

IL SEGNO E LE LETTERE

Saggi

-28-

IL SEGNO E LE LETTERE

*Collana del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne
dell'Università degli Studi 'G. d'Annunzio'*

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I volumi pubblicati nella Collana sono stati sottoposti a doppio referaggio anonimo.

The Language of Magic

Edited by Eleonora Ciani and Nicholas Wolf

Si approva per la stampa la bozza datata 12 Settembre 2022
previo inserimento delle correzioni eventualmente indicate alle pagine che seguono

(indispensabile indicare i numeri delle pagine interessate dalle correzioni,
che dovranno essere sostituite)

Qualora non ci siano correzioni, scrivere: "NESSUNA CORREZIONE"

In caso non si dia risposta alle eventuali note a margine, e per ogni elemento qui non segnalato,
si intende approvata la bozza senza modifiche

pp. correzioni **pp. 143-144** _____

Data **15/9/2022** _____

Nome e Cognome in STAMPATELLO **Eleonora Ciani** _____

Firma Eleonora Ciani _____

ISSN 2283-7140

ISBN 978-88-7916-996-7

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LED Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto

Via Cervignano 4 - 20137 Milano

www.lededizioni.com - www.ledonline.it - E-mail: led@lededizioni.com

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Volume pubblicato con il contributo
dell'Università degli Studi 'G. d'Annunzio' di Chieti-Pescara
Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne

In copertina

Graphic design by Pierluigi Traini

Videoimpaginazione: Paola Mignanego

Stampa: Litogi

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INTRODUCTION

Eleonora Cianci

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-intr>

This book contains a selection of papers presented at *The Language of Magic* conference, hosted in Pescara from the 22nd to the 25th of May 2019. The conference was organized for the first time in Italy by the *Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming*, part of the *International Society for Folk Narrative Research* (ISFNR)¹.

The idea of focusing the conference on the language or, better, on the *languages* of magic implies that each verbal charm needs to be delivered through words. Texts like charms can be considered as *parole* acts that refer to the concrete instances of the use of a *langue*. Verbal charms involve the use of words, which may be oral or written, spoken, whispered, sung, carried on, or swallowed, but they must be expressed in a specific fashion and in a specific language to gain the necessary power. The conference has revealed the unexpressed potential of the study of the power of words in magic, although many scholars have studied it in many fields in the last decades. Charms and magic are research objects for scholars of anthropology, folklore, history, religious studies, history of science and medicine, literature, philology, and linguistics. As we are going to read in this book, the research on this topic is multi-disciplinal and international.

The *Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming* has always sought to encourage the study of *verbal* charms. The 2019 conference was therefore enthusiastically hosted and funded by the Department of *Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne* of the Università degli Studi ‘Gabriele d’Annunzio’ di Chieti-Pescara, which cultivates several scientific interests in linguistic issues. Moreover, Abruzzo is an Italian region with a long tradition of old sacred rituals and pre-Christian customs that merge into folklore performances.

¹ The Committee consists of Eleonora Cianci, James Kapalo, Mare Kõiva, Lea Olsan, Haralampos Passalis, Éva Pócs, Jonathan Roper, Emanuela Timotin, Andrey Toporkov, and Daiva Vaitkevičienė. For further information on research activities and future conferences, see: <http://www.isfnr.org/committee-on-charms-charmers-and-charming.php>.

This book is a selection of fourteen out of forty-four papers presented by scholars from twenty different countries, a distillate of themes from various disciplines. The study of the language of magic was carried out according to different research approaches within various disciplinary fields. Subjects range from the study of old magic up to the still practised rituals. Some authors focus on Medieval and Early Modern charms written in different languages: Old Irish (I. Tuomi), Old High German (E. Cianci), Old Norse (M.C. Lombardi), Middle English (S. Harlan-Haughey); other scholars study charms in modern languages (Italian, Romanian, Russian, Finnish, Irish). In fact, it has been pointed out that charms and rituals still used in modern times are deeply rooted in the Medieval period, such as the English versions of the *Super petram* charms derived from Latin sources in Ireland (B. Hillers). Themes are presented with various methodological approaches. The older charms are studied with a philological, linguistic, or historical-oriented method, while the modern ones require an anthropological, folkloristic, and historical approach (L. Giancristofaro, L. Jiga Iliescu, I. Veselova). Some authors focus on the performative value of powerful and technical words in charms (H. Ilomäki, N. Wolf) even when the words are not written but alluded to by iconographic gestures (L.V. Fadeyeva) or, in other circumstances, magic words are hidden by taboo or euphemisms (L. Golubeva - S. Kupriyanova, M. Kōiva). Apart from “actual” charms, there are some literary texts in which magic is displayed and described, such as in some Old Norse texts, the Russian bylinas or the English *Secunda Pastorum*.

A remarkable fact connecting almost all these studies is that the charms reveal a strong relationship with Christian rituality, liturgy, and belief. Canonical or apocryphal elements play a crucial role as a model either in the *historiola* or in other parts of the charms. For instance, using neumes in charms seems to draw inspiration from liturgical chants.

Most charms and rituals discussed in the following chapters, either old or modern, are indeed remedies against a variety of illnesses or serious issues, childbirth for instance, in which words play the most important role. Healing comes thus from a special use of the language. The very existence of forged charms also demonstrates the belief in magic and the success of healing charms in everyday life, shaped by emulating the actual ones in the Russian tradition and eventually translated into English (A. Toporkov).

The conference offered even more opportunities of discussing multiple themes, most of which are embedded and well represented in the chapters of this book: charms as texts (meaning, analysis, editions), multilingual

charms (the interplay in the same texts or manuscripts between Latin and vernacular languages), how to do magic with words (the narrating power of the *historiola*, performative language, charm instructions, speech acts), oral and written transmission of charms (textual tradition in a written environment, writing surfaces, the power of the written word, the alphabets of magic, orality, memory, variation), charms as verbal remedies (interaction with medical and religious texts), the rhetoric of charms (argumentation techniques, belief narratives), what the charms do not say (taboo words, gibberish language, censorship, etc.). A great deal of information was discussed during three days of the conference, inspiring further research.

The conference days were also cheered by some moments of leisure, such as the Rhythm' and Blues concert by the UdA band, a music group made of students, professors, and employers of the University of Chieti-Pescara², or the tailor-suited guided tour at the Archaeological Museum of Chieti (Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo "Villa Frigerj" di Chieti). This place hosts extraordinary artefacts of Italic history, the *Capestrano Warrior*, for instance, and some less famous, apparently ordinary objects used to perform magic and rituals.

The conference was a precious chance to bring together scholars from different countries and disciplines, and share ideas, projects, and opinions, not to mention the opportunity to enjoy Italian food, wine, music, and culture together. At that time, we were absolutely unaware of how priceless the opportunity was to meet and join discussions together, as we are now after two years of social and academic restrictions due to the pandemics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude to the many people who helped in many ways in the organization of the conference: the Rector Sergio Caputi, Carlo Martinez, head of the Department that sponsored the conference (Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne), all the colleagues who accepted to chair the sessions (Mariaconcetta Costantini, Paola Partenza, Umberto Bultrighini, Marco Forlivesi, Stefano Trinchese, Jonathan Roper, Jacqueline Borsje, Nicholas Wolf, Maire Kōiva, Svetlana Tsonkova, Lea Olsan, Davor

² UdABand, "Hit the Road Jack, Cover by UdABand", *YouTube*, May 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCxRODHV3GI>.

