidental, but constitutes wider rhetorical strategy, which is not exclusively related to an inherent secret power of words” (ibid.: 16).<sup>3</sup>

Turning our attention back to the formation of the question in divination, the issue of secrecy must also be addressed because it shows how the hidden

becomes layered into a reading, first, as addressed earlier, because it is being used to access unknown information; second, because the question is not always revealed to the practitioner. In these circumstances, it is the client who has secret information unknown to the reader. In his work on Ifa divination, Richard Bascom found that clients also sometimes sought this unknowability:

If [---] the client wishes to conceal his question from the diviner, he asks for two objects from the diviner's bag and whispers these statements to them so that the diviner cannot hear, cupping his hands over his mouth so that the diviner cannot read his lips (Bascom [1969] 1991: 54).

While, in circumstances such as these, trust (or the lack of it) in the reader's abilities plays a part, among those I work with, they are often the ones determining whether the question is or is not revealed. Some do not want to know it before the reading, if ever, because to do so will cause bias in their interpretations. This approach suggests that, unlike with charming, for some the divinatory act loses its power when certain secrets are revealed to the practitioner.

## **COMING TOGETHER**

The relationship between charming and divination has not always resulted in them being wielded by the same individual. Owen Davies, focusing on charmers in England and Wales, writes that they “were remarkable for their ordinariness: they did not usually dabble in any other magical abilities. Unbewitching, fortunetelling, thief detection and love magic were all the province of cunning-folk” (1998: 42). In my research, however, I have found that many contemporary practitioners have taken on the role that charmers once played within their communities, incorporating it into their own repertoire of knowledge and practice. In part, this expansion of roles reveals an increase in access to different modalities through books and the internet. In addition, as larger social institutions move away from acknowledging and requiring these different roles, it has led to a breakdown of the divisions between them and resulted in individuals claiming what they need from each without external forces to moderate.

Within the contemporary diviner there is a coming together of different roles and methods, continuing the tradition of adaptability that has allowed both charming and divination to survive. Their increasing interconnectedness permits the practitioner to meet the needs of those who seek them out. Marlene, a reader who utilises a variety of tools, offers lessons on ritual practices: “I teach ceremony too, like how to use ceremony to bring healing because really it's all about putting out intentions, using the moon at the right time and everything”. Part of this “everything” is the integration of charms in these

ceremonies. Divinatory methods help to determine what needs to be healed and when to undertake the act, the charms serve as a tool for focusing intent and providing the healing.

Much like the charmers who came before them, divination practitioners have had to contend with the issue of monetary exchange, and in their current state we can see how these different roles are understood by the individual who inhabits them. Lovelace found that the “refusal of any reward for an act of charming is a point made by almost all Newfoundland charmers, often vociferously” (2011: 41). Accepting money for their services is often a challenge for the professional reader, particularly when they are starting out. In part, it has to do with recognising that what they have to offer is of value and that charging money brings a new level of seriousness and responsibility to their work. Still, when it comes to the practice of direct healing, which typically lies outside of the divinatory act but is undertaken by many who are diviners, several of those I interviewed will not charge for it. Richard, the minister of St. Brigid’s Spiritualist Church in Edmonton, explained that for him healings are very sacred and set apart from his other practices like card readings: “If a person comes and you give them a healing and they feel really good about it, they can leave a donation to the church, but not to me [---] it’s voluntary work ... healing is very spiritual”. For individuals such as these, a differentiation between their position as charmer (or healer) and that of diviner emerges in how they treat the concept of exchanging money for their services, demonstrating that they do not necessarily embody all these roles simultaneously.

The “ordinariness” that Davies identifies in charmers has become, within my research, part of the divinatory identity as well, tied in with their shared practicality. A constant refrain from those I have interviewed is that divination belongs to us all; it is something ordinary people can engage in. Richard considers it “our natural ability”, but we often do not regard it as such because it is no longer part of contemporary Canadian discourse. Gus has found this to be the case and says: “one of the things that I responded to really early on when I started talking about this [tarot] is the idea that in our society we are not taught how to read symbols. It’s not something that we are really taught a lot about”. Heather, a tarot reader in Edmonton, also reflected on the status of tarot and spiritual practices in general in our society:

I think we all have it, I think over a couple of millennia, I think it’s been, you know, especially over the last six hundred years or so, I think a lot of that stuff has been squashed, been undermined. I think we all had the power; I think we still have it. I think it’s just underutilised.

Yet, she sees a shift with more people in Canada having spiritual experiences and “looking for an opportunity to start thinking about these kinds of things”. And that becomes one of the key roles of the individual who takes on the role of healer-charmer-diviner among my participants; those they work with often need to be shown these different possibilities because they are not taught how to pay attention to their own intuition or to regard these methods as viable sources of information.

Both charming and divination, therefore, serve to help individuals connect to all aspects of themselves and their places in the world. Charms are a means of supporting interpersonal relations (Kropej 2003: 65), becoming a communicative act (Ilomäki 2004: 53) in the same way as divination. The practitioner often serves as a translator for these messages until the individual seeking the reading can claim them for themselves. They also provide support for the person when they do not want to interpret their own information for fear of their biases limiting what they are able to access, particularly if the topics are frightening or difficult. The spaces these practices create allow people to engage in their own narratives and find new ways of understanding and communicating their lives.

## **HEALING**

One of the most significant examples of the integration of both divination and charming among my practitioners revolves around healing. Illness, the sociologist Meredith B. McGuire observes, “is a profoundly human experience” (1990: 286), as is the search for methods of coping with it. As Roper posits, “verbal charms are a near-universal (perhaps even universal) way of coping with ill health” among other struggles in life (2009: xiv). Over time, charms and divinatory acts have been drawn upon to facilitate healing<sup>4</sup>, adapted to fit the needs of a community, and while they may appear to have been discarded in Western medicine, they are not so easily dismissed. Lovelace observes that “Newfoundland has had a very strong and widespread tradition of healing by means of charms” (2011: 37). It is, therefore, not surprising that he has found there is an ongoing interest in keeping charms within the process of healing.

One example is a woman Lovelace met named Shirley, whom he describes as part of “the post-modernization generation, university-educated and working at the highest level of orthodox medicine in a research laboratory. Nevertheless she is very interested in complementary forms of health care, which is where she suggested charming might take on further life” (ibid.: 44). I found similar individuals during my own fieldwork including Donna, a scientist working for the University of Alberta, whose approach of not discarding one system for

the other but integrating them into a more holistic approach to health care reflects Shirley's.

Among those I interviewed, divination and charming maintain their place in the repertoire of healing because they recognise that it is an intricate process demanding equally complex tools, both ancient and modern, for its success. In doing so they situate themselves as part of the therapeutic process but do not claim an ability to replace a doctor. Jessica, a tarot reader originally from Alberta, now residing in Newfoundland, emphasised that she is not a medical professional:

It's about centering them and balancing them and then directing them to get the appropriate help that they need within the medical system. Because the one thing I will never say is that I am a certified counsellor or psychiatrist or psychologist or doctor. So I may pick up on something, there may be something that you need to get investigated, but it doesn't mean that, you know, I'm going to be the one that diagnoses you either. And I think that there can be a balance between our rational, medical system and what people like myself do. There can be a balance. I don't believe that they have to be mutually exclusive.

Instead, they see themselves as part of a larger system, as explained to me by Peter,<sup>5</sup> a Tarot reader currently working in Edmonton:

So if you do have some health issues, you know what, go out and exercise, go out and do things, go to the doctor. And I really perceive as doing, you know, going to the doctor instead of the holistic – I believe both, but I believe first and foremost is going to the doctor and then if you want to do some holistic energy, well then by all means you can try here and there, but I always believe that you need to do the medical energy first.

And by Donna:

So I'm very careful to now, people will come to you about health, too. They'll want to know, how do you see my health, and that kind of thing. And you can tell them stuff, but you don't want them to rely on you for a diagnosis because I'm not a doctor, I'm just, you know. I could say sometimes I can see where, hmm, you know, you might need to get some medical care, or I can see that yeah, they're going to have a hospital visit. I can also see sometimes that there's going to be an injury.

This approach fits with Davies' findings that "[c]harmers did not diagnose, and charmed only for commonplace complaints which were recognised by orthodox and folk medicine alike" (1998: 41) and Bente Gullveig Alver's observation that "[s]eldom will a patient bypass the doctor and go directly to a folk healer"



and, even when they do so, are “likely to continue seeing the doctor” (1995: 25). People, when suffering an illness, still seek out a multitude of different ways to find healing and frequently strive to find a balance among all these different systems.

Divination and charming both emerge from a need in the community. As societies develop new systems of treatment, it is to be expected that the roles of past modalities will change. However, adjustment does not mean dismissal, and the willingness of practitioners to recognise their supportive function, whether it is socially accepted and acknowledged or not, allows for them to adapt to the shifting of needs and values. Instead of placing themselves in opposition to medicine, they step in to fill gaps within the system on an individual level, bringing all approaches together into a whole entity focused on the healing of a specific person.

A significant part of healing within holistic approaches comes from finding meaning and the creative power of speaking of one’s experience. Sabina Magliocco draws attention to this expanded understanding in *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*:

Western biomedicine does not generally address the issue of meaning, because it treats the body and illness as objects, separate from the person who experiences them. By contrast, in many alternative healing approaches, the body and illnesses are assumed to be laden with meaning. Indeed, part of the healing process consists of discovering the meaning of a person’s illness episode and then addressing that meaning through embodied practices (Magliocco 2004: 142).