Nikolić, Andrei Toporkov). For all the logistic and coordination during the conference, the excursion and the receptions: Sonia Colafrancesco, Fiorella Di Fonte and Luca Stirpe, with the help of many students (Asia Amicucci, Claudia Ballerini, Francesca Capocci, Romina Colavelli, Ludovica Croce, Letizia D'Alessandro, Francesco D'Avolio, Giovanni Di Francesco, Francesca Di Marco, Martina Giansante, Jessica Iachini, Nicola La Serra, Mari- lena Simeoni, Andrea Turavani), Mariacristina Ricci, Giziana Pantalone, and Nicola Di Nardo for media and communication support. Glauco Conte who organized the accommodation of some of our foreign speakers in the *Benedetto Croce University Residence*. The *UdA band* (Nicola Di Nardo, Romilda Tinari, Sefora Spinzio, Viviana Borrone, Angela Williams, Andrea Giovannoli, Giuseppe Amadio, Fabrizio Fornari, Umberto Bultrighini) for their stunning performance. I would also express my appreciation to all the members of the *Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming*: Jonathan Roper, Emanuela Timotin, Lea Olsan, James Kapalo, Mare Kõiva, Haralampos Passalis, Éva Pócs, Andrey Toporkov, and Daiva Vaitkevičiene.







Credits: Photos published on the Facebook page “The Language of Magic”.

NEUMES IN THREE OLD HIGH GERMAN CHARMS

Eleonora Cianci

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-cian>

ABSTRACT

Ad pestem equi, *Ad equum infusum* and *Crist unte Iudas* are three Old High German charms of the twelfth century that display various signs between the lines that can be identified with neumatic notation. The charms are integrated in two manuscripts collections of healing remedies, and they are the only texts displaying neumes. *Ad pestem equi* and *Ad equum infusum* are written in the margins of Vatican City, (BAV) Cod. pal. lat. 1158; *Crist unde Iudas* is in MS. Bamberg, (Staatsbibliothek) Msc. Med. 6. Nobody would be surprised to know that some charms were sung, or that there should have been an oral performance connected to them, yet this can be considered the first textual evidence of this idea. This essay provides a description of the neumes and a new edition and interpretation of the three charms.

Keywords: *Ad equum infusum*; *Ad pestem equi*; Bamberg Msc. Med. 6; BAV Cod. pal. lat. 1158; *Crist unte Iudas*; Medieval healing charms; neumes.

Three twelfth century German charms in Friedrich Wilhelm's *Denkmäler deutscher Prosa des 11. und 12. Jahrhundert* display a number of pen strokes that no one, to my knowledge, has yet identified as neumes. Wilhelm interpreted them as accent marks and numbered them as "18 acute, 10 circumflex" for the first two *Vaticanische Pferdesegen* in the one manuscript and 3 acute and 4 circumflex accents for the *Bamberger Blutsegen*. Wilhelm also points out that only the prose *Bamberger Blutsegen* displays those accents¹. The same happened in Elias Steinmeyer's *Die kleineren alt-hochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*. Steinmeyer did not explain the meaning of

¹ Wilhelm 1960, 1, 49-50; 2, 125-126, 127-129.

the signs, nor did he discuss their function. In his printed text, they are offered to the modern reader as accent marks or as diacritics indicating vowel length². Diacritics indicating stress, vowel quantity, or difference between *i*, *m*, or *n* are not uncommon in medieval German manuscripts.

In 1992, Karl A. Wipf included the newly edited charms in his Old High German verse anthology. He rightly observed that one stroke pencilled on the manuscript could not represent the long value of /a/ in the word *vvâmbiziges* “intestinal worm”. Wipf, however, only commented on one accent, carefully reporting the other signs without any interpretation³.

In a passing remark of his admirable study of the Merseburg charms, Wolfgang Beck suggested that the symbols in *Ad pestem equi* speak for a “singable quality” of the charm⁴. No one would be surprised that some charms were sung: the word *incantatio* refers, after all, to chanting or recitation. The three texts considered here provide explicit manuscript evidence of charms intended to be performed in a fashion similar to that of liturgical texts.

We owe Ernst Hellgardt a handlist of neumatic texts written in medieval German (ninth to fourteenth centuries). Hellgardt’s catalogue includes a total of thirty-seven items, four of which date to the twelfth century and one between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Our three charms are not among these. They are:

- Troyes, Stadtbibl. Ms. 663, f. 112v: *Cristi huns gegnade kirioleyon*⁵ (12th c.).
- Berlin, Staatsbibl. Ms. theol. lat. qu. 140, ff. 124r-177r: Williram von Ebersberg, *Hohenliedkommentar*⁶ (12th c.).
- Troyes, Stadtbibl. Ms. 888, f. 91v: *Cristi huns ge genade kirioleyon*⁷ (12th c.).
- Salzburg, Universitätsbibl. Cod. M II 6, f. 67rb: *Christ ist erstanden*⁸ (12th c.).
- Engelberg, Stiftbibl. Cod. 1003, f. 115r: *Mariensequenz aus Muri*⁹ (end 12th - beg. 13th c.).

Hellgardt observes that neumatic texts written in medieval German are usually included in collections of Latin liturgical texts. The category of liturgy, though, should not be restricted, in his opinion, to the canonical

² Steinmeyer 1916, 370-371, 377-378.

³ Wipf 1992, 70-71, 278-279.

⁴ Beck 2003, 287.

⁵ <https://handschriftencensus.de/18908>.

⁶ <https://handschriftencensus.de/15115>.

⁷ <https://handschriftencensus.de/18910>.

⁸ <https://handschriftencensus.de/12727> (Easter song).

⁹ <https://handschriftencensus.de/1553>.

office of the Mass and to other ceremonies. It should include events like the *Geistliche Spiele*, that is “para-liturgical” events customarily carried on in vernacular language¹⁰.

The first element that singles out our three charms is that they are not integrated into a liturgical book, canonical or not. Instead, they are found in two collections of healing remedies. *Ad pestem equi* and *Ad equum infusum* have come down to us in MS. Vatican City, (BAV) Cod. pal. lat. 1158; *Crist unde Iudas* is in MS. Bamberg, (Staatsbibliothek) Msc. Med. 6.

1. THE TEXTS

Ad pestem equi and *Ad equum infusum* are Old High German veterinary remedies. *Crist unde Iudas* is a charm against bleeding and wounds, belonging to the *Longinus* and *Flum Jordan* charm tradition. In the Bamberg manuscript, the charm is followed by a second blood charm also in medieval German (*Crist wart bi erden wunt* “Christ was wounded on earth”), which has no neumes. Steinmeyer and other scholars have read the two charms as one, perhaps because *Crist wart bi erden wunt* contains a charms motif (*neque doluit neque tumuit*) not infrequently coupled with the *Longinus* and the *Flum Jordan* motifs¹¹.

In what follows, the texts and their neumes will be presented prior to a description of their manuscript context. The texts established by Elias von Steinmeyer and Karl Wipf¹² have been compared once again to the original manuscripts. A few differences in reading and interpretation are discussed below. An English translation is provided, in which italics indicate the use of the Latin language in the manuscript. Ligatures have been expanded in italics. I adopt the lineation proposed in Wipf’s edition.

¹⁰ Hellgardt 2011, 163-164.