Divination provides access to some of this meaning, drawing into consideration a variety of potential causes that can extend back into past lives or ancestral patterns. Once identified, charms are brought in to facilitate healing. Shannon, a practitioner who provides a variety of healing modalities to her clients, discussed how she incorporates a word of intention into her Reiki practices:

So what would happen is, so you’ll lay out on the table and then I’ll ask you for a word, and that will be your word of intention. That’s the word that you focus on during the whole session. I say, so tell me, imagine what your life would be like if that word was true. So let’s say the word was peace. You need peace in your life. I say, what does peace smell like to you? What does peace taste like to you? What does it look like to you? What does it, you know – Use all of your senses as you’re going to get this, is what my peaceful life will look like.

This word serves as a charm although, in this context, it is created by the patient and not the healer.

Ulrika Wolf-Knuts argues that “it is also possible to maintain that the charm gives the person in need of help a language in which to express his needs” (2009: 166). Mimicking the secrecy of charm texts, Western medical language often denies the patient the ability to speak openly and completely about their experiences. However, divinatory acts and the ways in which they integrate charms provide new ways of articulating personal experiences, giving the patient their own specialised language that does not dismiss medical discourse but complements it while being uniquely tailored to the experiences of the patient. The movement toward a more holistic approach does not demand that all knowledge be disclosed but that people need to be part of the process and that they have their own information to contribute.

Healing that emerges from speaking one’s story requires that people have spaces where they are heard. In *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*, Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps discuss this desire to be listened to in relation to illnesses, noting that for those who suffer from chronic conditions, it is difficult to find “active listenership” because those within the medical system, as well as family and friends, “resist narratives that deviate from the canonical plot that illness is only transitory”. In particular, stories that come “uncomfortably close to disclosing the chaos and terror accompanying illness” or that “have no clear logic or resolution” are often quickly halted (2001: 277). However, charming and divination often embrace narratives that exist outside of linear time, drawing upon past lives and hidden connections that go beyond Western medical discourse. They provide places within which to share one’s narratives and explore not only the health issue itself but its impact on the rest of the person’s life and those with whom they share it. Within the work of these contemporary practitioners, all of these components come together to give the client a language and a space to seek out and come to terms with their own issues.

The mediumship of charms identified earlier by Nigosian also appears in acts of healing. Having an object present in a ritual can be important for the curative process by giving tangible form to something that cannot otherwise be seen. Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney note this interplay in Philippine extraction healings:

They use some combination of genuine paranormal power and sleight-of-hand to perform “bloody extractions”, whereby they magically seem to reach into a patient’s body with their fingers, without surgery or implements, and extract harmful objects ranging from worms to safety pins. Though these healers have been shown to use some measure of

trickery, many patients go away from the procedure much improved or even completely healed. If this is a matter of healing by suggestion, it seems to work often enough. Far more than Western doctors, shamans regard the mental and emotional condition of the patient as paramount in the healing process (Smoley & Kinney [1999] 2006: 165).

The tangibility of divination tools and charms serve the same function, not to trick the client but to give all involved a point of focus, a palpable representation of an illness that is often beyond the capacity of the human eye to see and a potential remedy that is often equally mysterious.

Healing extends beyond the physical body and its injuries to psychological challenges including past experiences of abuse. Laura Stark's discussion of magic and charming in "The Charmer's Body and Behavior as a Window onto Early Modern Selfhood" is worth a closer look because of the connections she makes between internal and external systems of power and the expectations for their protection of our well-being:

It is no surprise, then, that descriptions of magic recorded in rural Finland paint a vivid picture of persons who perceived themselves to be vulnerable and unprotected. In modern society, the individual is protected by laws, practices and institutions which safeguard personal boundaries. These include laws against fraud, defamation, slander, assault, battery, intimidation, violation of privacy, and more recently in some Western societies, laws against sexual harassment, stalking, and the physical punishment of children. Early modern individuals, by contrast, had to protect *themselves* from threats, and magic provided one means of doing this (Stark 2009: 5).

She later notes that "if nothing outside the self guarantees individual rights, then the individual must contain *within himself* the means to secure these rights, and the result is a very different sort of self" (ibid.: 13). Expanding upon this idea, at first glance the external structures established in twenty-first century Canada to protect its citizens indicate that divination and charming are no longer needed. Yet, in my interviews it no longer surprises me when I am told about their experiences of abuse, rape, and assault and the ways they have shaped their lives and practices. Listening to practitioners discuss their experiences, it becomes apparent that these systems fail.

What these conversations reveal is that these external institutions are not perfect, and when they falter, people seek to establish an internal means to protect themselves and allow them to cope with and heal from trauma. Fur-

thermore, these difficult experiences may help develop the intuitive abilities they draw upon to conduct readings. Marlene speculated that:

I think all kids are intuitive, you know, and when you grow up in a house where it's not necessarily stable some of your senses develop a little bit more strongly than others. You have to check in emotionally with the adults in the room to kind of know what to prepare yourself for because, you know, all of that uncertainty.

While stereotypes of divination suggest its role as that of superficial entertainment, it is consistently used by those I have interviewed to engage with challenging experiences. They question the protective power assigned to the Western legal and medical systems, among others. People who have experienced the fractures in these structures turn to alternative methods not in an effort to dismiss the external ones but because they recognise the need for something more, that what is officially sanctioned is not enough.

Being able to claim a language or system of meaning that is rooted in internal, lived experience, supported by the holistic practices of which divination and charming are a crucial part, resituates power away from larger social structures and back within the individual who is dealing with the trauma. It is not possible for such empowerment to come from external institutions alone. Irene explained that she believes that before we come into this life we choose everything that happens to us, meaning that "all the crap that happened in our lives are all our lessons. You can either grow stronger or it weakens you". Until you claim your own experiences, in your own way, you can never heal, and a key way of doing so for her and others is found in the information and languages provided by divination and charming brought together for this essential purpose.

## **CONCLUSION**

People are complex, and to regard any system or practice they create as any less so is to do these acts and those who use them a disservice. It is, therefore, essential to not assume that past practices of divination and charming have simply disappeared in the contemporary Canadian context, but instead to take a closer look at the ways in which they have been transformed. It is necessary to examine the ongoing relationship between charming and divination, particularly the ways in which they continue to be integrated into each other, and how the modern practitioner has come to embody these different roles for the purposes of engaging with and exploring the unknown and promoting healing

and reconciliation. In doing so, we find that the relationship remains an important one for many divination practitioners and for the communities they serve.

My work with diviners in central Alberta and the ways in which charming is present in many of their practices gives us a glimpse into, but by no means a comprehensive conclusion of, contemporary divination and charming within Canadian borders. It reveals the different ways in which the old is incorporated into the new and how past traditions are transformed within changing times. It demonstrates that we have ongoing concerns that we share with all who have come before about health and healing, and that the systems established by our ancestors still have much to offer. By understanding the ways in which these traditions have been brought forward, we better comprehend the needs of the twenty-first century citizen and the fractures within the external institutions and social systems set up to protect and aid them. Ultimately, it becomes apparent that divination and charming will continue to be adapted and remain necessary as long as we face uncertainty in our own lives.

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## **NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> My definition of divination is that it is the conscious utilisation of a variety of tools to uncover information deemed by the participant(s) to be otherwise unknowable. This information can be about, but is not limited to, the future and is often about present or past situations (including past lives). While divination can be a spiritual act, there is no religious requirement since the source(s) of this knowledge range from external deities to one's own subconscious.
- <sup>2</sup> While divination factors into magical practices (see, for example, Farley 2009 for an exploration into how tarot has been integrated into esoteric, occult, Neopagan, and New Age practices), I am in agreement with Patrick Curry that "divination cannot seamlessly be accommodated to the category of magic" (2010: 4).
- <sup>3</sup> The secret power of words plays out in various concepts of silence through divination. The practice of a dumb supper is typically found in records from rural communities; I have not encountered it being undertaken in urban centers, but it is worth recognising because of its manipulation of sound and silence. In this act, a young woman prepares a dinner in complete silence and backwards with the result being that her future spouse will appear for the meal. It is usually held at midnight, often on Halloween.

If silence is broken at any point the ritual will not work or the vision will disappear. In this case, the charm as a verbal component of the divinatory act is defined by the absence of language. In doing so, there remains the recognition of the importance of words and the power they have within ritual settings. (For more on the dumb supper and collected examples, see Bill Ellis' *Lucifer Ascending*, particularly pages 153–163; Paul B. Frazier's "The Dumb Supper"; and Wayland D. Hand's "Anglo-American Folk Belief: The Oral World's Legacy to the New".)

<sup>4</sup> See Judit Kis-Halasz's article "This Child Here Won't Shed Tears of Dreadful Fright, 'Cause He's not Caught by Devil's Might'. Change and Stability of Charms Against Fright Illness: A Hungarian Perspective" for past examples of the integration of charms and divination for healing purposes.

<sup>5</sup> Peter is a pseudonym, chosen by and used at the request of the participant.

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## THREEFOLD STORIES, THREEFOLD CHARMS: BÉCQUER'S POETIC ETHNOGRAPHY OF WITCHCRAFT

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Some striking examples of magic charms are to be found in three of the tales included by the Spanish writer G. A. Bécquer in his *Cartas desde mi celda* (Letters from my cell, 1864). Taking a supposed real-life contemporary event as his starting-point – the brutal death at the hands of the villagers of Trasmoz (Aragon) of an old woman accused of witchcraft – he weaves three separate but interconnected stories. Straddling the fields of literature and anthropology, history and fable, the poet is revealed as an astute ethnographer as he examines the basis of the powers attributed to witches in two medieval legends. The central character in the first, which unfolds in Islamic Spain, is a necromancer who obtains the power he longs for by studying books of magic. The second, set in the period after the Christian Reconquest, tells the story of a pretty young woman, a “Cinderella in reverse”, who gets the husband of her dreams thanks to the help not of a fairy godmother but of a cunning sorceress. The spells at the heart of these tales represent three classic reasons for invoking magic: to protect oneself from enemies, to gain power and wealth, and to win love, or at least to subjugate another’s will. The mutual influence of historical charms, which we know about primarily through judicial documents, and literary spells is further proof of the permeability between popular and learned culture. Bécquer, an ardent admirer of Shakespeare, was greatly influenced by *Macbeth*, and for both poets, despite the enormous power of words, witchcraft was first and foremost, “a deed without a name”.

**Keywords:** Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, poetic ethnography, Spain, Spanish literature, witchcraft

“En el fondo de mi alma consagro, con una especie de culto, una veneración profunda por todo lo que pertenece al pasado”

G. A. Bécquer, *Desde mi celda*, Carta IV (1864)

“El pasado [...] es el alma de nuestras almas”

M. de Unamuno, “Adiós al xix”, *Las Noticias* (1–I–1901)

“L’ethnologue écrit-il autre chose que des confessions?”

C. Lévi-Strauss, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, fondateur des sciences de l’homme* (1962)

## PROLOGUE

One of the most compelling verbal expressions of all time is the magic spell. The mysterious power of words reveals itself with greater potency here than in any other form of language. And while in practice, the dividing line between magic and religion is often blurred, there is no denying that invocations of evil spirits carry a higher emotional charge than other figures of speech.<sup>1</sup>

Whether in the real world or the realm of fiction, the dialogue between tradition and innovation plays a key part in any charm. For obvious reasons, fictional witches tend to express themselves in more elaborate terms than real ones. However, from historically documented spells we can divine an entire repertoire of formulas passed down from generation to generation – a living memento of traditional poetry.<sup>2</sup> Reality and fiction come together, therefore, in a form of oral expression directed at imaginary beings, whose help is seen as essential by those summoning them.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most powerful magic spells in Western culture appears in the “Pharsalia”, an epic poem from the first century by the Hispanic-Roman poet Lucan, which would inspire innumerable future European literary charms. In it, Erichtho, an utterly repugnant witch, casts a dreadful spell in order to read the future – one of the main goals of magic in the ancient world.<sup>4</sup> The three literary spells I shall discuss exemplify three other classic magical objectives: to protect oneself from enemies, to gain power and wealth, and to win love, or at least gain control over the will of others (Tausiet 2004, 2014a). In all cases, there is a clear reciprocal influence between documented, historical magic spells and literary charms, which is further evidence of the constant overlap between popular and learned culture.<sup>5</sup>

## THE POET AS ETHNOGRAPHER

The discipline known today as ethnography has always been a pluralistic practice, reflected in such diverse art forms as memoirs, travel writing, poems, novels, paintings, drawings or simple sketches (Cangas 1995; Maynard 2010). “Ethnography beyond ethnography” has recently undergone a certain revival, particularly since the 1990s (Tyler 1990). The new “poetic anthropology” is focused less on recording oral performances in textual form (“ethno-poetics”) and more on rediscovering ethnographic writings deliberately presented in a polished, poetic language but not included within the canons of scientific research (Olivares 1999; Rettig 2012).

In not being labelled either anthropology or literature, poetic ethnography or ethno-literature is a field as yet little studied (Fuente Lombo 1994; Fuente Lombo & Hermosilla Álvarez 1997; Díaz Viana 2008). One fascinating example of the genre is Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer’s *Letters from my Cell*. This distinct set of nine short stories in epistolary form was published in 1864, and



*“The poet and the muses” (Drawing by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer)*

ranges between autobiography and fiction, history and legend, anthropology and what many regard as most exquisite poetry.<sup>6</sup>

It has often been claimed that Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836–1870) is the most popular Spanish writer after Cervantes. He is renowned as Spain's first modern poet and is most widely recognized for his collection of tales *Leyendas* (*Legends*, 1857–1864; Baker 1991) and his volume of poetry *Rimas* (*Poems*, 1871; Baker 2000). Bécquer is also considered to be a precursor to the modernist movement, as his unique style helped revolutionize contemporary views of literature (Mizrahi 1991). Bécquer's legends are marked by a supernatural quality, which has led modern critics to compare him to authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and E. T. A. Hoffmann (Marín-Ruiz 2009; Mellado Espinilla 2002).

Regarding his poetry, due to his bitter lyrical attitude during the late Romantic period, Bécquer was set apart from his contemporaries, not by his themes of perfection, love, life, suffering, hopelessness and death, but by his unique, restrained style. Bécquer's compilation of poems represent the poet's struggle for perfection and eventual failure in both love and art. The language, written in a colloquial style, alternates between rhymed meter and speech-rhythms. And as the collection progresses, the tone also shifts from frustration and despair to detachment, and solace in death. He is credited with having had enormous



*The Monastery of Veruela from Afar-Drawing by Valeriano Bécquer*



*The Monastery of Veruela. Drawing by Valeriano Bécquer*

influence on many other acclaimed authors, including Rubén Darío, Miguel de Unamuno, and Juan Ramón Jiménez. While Bécquer had a modest, obscure career as a writer during most of his life, he has recently gained international recognition for his work.

Although his legends and love poems are nowadays well known, the stories included in *Letters from my Cell* can be regarded as unique and special, never having been translated into any other language. This work is a form of spiritual autobiography, an inner journey that the poet began when he left Madrid due to ill health and moved to the abandoned Monastery of Veruela in the mountains between Castile and Aragon (Serrano Dolader 2010). From his new home, the poet reflected on the differences between the frenzy of life in the capital and the process of internalisation that he began when he immersed himself in his new rural surroundings and the lives of those he met there. This journey into his inner self was not simply a solitary experience. Indeed, he was only able to discover himself through his encounters with local people, with whom he was utterly fascinated.

Like the Irish playwright John Millington Synge, whose fieldwork on the Aran Islands marked him for life (Smith 1996; Burke 2009), Bécquer was transformed by the time he spent in the monastery, achieving a new maturity and insight. This young man once obsessed with achieving literary recognition in Madrid, now spent his convalescence researching the cultural history of the area, and saw his value system undergo a complete reversal. He became “profoundly indifferent” to the judgement of others, revelled in life far from the crowds, and achieved an acute awareness of his own mortality.<sup>7</sup>

Such a radical change could not have occurred without the “encounter with the other” which, for Bécquer, involved close dealings with the people of the countryside around his new home.<sup>8</sup> His stay at the monastery lasted around a year and was spent in the company of his brother, artist Valeriano Bécquer, who had been given state funding to travel around Spain and capture images of the country’s traditional customs before, as it was feared, they vanished without a trace.<sup>9</sup> Gustavo had no such specific project in mind but, whether driven by his own interest or inspired by his hardworking brother, he too devoted himself, as far as his health would allow, to finding out more about the history and



*Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer in Veruela-Drawing by Valeriano Bécquer*

legends of the area. He spoke to the locals, and then either sketched or wrote about what he had learned (Rubio Jiménez 2011).

Like a nine-month gestation period, the nine letters represent the poet's intimate journey into the symbolic nucleus of the monastery. *Letter One* describes his travels north from Madrid to the abbey. *Letter Two* contrasts the hectic pace of life he knew in Madrid and the meditative state inspired by the atmosphere of the abandoned monastery. *Letter Three*, written as he was recovering from a serious relapse of his illness, marks the start of a new stage, a change of emotional climate enabling him to develop his ethnographical interests. Bécquer openly declares his intent to "collect the final words of a disappearing age", in "a place that is still untouched and resistant to civilising innovation".<sup>10</sup> At the same time, he reveals his emotional involvement with his field of study: "I feel a sense of awe", he says, when he perceives the harmonious organisation of traditional culture.<sup>11</sup>

Bécquer's ethnographic attitude – a profound subjectivity and parallel search for personal redemption – anticipated by a century the position of two giants of the field: Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ernesto de Martino. Both men believed that the study of "the Other" only made sense if it also entailed self-investigation. In 1955, the publication of Lévi-Strauss's *Sad Tropics* was not so much about the discovery of exotic peoples, as it was about reflecting in depth on one's own culture. Similarly, the work done by De Martino during the same period on the traditions of southern Italy revealed an essential need for self-knowledge (Lévi-Strauss 1955; De Martino 1961).

Armed only with his intuition – and the emotional support of his brother – Bécquer began observing, noting down and converting into literary form the profound impressions left on him by the history of the area. *Letter Four* is, in a way, a strongly worded *anthropological manifesto*:

You must leave the well-trodden paths, wander at random from one place to another, sleep moderately and eat no better than that. You need faith and real enthusiasm for your aims in order to go in search of the local people and primitive customs ... that are inexorably being driven out by the invasive flood of the new and the advances of civilisation.<sup>12</sup>

Thereafter, in a process of poetic mythologisation, the following letters portray three aspects of the feminine: the strong woman, the witch, and the saint (the latter exemplified in the figure of the Virgin Mary). As if it were a prologue to the three tales that deal with the world of magic and witchcraft, *Letter Five* pauses to admire the qualities of the local mountain girls, who possess a kind of masculine strength in their ability to face adversity,<sup>13</sup> and are the polar opposite of the spoiled, high-society ladies Bécquer had known in Madrid. In fact,

their combination of material poverty and spiritual resilience, leads us to the three stories that form the heart of this collection.