¹¹ See Steinmeyer 1916, 377-378. Further reference also in Cianci 2004, 120-123.

¹² *Ad pestem equi* and *Ad equum infusum* are not distinguished as two texts and are listed under the same title both in Steinmeyer 1916, 370-371 (1. *Pferdesegen*) and in Wipf 1992, 70, 278 (*Ad pestem equi . quod dicitur môrth*).

1.1. *Ad pestem equi*

1. Ad pestem equi . quod dicitur môrth
2. dic .
3. Johan . was êin mán .
4. fas ês sin sùn . genâs ín thes .
5. so do diz rós . des mordes .
6. Pater noster . ter .

Against a horse disease named glanders.

Say:

John was a man. His son stumbled. (He) healed him from this.

So may this horse from the glanders.

(Recite) *Three times Paternoster.*

1.1.1. Textual commentary

(1) **Morth**, (5) **mordes** “glanders”. The name is an OHG substantive (M-a) *mord*, *morth* “murder, death”, MHG *mort*, used in the juridical field, but also as a medical term indicating a disease of the horse. According to Gerhard Eis, the term indicates the disease called *Rotz* “glanders” in German texts of the eleventh century. This is a lethal infectious disease of equines due to a specific microorganism (*Malleomyces mallei*) that causes severe ulcerations on the skin and mucous membranes. The disease causes pain and makes the horse unusable, therefore as if dead¹³.

(3) **Johan**. Steinmeyer and Wipf read: *Iohan*, *iohan* respectively.

(4) **Fas ês**. Steinmeyer and Wipf read *Farês*. Steinmeyer interprets it as a personal name from the Bible, *Phares*, son of Jude, Wipf considers the analogy with the German substantive *Farne* “fern”, a plant. Both scholars abstain from explaining the grammatical implications and the meaning of their interpretations. In my opinion, between *Johan was ein man* and *genas in thes*, in which the verbs are in the past tense, we should expect another sentence in the past tense. In fact, the first part of all the charms with a *historiola* is always delivered in the past tense¹⁴. In this case, if the subject is *sin sun*, that is, the son of John, then *fas* should be a preterite of a strong verb. If we admit it, then we might consider the preterite 3rd singular *faz*

¹³ AWD 6, 801; Riecke 2004, I, 111; Eis 1964, 88-108; Graff 2, 855; Lexer 1, 2204.

¹⁴ For the meaning and function of the *historiola* in charms, see Frankfurter 1995 and Frankfurter 2017.

of a rare word, the stark verb (class 5) OHG *fezzan*¹⁵, which occurs only once in the eleventh century, glossing the Latin verb *labere* “tremble, vacillate, shudder”, and the OHG *gifezzan*, *gafizan* “to fall” (*ni gifaz* translate Latin *excidit* in the glosses of Gregorius’ *Dialogi*)¹⁶. The verb does not continue in the MHG and can be considered an archaism in the twelfth century. The meaning of this sentence is thus consistent with the general sense of healing a horse that cannot move.

Genas in. Steinmeyer and Wipf read *genasin*. Wipf translates: *Er genas davon*. I translated it as the preterite 3rd singular *genas* of the stark verb (class 5) OHG *ginesan*, *genesan*, *genesen*¹⁷, MHG *genesen* “to recover, to heal, to rescue” with accusative of the healed person (*in*) and the genitive (*thes*) indicating the disease (the same also in *des mordes*). On a semantic level, we can infer that the unnamed son of John fell (ill) or stumbled and then John healed him from the disease or the injuries.

1.2. *Ad equum infusum*

1. Item ad equum infusum .
2. dic .
3. Christ wârd an érthe gebóren . in críbbi giworfen . in slúthere bebúnden . sa verlóren.
4. Der heilige Crist buoce dítime rosse .N. ouervággenes . gerâys . thes wâmbiziges . thes wûrmes . unte álles thes . the íme scathene si .
5. In nomine Domini . Daz tír ze bóze .
6. Pater noster . post eadem ter .

Similarly for a lamed horse.

Say:

Christ was born on earth, lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, then he passed away.

May the holy Christ heal this horse (Name) from lame, from stiffness, from the farcy, from the worm, and from anything that may harm him.

In the name of the Lord. This is for you for the healing.

(Say) *Paternoster.* And afterwards three more.

¹⁵ AWB 3, 789.

¹⁶ AWB 3, 789; Graff 3, 727.

¹⁷ AWB 1, 1179; Graff 2, 1098.

1.2.1. Textual commentary

(3) **In sluthere bebunden.** The expression is a clear reference to Luke 2,12: “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”. Nonetheless, since the noun *sluthere* is a *bapax* in the entire OHG literature, there can be different opinions about it. I agree with Karl A. Wipf who translates “Schlüttchen”, which is a Swiss word for “baby dress” (*Schlutt*, *Schlüttli*)¹⁸. The fricatives /th/ in *sluthere*, *erthe*, *thes* and *scathene* represent an older usage of Central Franconian.

Bebunden is the past participle of the OHG strong verb (class 3) *bi-bintan*¹⁹ “to wrap, bind”.

(4) **Ouervaggenes.** This noun (genitive singular) derives from the past participle of the reduplication 7 class verb OHG *firfaban*, *farfaban*²⁰ “to catch”. It is also attested as *warwanghen* as a medical term indicating a specific disease of the horse legs and hooves, a rheumatic disorder²¹. In Hildegard von Bingen’s *Physica* the OHG term is mentioned in Chapter 12 *De Kestenbaum*²²:

Quod si equus et bos aut asinus, vel aliud quodlibet pecus *verfangen* est, da illi folia in pabulo ad comedendum, si potest, vel si comedere noluerit, ipsa folia pulveriza, et pulverem illam in aquam proiice, et da illi saepe in potu bibere, et curabitur.

Gerays. Genitive singular of OHG *girâhi* (N) “stiffness”²³. The word in this form is a *bapax* connected to OHG *rabi* (F-ī) and to MHG *ræhe* (adjective) “lame, stiff”, modern German *Räch*, *Rähe*, *Hufrehe* “laminitis”. These words are attested with the meaning of a stiffness of horse legs due to a disease of its hooves²⁴. Other OHG charms against horse diseases

¹⁸ Idiotikon IX, 797. Schwab translates this as: “tied with ropes”, and she connects *sluthere* to Gmc. **slutila*, OHG *sluzzil* (M-ā) “key”. In this way, she hypothesizes a meaning of “something that serves to close, to bind” and she refers to the crucifixion of Christ, which, in certain iconographies, is interpreted as tied to the cross by means of ropes, instead of nails. According to this interpretation, the four sentences would summarize the life of Christ, the first two would refer to birth, and the other two to death: birth and childhood, crucifixion, and death (Schwab 1994, 554-583). See also Cianci 2004, 61-64.

¹⁹ AWB 1, 1067; Graff 3, 135.

²⁰ AWB 3, 500; Graff 3, 408.

²¹ Eis 1964, 97; Riecke 2004, I, 111.

²² <http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/it/jxi.htm>.

²³ AWB 7, 656. Wipf translates it as “Aufregung” and connects it to MHG *gereize*, *geraize* (Latin *concitatio*), German *Reizung*. Wipf 1992, 70-71, 278-279.