### THREE STORIES, THREE CHARMS

All three are set in the same location. Trasmoz is a real place, but its name means “beyond the mountains”.<sup>14</sup> It therefore also stands as an image of something/somewhere beyond time, a place beyond reality on the frontier of nowhere. Together, the three stories form a trilogy in disguise; the apparent lack of continuity between them reveal the writer’s anthropological-poetic method.<sup>15</sup> Rather than simply gathering and collecting folk traditions, Bécquer applied his literary inspiration to interpreting things that may have actually happened by formulating a historical-legendary reconstruction of the past of this particular area.<sup>16</sup>

The first story tells of the recent murder of an old woman, who the villagers believed to be a witch (her name, “Aunt Casca”, could be translated as “Dried-up Woman”). According to Bécquer’s informant, a shepherd who witnessed the crime, the most astonishing thing was the woman’s reaction. Having begged in vain for mercy, and while continuing to sob, she began to mumble a strange spell. The shepherd could not make out what she was saying, but it seemed to be a tangled mixture of prayers to God and the saints, and invocations of demons:

The old woman lowered her head, clasped her hands together and began to mutter [---] words [---] which those standing near her could not understand. Some swore she was speaking Latin; others that it was some wild, unknown language, while a few understood that she was in fact praying, although she was saying her prayers backwards, as is the custom of these wicked women.<sup>17</sup>

Her *backwards prayers* filled the shepherd with terror.<sup>18</sup> His fear of witches is shared by a second informant mentioned by the writer: his servant girl, who is alarmed by the very mention of Casca. The girl tells the writer about her fears but also about the many precautions – to be baptized correctly, to make the sign of a cross on the hearth, to place a broom backwards in a doorway – she and her family had undertaken to guard against witchcraft.<sup>19</sup>

Like the shepherd, this young girl is convinced that witches have no power on Fridays, because that was the day on which Christ died, but that they can hear all that is being said about them. The writer encourages the girl to tell him more, asking why precautions are necessary since the witch is dead. She answers that the role of the witch is a hereditary one, passed down from one



woman to another – a widely held belief at this time.<sup>20</sup> And she ends by relating another story about witches that the writer promises to tell his readers later.

*Letter Seven* is a kind of parenthesis between that promise and the actual telling of the tale. Bécquer defers the action and appears temporarily to forget his main motif. Aunt Casca vanishes, and the poet takes us back into the distant past: the “time of the Moors”. As he himself explains, for the country folk of the Iberian peninsula, such an expression refers less to a real period of history than to “the mythological and fabled eras of the past”.<sup>21</sup> In search of a mythical-psychological explanation for the witches’ sabbaths supposedly celebrated in the ruins of Trasmoz castle, he pauses to recount a fable about the building’s magical origins.<sup>22</sup>

In essence, this story tells of how, at the time of the Christian Reconquest of Spain, a king who wanted a castle between the Moorish and Christian territories meets an old beggar who promises to build such a fortress in a single night as long as he is appointed its governor. The king laughs at the old man’s wild claim and, convinced that his offer is impossible, agrees to his terms. As in so many other folk tales, the king did not consider the involvement of magic.<sup>23</sup> The beggar turns out to be a necromancer, and charms are his specialty. Unlike Aunt Casca, who knows her spells by heart or makes them up as she goes along, the magician reads from a book of magic (Bécquer 2002, Carta VII, p. 254).

Here, Bécquer is highlighting the fundamental difference between “feminine magic” and “masculine magic”. For women, magic was an oral practice, always closely linked to religion, and virtually indistinguishable from the prayers or pseudo-prayers addressed to the saints; for men, however, it was book-based and tied up with the scientific studies of the period, astrology and alchemy in particular. Hence, the importance in this second spell is not the invocation of the spirits of heaven or hell but of nature, present in the four elements. As in the previous letter, where the witch’s spell, if elliptical, forms the culmination of the story, the charm recited by the magician is also climactic, although less than explicit:

The necromancer leafed through the book [---] He was mumbling unintelligible phrases and, stopping his reading from time to time, repeated a strange refrain in a lugubrious tone, as if reciting a psalm.<sup>24</sup>

By centring his two stories on spells whose details are only hinted at, Bécquer is paying homage to the immense strength of words but also, paradoxically, to the power of what is left unsaid. Just as undeclared love is almost always lasting, the power of magic revolves around its secrecy.<sup>25</sup> Once the spell is begun, the necromancer keeps “calling by name upon all the spirits of the air and the earth, of fire and water” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VII, pp. 255–256), but the poet



*The Village of Trasmuz-Zaragoza, Spain, where the three tales are set*

admits he cannot repeat these names. What we do know is that the spell is divided into three parts and that it has an immediate effect. The spirits of the elements shake the mountain three times, the rocks are split asunder, the trees are parted, sand is brought down by the mountain torrents, and a huge crowd of gnomes prepare to raise the castle (Bécquer 2002, Carta VII, pp. 257). The destructive deeds wrought by witches at their sabbaths supposedly took place after sunset, and this sorcerer's constructive work is similarly done during the hours of night, when the villagers and the proud king are asleep, unaware of the work underway (Bécquer 2002, Carta VII, p. 258).

This link between night-time and extraordinary events suggests that, despite the classic differences between female and male magic, the two share psychological roots. Aunt Casca and the necromancer, two figures who at first sight appear poor and wretched, both in fact possess awe-inspiring abilities. Bécquer seems to be suggesting that “magic” is precisely that: the power of what remains hidden, of what is left unsaid, of what is invisible (Bécquer 2002, Carta VII, pp. 254–255).

Bécquer's witchcraft trilogy ends with an apparently lighthearted little story. Within it, however, is hidden an attempt to “explain” the witchcraft – or in other words the misfortune – that continues to blight a village that has both welcomed the writer and shown him its darkest side.

This third story is again set in Trasmuz, after the Reconquest, when “the constant warfare between Aragon and Castile has ended”,<sup>26</sup> and the castle has been left in ruins. The local priest is such a good man that he has succeeded in keeping evil at bay, and even the witches' gatherings have disappeared. This

priest devotes his life to praying and helping the poor, but his peace and harmony is interrupted when his sister dies and he has to take in his orphaned niece.<sup>27</sup>

Dorotea turns out to be an attractive but vain and selfish eighteen-year-old. The night before a village celebration, when she is complaining about not having a new dress, she sees an old woman begging for alms. Once again, appearances are deceptive and the power of magic is hidden beneath the surface: the beggarwoman is a witch in disguise who, as a kind of anti-fairy godmother, promises to give Dorotea what she wants if she follows her instructions. Among other things, she has to recite a spell – an essential condition for her dreams to come true: “Make the sign of the cross three times with [her] left hand, calling upon the trinity of hell”.<sup>28</sup> Once again, the number three is important here. The spell plays a decisive role in the story and, although it lacks details, the names of the spirits invoked are listed: Beelzebub, Astaroth and Belial, three Phoenician gods who were turned into demons in the history of Christianity.<sup>29</sup> With his usual astuteness, Bécquer chose the names of three of the main divinities in the Canaanite culture: the father god Baal (now Beelzebub); the mother god Ishtar (here Astaroth) and Baal’s enemy (Belial, expelled from paradise by the principal god) (Hillers 1985; Moscati 2001).

Once the spell has been recited, a number of cats are turned into women who work all night to make Dorotea’s coveted finery. The results speak for themselves: two months later she marries “one of the most well-to-do young men”.<sup>30</sup> However, anticipating the trend of subverting traditional narratives that would develop from the 20th century, onwards (Mieder 1987; McAra & Calvin 2011) Bécquer warns of the hidden danger behind this fairytale ending: “the poor priest lost ... forever the power of his Latin exorcisms and his holy water. To his terrified amazement, and that of his flock, the witches took up residence once more in the castle.”<sup>31</sup> The presence of witchcraft in the village is not just an old wives’ tale; in fact, their ominous gatherings exemplify misfortune at its worst: “countless plagues attacked the cattle; the young people of the village were struck down by mysterious illnesses; babies were beaten at night in their cradles...”<sup>32</sup> Having told his tale, Bécquer closes the circle by mentioning Aunt Casca again in his conclusion. However, this is not the original, but another old woman in the village with the same name: “the sister of the other famous Casca”. Witchcraft, like evil, is passed on from one family member to another. Once again, the poet gives voice to the reverential fear that these stories inspire in him (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, p. 274). He ends his trilogy with an allusion to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the tragedy of all tragedies, according to which, despite the irresistible power of words, witchcraft is first and foremost “a deed without a name” (Sanders 1995).