²⁴ German words like *Wasserrähe*, *Mauchelrähe*, *Windrähe*, *Futerrähe* distinguish different laminitis depending on whether this rigidity was caused by exposing the horse to

use variants of this word, for example *errebet*, *errebeten* (adj.) in *Ad equum errebet* (Paris. cod. nouv. acquis. lat. 229) and *rebin* (accusative singular of a F-ī noun) in *Contra rebin* (Zurich cod. C 58/275)²⁵.

Wambiziges (genitive singular). It is a rather problematic term that according to Eis is linked to MHG, *wambiz*, MLG *wambete* “farcy”. Riecke also connects it to MLG *wambete* but translates it as “glanders”. Glanders and farcy are often used as synonymous. Glanders is a contagious fatal disease of the horse characterized by the development of ulcerating growths that are most commonly found in the upper respiratory tract, lungs, and skin. In the cutaneous form, it is also called farcy and growths appear along the course of the lymph vessels, particularly on the legs. However, Wipf translates the whole expression *thes wambiziges thes wurmes* as “from the worm of the entrails”, connecting the adjective *vvambiz-ig* to OHG *wamba* (F-ō), MHG *wambe*, *wanbis* “womb, belly” but it can also be connected to OHG *bīzig*, *bizzig* (adj.) “biting”²⁶.

1.3. *Crist unte Iudas*

1. Crist unte Iudas spiliten mit spieza .
2. Do wart der heiligo Christ wund in sine sîton .
3. Do nâm er der dumen . unte vordûhta se vorna .
4. So verstant du bluod . sôse Iordanis âha verstunt .
5. do der heiligo Iohannes den heilanden Crist in îro toufta .
6. Daz dir zo buza .

Christ and the Jude handled spears.

As Christ was wound in his side,

he took his thumb and pressed it thereon.

So, stop you blood, as the river Jordan stood still as holy John baptized Christ in it.

This is for your healing.

1.3.1. Textual commentary

(1) **Iudas**. There are two different interpretations of the name *Iudas*: Jacoby sees in *Iudas* the proper name “Judas”, a name that would refer

cold water, to heat, to cold wind or to overeating. Riecke 2004, I, 111; Eis 1964, 55, 97; BMZ II, 1, 548.

²⁵ Cianci 2004, 59-61, 66-69.

²⁶ Eis 1964, 94; Riecke 2004, 111; Wipf 1992, 70-71, 278-279; AWB 1, 1162.

to an episode of the *Evangelium Infantia Arabicum* (chapter 35) in which Judas Iscariot possessed by Satan bites Jesus on the right side and is freed by him from the devil²⁷. However, I agree with Elias von Steinmeyer that by *Iudas* is probably meant “the Jew”, that is, Longinus²⁸, known as such throughout the medieval tradition²⁹. The wound on Christ’s side procured by handling (OHG *spilōn*, MHG *spiln*, *spilen* “to handle, to play”³⁰) a spear (*mit spieza*) seems to confirm the presence of Longinus in this text (OHG *spioz*, MHG *spiez*, *spīz* “spear”³¹).

(4) **Iordanis aha versunt.** The river that stops to flow is a merging motif from the Old Testament: Joshua 3:9-13. The canonical Gospels only refer to the baptism in the Jordan river: Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:5; Luke 3:3; John 1:28.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE NEUMES

The study of the neumes requires competence in musicology, semiotics and palaeography. Musicology and semiotics investigate the aspects that influence performance: they interpret the neumes in terms of pitch patterns, articulation, and ways of enunciating and joining syllables. Palaeography, for its part, aims at dating and locating the neumes in a specific geographical area. Palaeography, musicology, and semiotics address, of course, many other aspects, e.g. the function of formal distinctions made by scribes in the shape of neumes³².

The use of neumes began in Western Europe around the ninth century and remained current in its German-speaking area up to the fourteenth century. Neumatic notations were perfectly consistent with the Carolingian cultural policy aiming at standardizing the writing of Latin and vernacular texts to achieve the maximum possible clarity³³. As soon as neumes found their way into parchment along with the spread of Caroline minuscule, different neumatic styles rapidly developed in various regions of Europe before being eventually unified under the so-called square

²⁷ Jacoby 1913.

²⁸ Steinmeyer 1916, 379.

²⁹ Cianci 2013, 207-209.

³⁰ BMZ 2, 505; Lexer 2, 1094; Graff 6, 331.



³¹ BMZ 2, 495-496; Lexer 2, 1090; Graff 6, 368.



³² A survey of the study on neumes see: Rankin 2018, 52-64. For the palaeographic investigation of the neumes, I refer to Corbin 1977.

³³ Treitler 2003, 370-371, 403-407.

notation. Neumes continued to be used for a long time even after Guido d'Arezzo, in the eleventh century, invented the modern musical notation³⁴.

The neumes found in our charms are short pen strokes shaped over single vocals or syllables. They are:

Virga  (Vatican), , < ' >: the *virga* is similar to an acute accent sign, probably indicating a single ascending note.

Clivis  (Vatican), , < ^ >: the *clivis* resembles a circumflex accent sign. Its upward stroke marks a higher note as its first element and its falling stroke marks the second lower note.

Punctum < . >: the *punctum* represents a pause, and it is an important aid for speaking as well as for reciting or singing³⁵. The *punctum* in our texts is never located above the vowel or the syllable like the neumes. It only occurs between words.

The style of the *virga* and *clivis* in both manuscripts is very similar to the St. Gall neumatic type (see *Figs. 1* and *2*). They are “adiastematic gestural neumes”, i.e., in a musical context, neumes not intended for measuring the distance between grades. They belong to a type of notation *in campo aperto* representing lower and higher notes only³⁶. The absence of staff lines and pitch referents, i.e., the lack of dedicated symbols for pitches and intervals, implies that the charms were addressed to the eyes of a competent singer, who had a previously acquired knowledge of the intended melodic system. An approximate record of the melodic line, a sort of visual aid to guide his memory with flexible gradations of exactitude, was probably enough to guarantee an efficient performance.

Were it not for the evidence offered by neumatic charms like the ones discussed here, our understanding of the mode of delivery of healing charms within a German monastic community of the twelfth century would not be available. Monastic communities recited psalms and antiphons in a tone that varied at specific points (that is, the voice raised or sunk within a pattern). The singing was conducted according to a shared knowledge of the melodic system. Generally speaking, the way medieval charms were written down on parchment hardly permits us to shed light on their actual mode of delivery. The monastic “textual community”, that is the community responsible for their production as well as for their delivery, did not obviously need any written account of the ritual.

³⁴ For a complete survey of the history of neumatic scripts in Germany and Switzerland, see Corbin 1977, 45–66; Parrish 1978, 8–10.

³⁵ Parkes 1992, 77.

³⁶ Parrish 1978, 8–10.






















Names	punctum	virga	pes	clivis	torculus	porrectus	climacus	scandicus	quilisma
Modern equivalent									
French Square Notation									
St Gall									
Messine									
Breton									
Aquitanian									
Palaeo-Frankish									
Beneventan									

Figure 1. – Different types of neumes adopted in Medieval Europe.































NAMES OF SYMBOLS	BASIC ST. GALL NEUMES	SQUARE NOTATION	MODERN NOTATION
1. <i>virga</i>			
2. <i>tractulus</i>			
3. <i>punctum</i>			
4. <i>gravis</i>			
5. <i>clivis</i>			
6. <i>pes</i>			
7. <i>porrectus</i>			
8. <i>torculus</i>			
9. <i>climacus</i>			
10. <i>scandicus</i>			

Figure 2. – Square neumes and equivalents in modern notation and in St. Gall neumes and French neumes (Fassler 2014, A10).