## EPILOGUE

As a kind of Christian epilogue, *Letter Nine*, the last in the collection, takes us back to the monastery. After three stories in which, despite all attempts to impose good, evil prevails, the writer strives to convey a message of hope. He then retells the legend of the founding of the monastery, a story about an apparition of the Virgin Mary to a lost traveller (Bécquer 2002, Carta IX, p. 283). And yet, if the enigma of evil is impenetrable and thus inexpressible, good is also a mystery beyond words. As he tells of the traveller's vision, Bécquer says, "I wish I had sufficient imagination to describe that sight",<sup>33</sup> and he goes on to describe how art can only struggle with its limited resources "to give an idea of the impossible".<sup>34</sup> As a good anthropologist-poet, he does not declare himself for or against the subject of his study, but ends by affirming the deep respect he feels for the legend, and the hope of being able to communicate to his readers "the true poetry of religion".<sup>35</sup>

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> On charms in the oral European tradition, see Roper 2009 and Kapaló & Pócs & Ryan 2013. On charms in the oral Spanish tradition, see Pedrosa 2000 and Gil 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> On historical charms in the Spanish tradition, see Estopañán 1942; Delpech 1985; Martínez 1990; Moreno 2001; Tausiet 2014a.
- <sup>3</sup> On literary charms, see Briggs 1962; Roper 2003; Alberola 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> See Lucanus 2015 [39–65 a. D.]. On the Erictho charm, see Stratton 2007 and Stratton & Kalleres 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> On the relationship between historical and literary charms in Spain, see Baroja 1990 and García 1999.
- <sup>6</sup> The poetic ethnography of Bécquer and, particularly, his approach to magic has been compared to the work of the Russian writer Nikolái Gógol (1809–1852) (Arséntieva 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> In Bécquer's own words: "Ya todo pasó, Madrid, la política, las luchas ardientes, las miserias humanas, las pasiones, las contrariedades, los deseos [...] Mi alma está ya tan serena como el agua inmóvil y profunda. [...] Las palabras *amor, gloria, poesía* no

me suenan ya al oído como me sonaban antes. ¡Vivir!... Seguramente que deseo vivir [---] pero vivir oscuro y dichoso, en cuanto es posible, sin deseos, sin inquietudes, sin ambiciones...". (Bécquer 2002, Carta II, pp. 186 and 205).

- <sup>8</sup> On the anthropological concept of "the other", see Tyler 1988; Augé 1998; Fabian 2014.
- <sup>9</sup> On the work of Valeriano Bécquer, see Brown 1957; Rubio Jiménez & Centellas Salamero 1999; Bécquer & Bécquer 2003; Rubio Jiménez 2009.
- <sup>10</sup> "Recoger la última palabra de una época que se va"; "un país virgen aún y refractario a las innovaciones civilizadoras". See Bécquer 2002, Carta IV, p. 208.
- <sup>11</sup> "El ánimo se siente sobrecogido". Bécquer 2002, Carta IV, p. 209.
- <sup>12</sup> "Es preciso salir de los caminos trillados, vagar al acaso de un lugar en otro, dormir medianamente y no comer mejor. Es preciso fe y verdadero entusiasmo por la idea que se persigue para ir a buscar los tipos originales, las costumbres primitivas y los puntos verdaderamente artísticos a los rincones donde su oscuridad les sirve de salvaguardia y de donde, poco a poco, los va desalojando la invasora corriente de la novedad y los adelantos de la civilización." (Bécquer 2002, Carta IV, p. 215).
- <sup>13</sup> Bécquer associated them to the Amazons and the governors of the Saint Brendan's Island: "En este pueblo hay algo de lo que nos refieren las fábulas de las amazonas o de lo que habrán ustedes tenido ocasión de ver en la *Isla de San Baladrán*" (Bécquer 2002, Carta V, pp. 226). On the figure of the strong woman in Spanish literature, see Delpech 1979; Delpech 1986; Tausiet 2014b.
- <sup>14</sup> The term *Trasmoz* might derive from "trasmontes", that is, behind the mountains: "Por su emplazamiento se encuentra tras los montes, tanto si miramos desde el este como desde el oeste" (see Gargallo Sanjoaquín 1993–1994).
- <sup>15</sup> Something similar could be said about three English narrative poems of the 14th century entitled "Pearl", "Patience" and "Purity" (or Cleanness), which have been attributed to the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Putter & Stokes 2014).
- <sup>16</sup> Regarding the subject of witchcraft in the three letters, see Amores 1999, 2000.
- <sup>17</sup> "La vieja inclinó la cabeza, juntó las manos y comenzó a murmurar entre dientes qué se yo qué imprecaciones ininteligibles: palabras que yo no podía oír por la distancia que me separaba de ella, pero que ni los mismos que estaban a su lado lograron entender. Unos aseguraban que hablaba en latín; otros, que en una lengua salvaje y desconocida, no faltando quien pudo comprender que, en efecto, rezaba, aunque diciendo las oraciones al revés, como es costumbre de estas malas mujeres." (Bécquer 2002, Carta VI, p. 237).
- <sup>18</sup> This motif of the "backwards prayers" is one of the many examples of the construction of the myth of witchcraft as the reverse of Christian liturgy. On the idea of witchcraft as a system of representation based in the logic of contraries, see Clark 1997 and Tausiet 1993. According to the Thompson motif index of folkloric literature (G257.2), to read the Bible backwards would inform of the identity of a witch.
- <sup>19</sup> On the continuance and validity during the 20th century of these kinds of rituals against witches in Aragón (Spain), see Beltrán Martínez 1981.

- <sup>20</sup> “Son una familia entera y verdadera, que desde hace un siglo o dos vienen heredando el unto de unas en otras; se acabó con una *tía Casca*, pero queda su hermana, y cuando acaben con esta, que acabarán también, le sucederá su hija...” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VI, p. 245).
- <sup>21</sup> “Corresponde a las edades mitológicas y fabulosas de la historia” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VI, p. 247).
- <sup>22</sup> On this story and its relationship with alchemy and Becquer’s inner voice, see Deutsch-Johnson 1976 and 1995.
- <sup>23</sup> The same psychological resort appears in a traditional folktale about a woman who promises a man they can be lovers if he does something apparently impossible. See, in Italy, Giovanni Boccaccio (“Decima Giornata, Novella Quinta”, *Decameron*, 1353); in England, Geoffrey Chaucer (“The Franklin’s Tale”, *Canterbury Tales*, 1475) and, in Spain, María de Zayas. (“El jardín engañoso”, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, 1637).
- <sup>24</sup> “El nigromante iba pasando las hojas del libro [...] murmuraba entre dientes frases ininteligibles y, parando de cierto en cierto tiempo la lectura, repetía un estribillo singular con una especie de salmodia lúgubre” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VII, p. 254).
- <sup>25</sup> On the subject of collecting and interpreting secret knowledge within the 19th century scientific context, see Stiübhart 2013.
- <sup>26</sup> “Terminadas las continuas guerras entre Aragón y Castilla” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, p. 262).
- <sup>27</sup> “Como no hay felicidad completa en el mundo y el diablo anda de continuo buscando ocasión de hacer mal a sus enemigos, este, sin duda, dispuso que, por muerte de una hermana menor, viuda y pobre, viniese a parar a casa del caritativo cura una sobrina que él recibió con los brazos abiertos” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, p. 263).
- <sup>28</sup> “Si quieres vernos en nuestra primitiva forma [...] haz tres veces la señal de la cruz con la mano izquierda, invocando a la trinidad de los infiernos” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, pp. 270–271).
- <sup>29</sup> These demons were invoked very often in the Spanish charms. See Alberola 2010, pp. 241–265.
- <sup>30</sup> “Uno de los mozos mejor acomodados” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, p. 273). On the classical structure of fairy tales, see Lüthi 1970; Warner 2014.
- <sup>31</sup> “El pobre mosén Gil perdió desde aquella época para siempre el latín de sus exorcismos y el trabajo de sus aspersiones. Las brujas, con grande asombro suyo y de sus feligreses, tornaron a aposentarse en el castillo” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, p. 273).
- <sup>32</sup> “Sobre los ganados cayeron plagas sin cuento; las jóvenes del lugar se veían atacadas de enfermedades incomprensibles; los niños eran azotados por las noches en sus cunas...” (Bécquer 2002, Carta VIII, p. 273).
- <sup>33</sup> “Yo quisiera tener la fuerza de la imaginación bastante para poderme figurar cómo fue aquello” (Bécquer 2002, Carta IX, p. 281).
- <sup>34</sup> “Para dar idea de lo imposible” (Bécquer 2002, Carta IX, p. 282).

<sup>35</sup> “La verdadera poesía de la religión” (Bécquer 2002, Carta IX, p. 288).

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# SEEKING VOICES AND FINDING MEANING: AN ANALYSIS OF PORTUGUESE VERBAL DIVINATION

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Among the numerous charms and incantations collected by late 19th and early 20th-century Portuguese folklorists and ethnographers, there are a small number which are intended to be used in verbal divination. These procedures, at times referred to as *andar às vozes* (seeking voices), while being words of power in themselves, are effectively meant to attribute power and significance to whatever random words or sounds are heard immediately after being recited. Being divination procedures, they present a question and answer structure between a performer and a supernatural entity. In these processes, certain cues or ‘manifestation avenues’ are offered for the called upon supernatural entity to manifest and provide an answer to the performer. As such, the analysis of these (and other) divination procedures can help map the relationships between performers and supernatural entities. Particularly, these can help discern what the accepted manifestations of spirits are during any such divination for a performer, and what implications this may have for other aspects of folk magic.

**Keywords:** absorption hypothesis, cognitive science of religion, divination, domination magic, manipulation magic, J. Leite de Vasconcelos, love magic, saints

## INTRODUCTION

From the numerous verbal magic procedures collected by the great late 19th and early 20th-century Portuguese ethnographers and folklorists, a restricted set of divination procedures require particular attention due to their suggested functioning. While being divination procedures with a standard question-and-answer structure, they stand out due to their verbal nature and the establishment of a kind of vocabulary of communication to be used by an addressed supernatural entity in its communication with the performer.