There is a strong relationship between the phonetic value of written letters and the neumatic notation. Neumes can indeed communicate a written gesture. As Treitler points out, medieval musical notation was initially a spatial metaphor in which melody was represented as a voice movement and then they became signs for the inflection of the voice³⁷.

3. THE MANUSCRIPTS

3.1. *The Vatican manuscript*

The first two charms, *Ad pestem equi* and *Ad equum infusum*, are both in MS. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana³⁸, Cod. pal. lat. 1158 at f. 68v. *Ad pestem equi* appears as one line of text in the upper margin of the page; *Ad equum infusum* occupies the second and third lines of the upper margin and four more lines on the left margin of the same page³⁹. Cod. pal. lat. 1158 is a copy of the *Viaticus Peregrinantis* by Constantinus Africanus. This is the famous eleventh-century Latin translation from the Arabic *Zād al-musāfir* by ibn al-Gazzār, the medical handbook for the traveller.

It consists of sixty-eight *folios* written in Carolingian minuscule measuring 335 × 230 mm (written space 260 × 165 mm). Each page is organized in two columns of 43–44 lines each. The codex probably derives from a book commissioned by *Northungus medicus*, a monk expert of medicine at the monastery of Hildesheim in the first half of the twelfth century. The manuscript laid for some time in Heidelberg, Bibliotheca Palatina and was transferred to the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in 1623. It was bound in parchment and cardboard in 1780. Along with the *Viaticus Peregrinantis*, this manuscript contains four items in Old High German (Franconian) language (nn. 4, 5, 6a, 6b).

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1. f. 1r | Title page containing the words <i>Viaticus Constantini</i> in a later hand. |
| 2. f. 1v | A decorated page displaying four doctors with their medical equipment. |

³⁷ Treitler 2003, 401.

³⁸ <https://handschriftencensus.de/10515>, https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bav_pal_lat_1158, *BStK Online*: <https://glossen.germ-ling.uni-bamberg.de/bstk/807>.

³⁹ https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bav_pal_lat_1158/0142 (digitized image).

3. ff. 2ra-68vb Incipit: *Constantinus Africanus, Viaticus Peregrinantis*.
4. f. 13rb Old High German gloss *vveckoldor* over Latin *Juniperus*.
5. f. 38ra Old High German gloss *dost* over Latin *abrotani*⁴⁰.
6. f. 68v (a) upper margin: Old High German charm *Ad pestem equi* against horse glanders; (b) upper and left margin: Old High German charm *Ad equum infusum* against horse paralysis and other horse diseases.

3.2. The Bamberg manuscript

The third charm, *Crist unte Iudas*, is transmitted in MS. Bamberg, (Staatsbibliothek)⁴¹, Msc. Med. 6 (see Fig. 3).

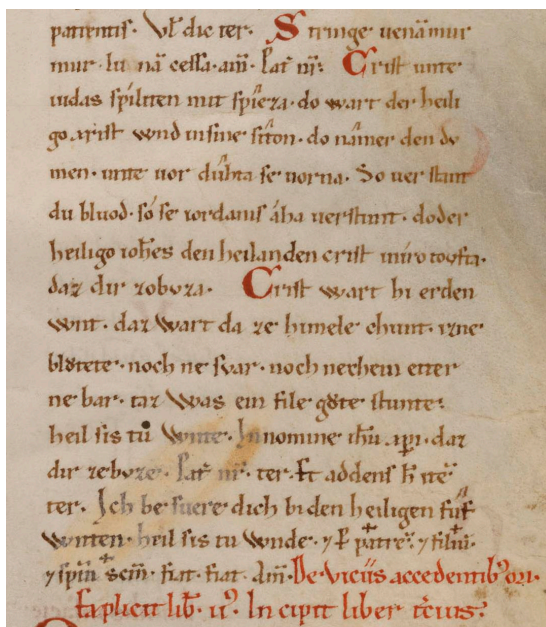


Figure 3. – MS. Bamberg, (Staatsbibliothek) Misc. Med. 6, f. 139rb. The Bamberg charms: “Crist unde Iudas” and “Crist wart bi erden wunt”. Foto: Gerald Raab.

⁴⁰ For the two OHG glosses, see Riecke 2004, I, 129-130.

⁴¹ http://digital.bib-bvb.de/view/bvb_mets/viewer.0.6.5.jsp?folder_id=0&dvs=1649601205307-133&pid=5402038&locale=it&usePid1=true&usePid2=true (digitized image); description of the manuscript: Leitschuh - Fischer 1899, 433-435; Suckale Redlefsen 1995, 103; <https://handschriftencensus.de/6838>.

This is a miscellany of medical texts dating to the last quarter of the twelfth century. The script seems to be a late Carolingian minuscule in transition to early Gothic⁴². The Bamberg manuscript is made of 143 *folios* of 290 × 185 mm and consists of two codicological units: the first (ff. 1-118) has a written space of 245 × 140 mm with each page having two columns of 42-44 lines. The second (ff. 119-143) is in a different hand: the written space measures 250 × 150 mm, with two columns of 43 lines for each page. The manuscript is connected to the same *Northungus medicus* of Hildesheim, who commissioned or directed the writing of the Vatican codex. A line at f. 143v attests that the codex was in Bamberg in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries (*Hic Liber est maioris Ecclesie in babenberg*). Since 1803, after the secularization, it has belonged to Bamberg Staatsbibliothek. The volume was bound in white pig leather with the golden seal of the Bamberg Dombibliothek and with two metal claps in 1611. The manuscript contains two texts in Old High German (Franconian) language (9a and 9b):

FIRST PART:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. ff. 1ra-29rb | <i>Constantinus Africanus, Practica.</i> |
| 2. ff. 29va-36rb | Northungus, herb glossary (alphabetic). Incipit: <i>Uber de nominibus morborum et specierum et herbarum a northungo compositus.</i> |
| 3. ff. 36va-40ra | <i>Tractatus de natura aquae.</i> |
| 4. ff. 40ra-118ra | Incipit: <i>Antidotarius per alphabetum transpositus.</i> |
| 5. f. 118rb | <i>De ponderibus medicinalibus.</i> |
| 6. f. 118v | Empty. |

SECOND PART:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 7. ff. 119ra-143vb | Collection of remedies, f. 119: <i>De passione vertiginis et Scotomiae</i> , f. 126: <i>De Podagra</i> , f. 127r: <i>De ponderibus medicinalibus</i> . <i>De Cerebro</i> . <i>Specula Medicorum</i> , f. 127v: <i>Hic summa totius Artis (hanc paginam in hunc modum a northungo christi pauperculo editam ... memorie commendet). Quid sit phisicus.</i> |
| 8. f. 130 | Incipit: <i>Uber capitis</i> , f. 134v: <i>De causis que in naribus generantur</i> . In the following pages there are repetitions of the previous remedies in another order, f. 139: <i>De libro pauperum</i> . Remedies against bleedings. |