Analyzing the references to these procedures by the ethnographer José Leite de Vasconcelos (1858–1941), given their verbal nature and their common recourse to saints as their addressed supernatural entity, they are commonly referred to as either *rezas* or *orações* (1985: 485), both of which can be translated as ‘prayers’. Under this category of prayer, two different forms of these divination procedures can nonetheless be detected. The first functions by the performer posing a question to a supernatural entity, either for himself or a client, simultaneously supplying a vocabulary and accepted avenue to be used to frame the answer. Subsequently, the answer is received through an otherwise random event which is deemed significant in light of the vocabulary provided and is interpreted as the manifestation of the addressed supernatural entity (Figure 1a). In the second form, the performer puts a question to a supernatural entity, offering once again its accepted vocabulary of answer, and this is perceived as responding directly to him without necessary recourse to any manifestation in the material world (Figure 1b).

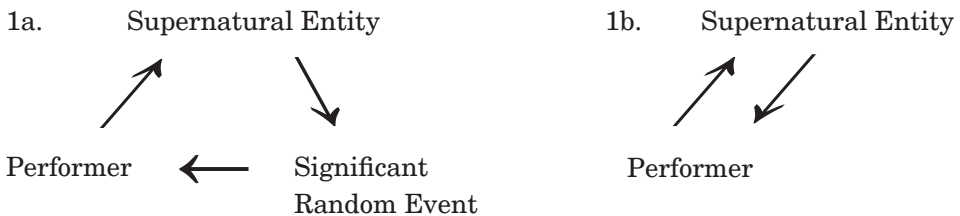


Fig. 1a. Verbal divination structure dependent on an external random event.  
Fig. 1b. Verbal divination structure not dependent on a random event.

The study of these procedures (as in fact most divination methods) can offer various insights into a variety of fields of religious studies, from contemporary cognitive studies of religion to the academic study of western esotericism. Focusing on the first, from the perspective of cognitive studies, analyses of divination procedures can offer interesting illustrations and even alternatives to the processes of attribution of agency and causality. Within cognitive theory, religion can be (at least in part) understood as a mechanism for the attribution of meaning and agency to random events (Luhmann et al. 2010: 67). Such a theory is typically backed by evolutionary arguments in that interpreting sounds and movements in the wild as being the products of an active agent, such as a predator, is overall more conducive to survivability than simply dismissing such random events as irrelevant (Gray & Wegner 2010: 9). Following this idea, one can possibly also understand religion as a method of offering order

to the world by ascribing motive and a certain human-like thought process to its randomness.

This process however depends on a very specific order of attribution of agency and causality, as proposed by Ann Taves (2008: 129). It is firstly necessary for agency to be attributed to a given perception or sensation, only after which causality can be attributed between the agent and the event. Based on this theory, the different forms of divination presented below can be understood equally as methods for the attribution of meaning and agency to random events. This means that whether you perform the divination prayer or not, in all likelihood the responses perceived as being given by the addressed supernatural entity would happen all the same, but the fact that the prayer was performed inflates this otherwise meaningless event with significance and agency.

From the perspective of the study of western esotericism, a relevant point which can also be deduced from the study of folk divination procedures is that they offer a particular model for spirit communication which can be placed in antithesis to more modern and contemporary forms of communication, such as those found in Kardecism, Spiritualism or in movements derived from the 19th-century Occult Revival, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn or the Theosophical Society. In such groups or movements, several techniques involving meditation, trance, visualization, altered states of consciousness and the use of creative imagination are employed as a base for spirit communication. All of these can be seen to be typical of literary and upper layers of society and most of them can actually be traced to Renaissance authors such as Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino and their considerations on the use and reality of the imagination (Van Den Doel & Hanegraaff 2006: 610–611). This same strand can be equally traced across Paracelsus (Van Den Doel & Hanegraaff 2006: 612) in the 16th century and Eliphas Levi (Van Den Doel & Hanegraaff 2006: 614) in the 19th, eventually leading to its use in the Golden Dawn as a cornerstone for spirit contact (Luhrmann 1989a: 41), and consequently contemporary Western Mystery Schools (Luhrmann 1989b: 134) and Witchcraft (Luhrmann 1985: 158). As conceptualized by Luhrmann, these types of methods translate a process of ‘absorption’, a process by which the individual focuses on a mental object while diminishing his/her attention on the everyday events of mundane life (Luhrmann et al. 2010: 75).

In contrast, the prayers presented function by a completely opposite process. The individual focuses on the everyday events of mundane life, given the particular place and influence over these same events spirits are assumed to have (or are given) in this folk environment. The ‘non-inner’, or non-mental or psychological nature of spirits here, as translated by these divination procedures, equally means that they do not rely on any form of altered state of consciousness

or any particular 'inner' skill for the establishment of spirit communication. Consequently, the form of perceived communication and the answers following from these prayers all become extremely tangible and unambiguous. This does not mean, however, that the answers obtained by these folk methods are themselves unambiguous, but rather that the method of interpretation to do with whether or not a spirit message/answer was received or not is completely unambiguous. The spirit answer is itself completely analogical and sensorial.

Beyond these two aspects, this paper hopes to further address the relationship established between the performer and his referred supernatural entity: what the 'vocabulary' supplied for communication may signify in this traditional environment and the possible ramifications of this in the reading of other related folk magic procedures.

### **GETTING SPIRITS TO TALK BACK: FROM DIVINATION TO MANIPULATION**

Given their reference as 'prayers', and before we proceed to analyse these forms of divination themselves, it is fundamental to distinguish the particular form of divination described in Figure 1b (of direct questions and answers between a performer and a supernatural entity) from regular orthodox religious prayer, particularly that of contemporary American Evangelical Christianity. The problem here is that in this particular Christian denomination believers are expected to engage in an active dialogue with God as a form of prayer, the structure of which can be equally described by Figure 1b. To distinguish these two types of dialogical engagement with a supernatural entity, as described by Tanya Luhrmann (2010: 66–67), it should be noted that Christian Evangelicals require a considerable amount of learning and training in order to become efficient in this type of conversational prayer. Associated with this is also a whole series of mental hurdles to be overcome in order for a practitioner in this context to effectively perceive that he is having a dialogue with God (interested readers should refer to Luhrmann's 2012 *When God Talks Back*). In contrast, the forms of verbal divination analysed in this paper require no actual process of 'faith' or any form of 'mental gymnastics' to be perceived as being effective by their performer. As already mentioned, the answers provided by these methods are all, from a sensorial perspective, extraordinarily tangible and unambiguous and largely do not require any process of learning or belief in order to be performed, only to be accepted.

Looking now directly into these particular forms of divination, from the simplest to the most complex, the one which seems to be the clearest, in terms of

methodology and functioning, can be found in the book *Diabruras, Santidades e Profecias* (1894: 111) by Teixeira da Aragão. Yet, the sources mentioned in this book reveal that this procedure was in fact taken from the 1731 Inquisition process of D. Paula Teresa de Miranda Souto-Maior.<sup>1</sup> Analyzing the original document, the procedure can be seen to go as follows:

Para saber se qualquer pessoa era viva ou morta, punha-se á janela passando uma contas e dizendo: ‘Côrte do Céu ouvi-me, côrte do Céu falae-me, côrte do Céu respondi-me’. Esperava as primeiras palavras bues se dissessem na rua, e n’ellas estava a resposta do que desejava saber.

*In order to know if any person was alive or dead, she would place herself at her window going through / [praying] some beads and saying: ‘Court of Heaven hear me, court of Heaven speak to me, court of Heaven answer me’. She would wait for the first words said on the street and in them was the answer she wanted.*

If we break down its structure we see that the performer addresses a supernatural entity (in this case the ‘court of Heaven’) with a question and a ‘trigger formula’; random words are spoken on the street; these are interpreted as the concrete message or manifestation of the supernatural entity and are taken as containing the sought answer.

As stated, this being the simplest form of verbal divination found, all remaining prayers present an increasing level of complexity and internal structure. The second example, collected on an unknown date and at an unknown location by Zófimo Consiglieri Pedroso (2007: 207), is specifically addressed by this scholar as *andar ás vozes*, or, ‘seeking voices’. The procedure seems to be slightly more ritualistic than the previous one, and Consiglieri Pedroso mentions that this could be performed in two different ways: the first of these at any hour of the day, by going out into the streets after its recitation and actively ‘seeking voices’ containing an answer; the second, at the hour of the Trinities (six o’clock in the afternoon), by simply standing at your window (a liminal space, similar to the first example) and passively waiting for the voices to reach you. In either case, the prayer to be recited is presented as the same:

Meu S. Zacarias!  
Mau santo bendito!  
Foste cego, surdo e mudo;  
Tiveste um filho e o nome lhe puseste – João;  
Declara-me nas vozes do povo  
*My St Zachariah!*  
*My blessed saint!*  
*You were blind, deaf and mute;*

*You had a son and you called him John;  
Declare to me in the voices of the people*

In this vein, having a particular association with space and time (but less structure), are a number of procedures described by Teófilo Braga, which he also refers to as *andar ás vozes* (1994: 73–74). Interestingly, besides the question being divined upon, these no longer have any form of prescribed verbal cue to trigger the attribution of significance to a random event. These procedures mostly seem to be associated with religious events or spaces, in that attending or going to a religiously charged practice or space will provide the circumstances for the answer to a particular question to be found. The first of these is from Foz do Douro (municipality of Porto):

[---] elas traziam a outras cachopas de São João à quartas-feiras, e da Virgem do Monte às sextas-feiras, que vão mudas à romaria, espreitando o que diz a gente que passa; donde afirmam que lhes não falta a resposta dos seus embustes [---]

[---] *they would bring other girls from São João on Wednesdays, and from Virgem do Monte on Fridays, going mute to pilgrimages, observing what passerby say; from which they claim they will have no lack of answer for their wiles* [---]

The second from São Miguel (Azores):

Quando qualquer pessoa quer saber notícias que lhe hão-de vir de uma amante, vai de noite num passeio até ao adro da igreja em que está o Santo Cristo, rezando numas contas e com outra pessoa atrás para ir ouvindo melhor o que se diz pelo caminho e dentro das casa, e isto sem que nenhuma delas diga uma só palavra. Quando voltam vêm combinando o que ouviram e dali concluem que novas hão-de vir.

*When any person wishes to know news that are to come of a lover, they go at night on a walk to a churchyard which has the Holy Christ, praying some beads and with some company following behind so as to better hear what is being said along the way, inside houses, and this without any of them saying a word. When they return they combine what they heard and from it they conclude what news is to follow.*

Once again, no form of specialized verbal cue seems to be involved beyond the praying with 'beads' (likely a rosary), which is also mentioned in the 1731 prayer described above. The third from Porto:

[---] vai-se rezar à porta da Sé, à Senhora das Verdades, e no caminho é que se colhe as vozes.



[---] *one prays at the door of the See, to the Lady or Truths, and on the way back collect voices.*

Of the more structured types of divination, the ones which seem to be the most common typically do not allow the same flexibility of answers given by the use of random words as the procedures so far presented. This aspect in particular can be noted as a fundamental point which can be understood to distinguish between the prayers and procedures so far presented and the ones set out below. The following, collected by José Leite de Vasconcelos (1985: 485) in Lageosa (municipality of Sabogal), implies a different type of functioning, while nonetheless requiring a random event to be made effective:

Santa Helena, rainha de Sena, moura foste, para a cristandade voltaste, com onze mil virgens te encontraste, com elas vos comprimentasteis, três raminhos de salsa verde cortaste, com a cruz de Christo sonhaste, três cravos que tinha três cravos lhe tirasteis, um para ti, outro para o vosso filho Constantino, deitasteis um ao mar para o consagrarem, pra com eles venceres todas as guerras e batalhas, e nos declarar esta verdade

Reza-se uma salve Rainha à Rainha das verdades; padre-nosso as santo mais velho que houver em Roma

Entre meia hora, há-de de nos declarar esta verdade: ou pelos cães a ladrar ou pela porta a abrir e a fechar, ou pela gente a passar ou crianças a chorar, ou sinos a tocar.

*Saint Helen, queen of the Sene moura<sup>2</sup> you were, to Christendom you returned, with eleven thousand virgins you meet, with them you greeted, three twigs of green parsley you cut, with the cross of Christ you dreamt, three nails it had three nails you took, one for you, another for your son Constantine, another you threw in the sea to consecrate it, so with it you could win every war and battle and declare us this truth.*

*Pray a Salve Regina to the Queen of Truths; an Our Father to the oldest Saint in Rome.*

*Within half an hour, you shall declare to us this truth; whether by dogs barking or doors opening or closing, or by people passing or children crying, or bells ringing.*

While still requiring a random event as an answer, this prayer either includes or implies the very language meant to be used in a very simple yes-or-no type of answer. The flexibility and complexity of response have been lost, but a simple and direct unambiguity has been gained. Upon analysis, the prayer itself is also seen to refer to St Helen, the most common supernatural entity addressed in this form of divination, and furthermore includes a mention of the 'Queen

of Truths', a similar concept to the 'Lady of Truth' mentioned in the previous procedure from Porto.

Following this same system of response and overall motif but to the exclusion of a random tangible event is the following prayer, also collected by Vasconcelos (1880a: 542–543) in Cumieira (district of Vila Real), which is an event of a divination procedure fully following the structure presented in Figure 1b:

Santa Helena,  
Rainha de Sena,  
Moiras fostes,  
Christo vos tornastes,  
Co'a c'roa de Christo sonhastes,  
Ao caminho vos botastes,  
Co'as três Marias cos encontrastes,  
Com ellas pão e peixe creastes,  
Tres cravos lhe tiraste,  
Um deitastes ao mar p'ra ser sagrado,  
Outro com elle ficastes,  
Outro deste a vosso irmão Constantino  
P'ra vencer a batalha da fé.  
Peço-vos, Santa Helena, Se for verdade isto que vos eu peço  
[pergunta]  
Se fôr verdade, sonhos me dareis,  
Agoas claras,  
Roupas lavadas,  
Campos verdes;  
Se fôr o contrario do que peço,  
Sonhos me dareis;  
Campos seccos,  
Roupas sujos  
Agoas turvas.  
*Saint Helen,  
Queen of the Sene,  
Mouras you were,  
[To] Christ you turned,  
With the crown of Christ you dreamt,  
To the road you took,  
With the three Marias you met,  
Bread and fish you created with them,  
Three nails you took,*

*One to cast into the sea to consecrate it  
Another you kept,  
Another you gave your brother Constantine  
To win the battle of faith.  
I ask you Saint Helen,  
If it is true this that I ask  
[question]  
If it is true dreams you will give me [of],  
Clear waters,  
Clean clothes  
Green fields;  
If it is the contrary of what I ask  
Dreams you will give me [of]  
Dry fields,  
Dirty clothes  
Murky waters*

While the language of the answer is still supplied in the same basic terms, the answer is now asked to be given in the performer's dreams. Particularly relevant for this point is the information which Vasconcelos offers that this procedure in particular is intended to be performed at midnight, meaning that it is likely that this prayer is meant to be performed before sleep (this beyond the conception of midnight as an hour of magical significance, being a liminal moment).

Moving beyond saints, the same kind of procedures can also be performed with recourse to the stars, while not straying from the general structure. As collected by Vasconcelos in Lagoa (district of Faro) (1980b: 288):

<i>Estrela meiga e luzente,</i>	<i>Gentle and shining star</i>
<i>Que brilhas no firmamente,</i>	<i>Who shines in the firmament,</i>
<i>Diz-me, por favor:</i>	<i>Tell me, please:</i>
<i>[pergunta]</i>	<i>[question]</i>
<i>Se assim for, faz o milagre</i>	<i>If this is such, make the miracle</i>
<i>E dá-me os seguintes sinais:</i>	<i>And give me the following signs:</i>
<i>Cães a ladrar, portas a bater</i>	<i>Dogs barking, doors closing</i>
<i>E meninos a chorar.</i>	<i>And boys crying</i>

Beyond purely divinatory procedures, while following the same communication model and overall establishment of language and significance between the performer and an addressed supernatural entity, are some rare forms of love and manipulation sorcery. The following, collected once again by Vasconcelos (1985: 40) at an undisclosed location, is a particularly rare example due to its

structure and the complex relationship it seems to create with its addressed spirits:

[NN] onde estás tu e onde estou eu? Nem tu me vês a mim, nem eu te vajo a ti; eu tenho parati o que tu não tens para mim; três mensageiros, todos eles muito fortes – Lucas, Luzes e Elias. Lá tos mando, lá tos envio, para que façam no teu coração tamanha revolução e tamanho amor por mim que não possas comer nem beber, nem dormir, nem descansar, sem comigo vires falar. Lucas, Luzes e Elias, se assim for, sinais me haveis de dar: cães a ladrar, portas a abrir e a fechar, sinos a tocar e meninos a chorar, enquanto eu rezo nove salve-rainhas por vossa intenção.

[NN] *where are you and where am I? Neither do you see me nor do I see you; I have for you what you don't have for me; three messengers, all of them strong – Lucas, Luzes and Elias. There I send them to you, so as they may do in your heart such a revolution and such a love for me that you won't be able to eat, nor drink, nor sleep, nor rest, if you do not speak to me. Lucas, Luzes Elias, if this is such, signs you should give me: dogs barking, doors opening and closing, bells ringing and boys crying, while I pray nine Salve Reginas in your name.*

Analyzing the general functioning of this particular sorcery, it does not in actual fact stray from many forms of love sorcery meant to torture its intended target into submission. However, beyond the objective of the sorcery itself, an extra layer of communication is established. The mentioned spirits are asked to confirm whether the operation was successful by the same yes-or-no type of communication we have observed so far. To establish this as a completely commercial type of interaction, payment is also offered in the form of nine Salve Reginas. This particular point opens a few other problematic issues with this sorcery, also due to the fact that the particular trinity of spirits addressed (Lucas, Luzes and Elias) seem to very rarely feature in any other folk magical procedure.

Breaking these three names down, Lucas and Elias seem to be biblical names (Luke and Elijah), while Luzes (translatable as 'Lights') is likely a corruption or fill-in for Lucifer. Obviously, there may not be a particular inner logic to the selection of these three names, as a large component in them is likely their alliteration, which is likely to be a more important magical component than the actual characters being addressed. Nonetheless, given their presence in a love/manipulation sorcery, they are likely to be easily fitted into the category of evil spirits. However, the payment offered for this particular service does not correspond with that most commonly given to this class of spirits in Portuguese folk magic, as prayers are much more commonly offered as payment to the souls

of the dead or the souls in Purgatory. While a full description and breakdown of this sorcery is not what is intended here, it should be noted as one of the most interesting and complex I have ever found in Portuguese folkloric records.

Moving forward, the last of these procedures worthy of note, still in the realm of love and manipulation, comes from the same 1731 Inquisition process of the first prayer presented. Comparing it with the previous ones, a more complete ritual context and procedure is presented:

Estando no tempo em que a fazia com o pé esquerdo descalço, e braço e perna da mesma arte nus, e o cabelo da parte esquerda desgrehado, com a janela e porta aberta, e um prato com sal diante de si; Tomando uma mão cheia de sal:

Esta mão cheia venho deitar  
Por [NN]  
Para que sem tino andar,  
Sem tino andar, sem tino andar,  
Me venha buscar,  
Me venha falar;  
Que venha  
E não se detenha  
Para Satanaz  
Para Barrabaz  
Para Caifaz!  
E logo, logo me venha amar,  
E estes signaes me hão de dar:  
Canes a ladrar,  
Bestas a passar,  
Gatos a saltar/gallos a cantar.