⁴² None of the manuscript catalogues mentions the script.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 9. f. 139rb | (a) <i>Christ unde Iudas spiliten mit spieza</i> , an Old High German blood charm with neumes; (b) <i>Crist wart bi erden wunt</i> , an Old High German wound charm. |
| 10. f. 139rb | Incipit: <i>Uber tercius de viciis accendentibus ori</i> . |
| 11. f. 141v | Incipit: <i>Tractatus libri aelegantiae</i> . |
| 12. f. 142v | <i>Tractate de scaemate humano</i> (containing a 14 cm – figure of a human body with a beard; the picture seems to follow a contemporary Italian exemplar). |
| 13. f. 143r | <i>Loca combusta imprimis debent</i> . |
| 14. f. 143v | <i>Hec medica mina sua proprietate maturant apostemata et rumpunt</i> . |

4. CONCLUSION

Various studies of the dissemination of Constantinus Africanus' work in Western Europe suggest that the Bamberg antidotary as well as the Vatican *Viaticus* originated in Hildesheim and that they were probably a product of the medical school of *Northungus medicus* "the little pauper of Christ" (as stated at f. 127: *hanc paginam in hunc modum a northungo christi pauperculo editam ... memorie commendet*). Brian Long states:

The monks of Hildesheim, for example, sought to produce an "enhanced Viaticum" by combining Constantine's text with supplementary moral apothegms and the empirical findings of their teacher Northungus. [...] BAV MS Pal. lat. 1158 preserves the best copy of this text; additional evidence of their efforts, including parts of this "enhanced Viaticum" that appear to have been copied from Pal. lat. 1158, can be found in Bamberg, Med. msc. 6.⁴³

Northungus was a monk and a teacher at the monastery of St. Michael in the first half of the twelfth century⁴⁴. His learning was of remarkable scope and variety. According to Wack, he compiled the Bamberg antidotary drawing material from an early version of the *Antidotarius magnus* adding to it several other recipes taken from other, unidentified, local sources: "Thus, the compiler of the Bamberg manuscript or of its source integrated a (probably) written tradition of 'indigenous medicine' with the

⁴³ Long 2015, 289, 196.

⁴⁴ Green 1994, 144.

latest teaching emerging from Salerno and elsewhere, giving us a glimpse of the range of German monastic medicine”⁴⁵.

From this, we may draw two important conclusions. Firstly, St. Michael was part of a large network of medical institutions favoring a rapid transfer of knowledge from the Mediterranean region to northern Germany. Secondly, local remedies were added to the new ones coming from abroad. Among these, we can certainly number our three neumatic charms. Despite their undefined provenance, their language, as we have seen so far, seems to be older than those current in other German contemporary texts.

It is hard to believe that our three neumatic charms are the only surviving exemplars. Further research may bring to light more of them, helping to establish a more reliable basis for a comprehensive study. The link of our Vatican and Bamberg medical volumes with Hildesheim school of medicine raises the fascinating question whether Hildegard von Bingen, the most famous medieval scientist of her time, had a role in connecting medical remedies with liturgical singing. In fact, Hildegard von Bingen made use of Constantinus Africanus’ work as she combined Constantine’s theory and remedies with her own innovative interpretations of theology, cosmology, and medicine⁴⁶. We also know how strong her interest in music and singing was.

Twelfth-century charms, chants, and medical remedies share the same monastic environment. German Benedictine monasteries carefully studied the Mediterranean tradition and tested it with everyday practice and field-work. This is the place where Christian belief merges with local customs and where charms, poems, and medical recipes find their way to the parchment. Some of them allow us even to get a vague idea of the necessary ritual gestures and movements. In a recent work, Haines nicely explains this as follows:

Thus, along with gesture and movement, the music of the human voice is the most ephemeral element of magic rituals. The texts of some charms and prayers from the late Middle Ages, for example, have survived in writing [...] but their song or recitation has the musical notes have not. [...] As an example, the words of the famous Longinus charm – “Longinus miles latus domini nostri Jesu Christi lancea perforavit et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua in redemptionem nostram” (“The soldier Longinus pierced the side of our lord Jesus Christ and immediately there gushed forth blood and water for our

⁴⁵ Wack 1994, 189-199.

⁴⁶ Long 2015, 289.

redemption”) – have both a lyric and liturgical feel. To my knowledge, no late medieval Longinus charm has survived with musical notation. Yet, it is hard to believe that such popular formulas as this one were not chanted or recited on occasion. Indeed, perhaps there was a melody or two performed often enough with this charm that it was known as the “Longinus tune”. This is a common phenomenon of orality that is underestimated from our excessively written perspective.⁴⁷

Our three neumatic charms were also produced in a monastery. As we have seen, the manuscripts hosting them are not of ecclesiastical or liturgical character. The neumes are where we would not expect them to be. Are these the only extant medieval neumatic charms?

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WORDS AS GESTURES: ALLUSIONS TO THE CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY IN EAST-SLAVIC CHARMS AND MAGIC FORMULAS

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-fade>

ABSTRACT

Christian icons (i.e., sacred pictures and sculptures) are usually considered as one of the most important sources of knowledge and concepts of Christianity in folk culture. This attitude is based on the role of the church building and its decorations as “The Bible for the illiterate”. In these terms the sacred space of a church can be characterized as a place where an image and a word are combined in steady formulas that could be very useful for folklore compositions, e.g., charms, when they need to apply Christian personages and plots connected with them. In this article the attention will be drawn to the charms and the magic formulas based on gestures of saints that are well known from the most common icons such as the Virgin who is taking water from the well or spinning/reading the book during the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel, the Virgin in prayer who is covering people with her veil/cloak (“The Protecting Veil” of the Theotokos as a popular variant in Russian iconography of this feast), the bathing of the infant Jesus by midwife Salome, the beheading of John the Baptist, etc. The aim of this research is to show that charms have a special code of Christian visual forms that can be regarded as allusions to Christian iconography.

Keywords: Christian imagery in charms; icons; performatives; pictorial language; ready-made poetic formulas.

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to N.S. Kochetkova for her recommendations, which were very helpful during my work of translation of this article.

There is no doubt that our cultural memory is full of different visual impressions. They continue to remain with us always and everywhere, because “every man carries his culture and much of his social reality about with him wherever he goes”². The visual images that have been stored in our memory can be evoked by all sorts of situations in which we find ourselves. Sometimes, when we regard it as a useful thing, we are able to turn them into words. The resulting verbal formula can be applied as a pre-existing solution that helps us to express our communicative intentions. It seems to be quite appropriate and effective in the folklore, with its *aesthetics of identity* and its tendency to return to something in your memory and repeat it in the most convenient way³. The ready-made formulas in the traditional type of poetics refer to the authority of the proto-situation or the proto-text which are of real semantic value in this context, so they help to achieve the desired result in certain circumstances of communication.

In this article we are going to trace how this works in magical texts. In order to consider the imagery language of spells and charms, we must take into account the specifics of their poetics as a ritual genre that means a genre of a dynamic inner content that needs equally dynamic and operative imagery. Therefore, the consideration of visual texts that suggest apt vivid metaphors for magical formulas should be started with the acknowledgement of their potential to perform all you need with an active subject (character) who acts, operates, or does/makes something within a developing situation.

1. THE ROLE OF GESTURES IN VISUAL AND VERBAL TEXTS

An artist who depicts an image with paint on a board or canvas, or creates a sculpture working in wood or stone, usually deals with a static form. He has to “stop” for us what is happening in time. He turns the dynamics into statics. However, he embodies an action (= motion), proceeding as a process, in a *gesture* that represents this action (= motion). That is why he stops a fleeting moment at the most significant point, which can be regarded as the quintessence of the event.