*Being at this time with her left foot bare, and the arm and leg of the same side naked, and her hair on the left side uncombed, with her window and door open and with a plate of salt in front of her. Taking a hand full of salt:*

*This hand I cast  
For [NN]  
So as he will have no sense,  
Have no sense, have no sense,  
And come get me,  
And come talk to me;  
And come  
And not be detained  
For Satanaz*

*For Barrabaz  
For Caifaz  
And immediately, come and love me,  
And these signs you shall give me;  
Dogs barking  
Beasts passing  
Cats pouncing / Roosters singing.*

While obviously similar to the previous case – which is an excellent indicator of how this particular type of engagement with spirits is widespread – the three spirits addressed here (translatable as Satan, Barabbas and Caiaphas) are likely the most common trinity addressed in Portuguese love/domination magic. Also noteworthy is the ritual procedure itself, whose purpose seems to be to place the performers in a liminary state between dressed and undressed.

## **CONCLUSION**

After analysing the prayers and sorceries set out above and returning to our initial points of discussion, from the cognitive studies point of view, it can be considered that, in these cases, the process typically described for the attribution of agency and causality in a religious environment is reduced to extremely personal and individual circumstances. Divination is really not about ascribing order to the world on a cosmic level, but rather the restructuring of the world and its invisible active agencies in a functional capacity to do with personal questions, circumstances and communication with a supernatural agency. The randomness of the universe is momentarily suspended and rearranged to provide a single individual or a group with an answer.

One other issue which can be brought up by these prayers when fitted to the cognitive model is that, at its core, it is not the attribution of an invisible supernatural agency to a random event that is concerned, but rather, offering an invisible supernatural agency a means of manifestation through a random event; the meaning of a random event is first determined, after which it is offered as a means of manifestation for a supernatural agency. Essentially, rather than agency being ascribed, a means of controlling agency is presented.

From a western esotericism perspective, the model for spirit communication transmitted by these prayers also conveys the underlying point that, in this context, spirits are taken to be autonomous and radically independent and exterior to humans; they do not manifest through an adequate learned use of the human mind but by their own ‘virtue’ (occasionally dependent on invitation). In striking contrast to the process of ‘absorption’ used by modern

and contemporary occult practitioners, one may then come to call this process one of ‘alienation’ and this particular model for spirit communication as the ‘tangible contact model’.

Finally, these prayers and processes also offer us a very tangible data about the accepted methods and capacity for spirits to interact with the mundane material world in the particular traditional folk environment referred to. From here we can extrapolate to the kind of material objects that spirits interact with and the kind of realms of human experience they can provide answers on. In sum, these prayers, and similar divination techniques, within their own contexts, mark the accepted place of spirits in the mundane or material world and the kind of power that they have (or are allowed to have) over this same materiality.

Furthermore, analysing the specific yes-or-no language cues which many of these prayers offer spirits for their manifestation, the interesting observation can be made that these are often the same kind of this-world manifestations which are frequently listed in some charms for spirit, disease or bad weather banishing, such as those referring to a place where no cat meows, no dog barks or no rooster crows. Borrowing Jonathan Roper’s definition (2003: 25), the use of these cues for spirit banishing can be understood as the construction and description of an anti-world where spirits/diseases/bad weather are expected to travel to. If this is the case, the prayers and sorceries described in this paper, given the use of similar cues, can also be understood as inviting spirits into concrete this-world manifestation by offering them the very mundane events which determine this-world as a concrete space of human proximity. Consequently, such banishments can perhaps also be understood not so much as banishing spirits to a faraway place or an anti-world, but to a state/place of non-manifestation or communicative silence.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 4082. Digitalization of the original documentation can be consulted at:  
<http://digitalq.arquivos.pt/details?id=2304053>

<sup>2</sup> ‘Moura’ is a complicated concept in Portuguese (and Iberian) folk environments. In this particular case it is mostly used as a synonym to non-Christian.

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## CONFERENCE REPORT

### **“CHARMS, CHARMERS AND CHARMING: INNOVATION AND TRADITION”**

**(MAY 6–8, 2016, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK, IRELAND)**

The ninth international gathering of the Committee for Charms, Charmers and Charming took place at University College Cork in Cork city, Ireland from Friday 6th to Sunday 8th May, 2016 and was the largest conference of this ISFNR Committee to date. Under the title “Charms, Charmers and Charming: Innovation and Tradition”, the two day conference brought together scholars from nineteen countries and several academic disciplines, including folklore, medieval studies, Celtic studies, study of religions and literary studies. The conference was jointly hosted by the Departments of Folklore and Ethnology, Early and Medieval Irish, and Study of Religions of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences at University College Cork.

The theme of the conference was chosen with the aim of enabling participation from a diverse range of disciplines. Charms, charmers and charming are often associated with “traditional” cultural systems. The conference aimed to juxtapose the study of traditions with an exploration of the dynamics of innovation which has come with modernity, pluralism, globalisation, and digital and virtual worlds. An important aspect of innovation includes the evolving ways in which charms and charmers have been viewed in different societies over time and the development of new theoretical and conceptual lenses and methodological approaches through which charms, charmers and charming are approached. The very diverse contributions at the conference proved that this goal was made manifest.

The conference, comprising fifty-four participants, of which forty six were speakers, was organised in parallel sessions, with a whole day dedicated to papers on Irish charms and charming traditions. For the first time the Charms, Charmers and Charming annual conference also featured keynote speakers; Professor Johannes Dillinger of Oxford Brookes University gave a lecture entitled “Charms and the Divining Rod: Tradition and Innovation in Magic and Pseudo-Science, 15th to 21st Centuries” (featured in this volume) and John Carey, Professor of Early and Medieval Irish at University College Cork delivered the keynote for the Irish charms section, “Charms in Medieval Irish Tales: Tradition, Adaptation, Invention”.



*St Declan's Holy Well, Ardmore. Photographer Ciarán Ó Gealbháin.*

Continuing the tradition of including a dedicated panel for specific charm types, this year there was a panel on the *Flum Jordan* charm that included papers on Irish, Latvia and Finnish variants. Noteworthy amongst the sessions that spoke directly to the conference theme was the panel “Tradition and Innovation in Charm Scholarship”. The four papers presented in this panel explored historical and contemporary approaches to charms both in national contexts (Finland/Karelia and Croatia) as well as international endeavours. The papers from Jacqueline Borsje as well as Emese Ilyefalvi (featured in this volume) address questions of the future of comparative cross-cultural research in the light of advances in digital humanities.

The second day of the conference included most of the Irish contributions with eleven papers covering medieval manuscript traditions up to contemporary charming practices, with the two days of the conference representing one of the largest ever gatherings of Irish charm specialists, including John Carey, Barbara Hillers, Ciarán Ó Gealbháin, Ilona Tuomi, Jacqueline Borsje, Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, Maebhe Durston, Joseph J. Flahive, Cathinka Dahl Hambro, Ksenia Kudenko, Shane Lehane, Denis McArdle, Tatyana Mikhailova, Bairbre Ní Floinn, Deirdre Nuttall, Stiofán Ó Cadhla, Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, David Stifter, and Nicholas Wolf.

Papers from these special panels will be published in a book titled *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: Tradition and Innovation* edited by John Carey, Barbara Hillers, Ilona Tuomi and Ciarán Ó Gealbháin, to be published by the University of Wales Press with a projected publication date of 2018. This will mark the first dedicated volume dealing specifically with Irish material related to charms and charming.

The two days of academic papers and lectures was followed by an excursion to the medieval coastal settlement of Ardmore in county Waterford which is famous for its built heritage, holy well and associated “pattern day” or patron saint’s day pilgrimage, and rich folkloric tradition. Thirty-three conference participants joined us on the day-trip and there was a lot of interest in Ardmore as a site of folk religiosity and local healing practices. The group was brought on an educational tour with local tour guide Liam Suipéal to sites of interest, including St Declan’s Stone, the round tower and the old church. Participants from landlocked countries were especially happy to visit the seaside and hear stories about the significance of the locality and, due to the nature of the research of the group, they were happy to experience local landscapes, customs and cultural traditions.



*St Declan’s Stone, Ardmore. Photographer Ciarán Ó Gealbháin.*

On the first night of the conference, delegates were invited to Cork City Hall where they were addressed and welcomed to the city by the Deputy Lord Mayor Joe Kavanagh. The conference was generously supported by University College Cork's College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, the School of Irish Learning, Cork City Council's Lord Mayor's Office, and Fáilte Ireland National Tourism Development Authority's Conference Ambassador Programme, and Cork Convention Bureau. As part of the conference pack, each conference participant was given a coloured linen conference bag, an ogham stone design bookmark, and a conference postcard. Dr Jenny Butler, a member of Fáilte Ireland's Conference Ambassador Club, was honoured for her role in co-organising this conference, and for bringing an estimated €81,000 in tourism and business revenue to the region, by being nominated for an award at the Cork Convention Bureau's Third Annual Cork Conference Ambassadors' Awards held at the Cork International Hotel on 19th December 2016. Overall, this was a highly successful conference and we are delighted to present the proceedings here of our colleagues' most valuable work.