The study of spatial and temporal patterns of the deployment of action in the works of fine art – paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, frescos – is cur-

² Firth 1957, 27.

³ Лотман 1992, 244.

rently attractive for many researchers. The combination of quiescent states, poses, and positions with movements, processes, and actions proceeding in time draws their attention from the point of view of techniques and methods of realization as well as the content transmitted through them. In this regard, we can refer to a few comments on the particular gesture – *the head canting*. Its role and semantics were considered in a recently published study on body language as one of the semiotic codes of speech communication⁴. This consideration was a response to the conclusions of psychologists from the University of Bologna who had examined the head canting in painting⁵.

The semiotics and anthropology of religion investigate the gestures of saints as a part of spiritual communication. Massimo Leone, for example, researches cults of saints of early modern Catholicism whose canonization took place in 1622 as “the most formidable communication media”⁶ and first of all as visual media (“they are proposed as models of spiritual perfection not only through words, but through images as well”⁷). The scientist pays attention to the historical context of their representations, “but also to their syntax (how were they constructed?), their semantics (what did they mean?), and, above all, their pragmatics (how were these representations persuasive?)”⁸. These are the same interests as demonstrated by Russian researchers of Western Christian visual art⁹.

Ethnologists and philosophical anthropologists also work on the problem of gestures. In particular, Ya.V. Chesnov was interested in a gesture as a cultural result and a generalization of symbolic meanings that had accumulated over centuries in different ethnic traditions. In the article “Existences: The Gesture”, the object of his study was the figure of Moses as created by Michelangelo¹⁰. From the point of view of the anthropological approach, everything in this image is significant: the fact that Moses is sitting on the throne, his gesture of grasping the end of the beard with fingers, and horns on his head. The researcher evaluates the gestures of the prophet as existential because they are not so much the result of the specific biblical episodes as the cultural memory of civilization.

⁴ Крейдлин и др. 2020, 303-307.

⁵ Costa - Menzani - Ricci Bitti 2001.

⁶ Leone 2010, 1.

⁷ Leone 2010, 5.

⁸ Leone 2010, 16.

⁹ Федосов 2020.

¹⁰ I mean the famous sculpture in the church San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome (Чеснов 2009).

Art researchers have addressed the problem of a gesture most consistently, since the difficulties of translating from the language of plastics into the language of words in the analysis of the works of fine art were an inevitable reality for them¹¹. Hence their need to find an adequate mechanism for describing visual texts, and the introduction of the concepts of “gesture” or “psychological gesture” into circulation¹², and the thought that “in all canonical arts – ancient Egyptian, ancient Greek”, there is “its own complex of psychological gestures, more or less constant, stable, reflecting the essence of the religious interpretation of the universe”¹³.

As we need to make absolutely clear the role of a gesture as the culmination of the event in its pictorial embodiment, it might be a good idea to remember an episode from the hagiography of St. Francis of Assisi. It was described in the famous book by G.K. Chesterton in such a way:

It is said that when St. Francis staged in his own simple fashion a Nativity Play of Bethlehem, with kings and angels in the stiff and gay medieval garments and the golden wigs that stood for haloes, a miracle was wrought full of the Franciscan glory. The Holy Child was a wooden doll or bambino, and it was said that he embraced it and that the image came to life in his arms.¹⁴

In the depiction of a Christian writer of the twentieth century, the story of the celebration of Christmas in Greccio, as we see, goes straight to the moment when a wooden figurine of the baby Christ comes to life in St. Francis’s hands (“[...] he embraced it and [...] the image came to life in his arms”). This gesture was evaluated by the narrator as the main action and the main miracle of the event, which started the tradition of the presence in each Christian church of a wooden figurine of the Divine Infant in a crib during the Christmas period. But this episode was embodied in the same way by Giotto di Bondone and his disciples at the end of the thirteenth century in the famous fresco from the life cycle of the saint in the Upper Church of St. Francis in Assisi. As we see, the painter and the writer coincide in the gesture of St. Francis, who bent over the crib and embraced swaddled baby Jesus. And the baby gazed intently, like an adult, into the face of the holy man.

¹¹ Here I rely on the recently published manuscript of a lecture that had been found in the private archive of N.A. Dmitrieva (1917-2003). According to the people who were close to her, the problem of translating visual images into words had occupied her for many years. See Дмитриева 2020, 370.

¹² Дмитриева 2020, 372.

¹³ Дмитриева 2020, 374.

¹⁴ Chesterton 1923, 183.

In this regard, we need to take into consideration the concept of a *gesture* in the meaning of indicating any actions or deeds. (In Latin *gestus* combined the ideas of a static way of presenting oneself – position, posture – and the dynamic, fluid way – gesticulation, movement.) The gesture is visual because it is a fact of physical being that is accessible for perception from the outside. Therefore, it becomes an important element of the semiotic system of the visual arts. The gesture works as a substitute for action, movement and also as a substitute for the inner intentions of the depicted person.

Most prominently, this can be traced in Christian iconography. By virtue of its canonical character, it deals with a limited set of gestures that often becomes good recognizable symbols: “Avoiding the variety of individual ‘naturalistic’ poses and gestures, keeping only those determined by the canon”, the icon, “on the other hand, mastered the secret of their spiritual prototypes and created plastic (figural) formulas incomparable in their semantic fullness”¹⁵. In this sense, the “motherly gesture”¹⁶ of the Virgin Mary, keeping and in the same moment embracing her child, which exists in a great number of variants of her iconography, is the most recognizable gesture in the history of art – and of Christian art first of all. Moreover, it is recognizable regardless of the painting style, because the archetype is the most important thing in this example (no matter what skeptical judgments would be expressed by apologists of rules and pure forms of certain religious iconographic manner).

According to the ideas of the theorists of Christian art, “an icon is a visible evidence of both the descent of God towards man and the striving of man towards God”¹⁷. So the main place on an icon is given to a person who is standing in front of God: “The internal order of the person depicted on the icon is reflected in his movements: the saints do not gesticulate – they stand in front of God, perform a religious rite, and their every movement and the position of their body have a sacred, hieratic character”¹⁸.

That is why the gesture on the icon is not just “passionless”. It is extremely schematic, simplified to the level of a sign. Consider, for example, a gesture of adoration – that is, a figure in prayer, raising its arms with open palms. Since ancient times, this gesture has meant an appeal to

¹⁵ Дмитриева 2020, 373.

¹⁶ This term was offered by Ya.V. Chesnov (here I can refer only to my oral conversations with the late scientist).

¹⁷ Успенский 1997, 226.

¹⁸ Успенский 1997, 219.

God with a prayer and has been a gesture that “shows openness to the high will”¹⁹. In Christianity, this gesture is most vividly embodied in the image of the Oranta – one of the main types of iconography of the Theotokos, who is standing in front of God in a protecting prayer. But in this context, the gesture also received an additional semantic connotation – “this is already the gesture of protection and preservation (‘Нерушимая стена’ / ‘Unbreakable Wall’)”²⁰.

A gesture on the icon has never been random, because it involved “reading” and recognizing by a worshipper. This concerns not only the images of saints in prayer, but also narrative icons, which tell a plot and are based on the events of the Bible or hagiographic legends. And in this sense, L.A. Uspensky was right when he wrote that “icony [...] is not limited to the plot, to *what* is depicted [...] icony consists mainly in *how* this plot is depicted”²¹.

Reflecting on a semiotic continuum that is growing “avalanche-like” due to the emergence of complex and derived signs, N.B. Mechkovskaya notes: “A gesture may cause a picture and/or a word; on a basis of a verbal story, a concentrated, condensed meaning can form and then it can give birth to the content of a new drawing (static visual sign), or ritual gesture to a new verbal sign (metaphor, idiom, symbol, etc.), which further leads to the formation of new complex signs of different physical nature and different purposes [...]”²². Obviously, the gesture that was found or traditionally repeated by the master, in our case the icon painter, can be read as a productive opportunity to be reproduced within the verbal text. Having retained its internal, implied connection with the proto-text, i.e., the original source, and its initially inherent sacred meaning (which is essential for the text from which the participant of the ritual expects help), the gesture might become a productive basis for the magic formula and contribute to the development of a certain theme in the charms with the specific functional aims.

¹⁹ Дмитриева 2020, 373.

²⁰ Дмитриева 2020, 373.

²¹ Успенский 1997, 201.

²² Мечковская 2008, 176.

2. ABOUT A GESTURE IN TERMS OF THE PRAGMATICS OF CHARMS

Charms are *words* that are regarded as *actions* or *deeds*²³. This is the basis for their functional structure and functional semantics that results in the choice of motifs and acting subjects (= personalities). However, it should be noted that this remark characterizes the folklore poetics in general. As it was highlighted in the thesaurus “The Slavic Antiquities”, in folklore “objects, characters, and other substantives receive by themselves mythological interpretation only through predicates, i.e., primarily through the actions typical of them or directed at them, since it is the actions that are accompanied by motivations that open up the ‘deep’ meaning attributed by the folk consciousness to various facts of reality”²⁴.

Charms are texts with ritual roots. What is more, they are often accompanied by ritual acts in the present magic practice. So their semantic structure is very sensitive to the gesture if it is considered as a directional action, suitable to achieve a certain functional purpose. A personality is important for charms as a performer of a certain gesture. A saint depicted on an icon may be mentioned in charms precisely because the proper gesture and the attribute (the item) connected with it are its typical characteristics. In this case, the whole situation, captured on the icon, is perceived as a precedent. And the gesture of the personage is also a reference to this precedent – the sacred text and/or the sacred image²⁵.

When noticed on the icon, the gesture becomes the basis of a plot (= a motif) in charms and under certain circumstances can become a ritual gesture. It means that from words a gesture goes into actions accompanying

²³ This correlates with the John L. Austin’s arguments about a “performative utterance” (words and texts), when “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action” (Austin 1962, 6). It should be mentioned that in the Russian translation, Austin’s book was called *The Word as the Action* (Остин 1986), although its original title was *How To Do Things with Words*.

²⁴ Толстые 1995, 12.

²⁵ It is quite appropriate to mention here the kanon of the Eastern Orthodox Church devoted to the transferring the Acheiropoietia image of the Our Lord Jesus Christ, because in some sense it seems to support this tradition. Since the history of the Not-Made-by-Hand icon of the Savior (Спас Нерукотворный, Святой Убрус or The Mandylyon of Edessa) is connected with the healing of illness – the cure of the Edesian king Abgar – there is the statement in the seventh ode of the kanon, created to glorify this icon: “Изображением исцеляеши нашу болезнь” (“Through the image You heal our sickness”). In this way the special status of the icon (and what is depicted on it) is declared in Christianity. In the folk ritual practice, the idea of healing with icons is being developed. For more details, see Фадеева 2019, 130–131.

these words. However, the gesture can be numerously rethought, adapting to the requirements of the context (that is, the situation in which the charms are used) and acquiring the necessary functional orientation. Let's look through a few cases which are worth discussing as the classic examples of "remembering" in charms the gesture known in folk tradition from the icon.

2.1.

We start with the gesture of a midwife, bathing and washing a baby, in birth charms and in charms for a healthy baby:

Бабушка Соломоньюшка Христа парила да и нам парку оставила. Господи благослови. [...] Бабушка Соломоньюшка парила и правила, у Бога милости просила. [...]

Granny Solomonyushka steam-bathed Christ and left us some nice little steam. God bless us. [...] Granny Solomonyushka steam-bathed and corrected the baby's body, asked God for mercy. [...] ²⁶

Не я тебя парю, не я тебя мою — парит тебя, моет бабушка Салманида, которая истинного Иисуса Христа повивала и на белые руки принимала.

It's not me who is steam-bathing you, who is washing you — it's granny Salmanida who swaddled the genuine Jesus Christ and got him by her white hands, who is steam-bathing you, is washing you. ²⁷

The magic formulas accompanying the preventive washing of a newborn baby in order to relieve it of all kinds of diseases often mention the midwife Solomonia/Solomiya/Solomonida ²⁸. It is known that the idea of a midwife bathing the infant Christ goes back to the icons of the nativity of Christ (see *Fig. 1*). At the same time, the motif of bathing the baby in some variants takes place in all the episodes of the Nativity on icons that describe the scenes of childhood of Mother of God, John the Baptist, Nicholas the Wonderworker, etc.

As the researchers of Christian iconography assumed, this motif came in the icons of the Nativity of Christ not only through the Gospel of James, but first of all through the ancient images of birth scenes in marble bar-reliefs, where two women bathing the newborn baby were usually pre-

²⁶ Vyatka province; Майков 1994, 31 (N. 51).

²⁷ Russian villages of Tatarstan; Аникин 1998, 44 (N. 71).

²⁸ For more information about the midwife Salome and her functions in Russian (and in some East-Slavic) charms, see Юдин 2011; Фадеева 2019, 152-196.

sented²⁹. Therefore, this episode was traditional for sculptors and painters and had a purely grassroots, household character – even on icons.



Figure 1. – Midwife Solomonia and a maid with baby Christ. A fragment of the icon
 “The Nativity of Jesus Christ”, first quarter of 15th century, Moscow.
 Image courtesy of The State Tretyakov Gallery, Russia.

However, Russian charms did not just respond to a specific fragment of the icons of the nativity of Christ. They expanded the range of actions performed by the midwife Solomonia, attributing to her the ability not only to help women in labor and delivery, and to wash and steam a newborn baby in the steam bath, but also to nurse him, to heal his illnesses by spells, to chew baby’s ruptures, as well as unlocking labor and milk and locking (= stopping) blood. This means that the theme was developed, although it didn’t go far beyond the scope of obstetrics and treatment of children.

²⁹ Покровский 2001, 142.

2.2.

The spinning of (purple) threads by the Virgin Mary is another well-known example of an icon gesture that becomes very useful in charms. It originates from the icons of the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Magic formulas based on so called “annunciation spinning” have been repeatedly commented on by researchers³⁰:

[...] Под восточной стороной лежит камень белатырь. На том белатыре камне сидит Мать Пресвятая Богородица. У ней пряшенька золотая и веретёшечко. Сидит прядет, мотает. У меня, раба Божия Егора, кровь вынимает. [...]

[...] The stone belatyr lies under the eastern side. The Most Holy Mother Theotokos sits on that stone. She has a golden distaff and a spindle. She sits spinning and skeining. She takes out the blood from me, God's servant Egor. [...]³¹

Шла матушка Мария из города Асия, от города Иерусалима. Шла, шла она приустала, села приотдохнула. Пряла лен шелковый, шелковина оборвалась, у раба (имя) руда унялась.

Mother Maria went from the city of Assia, to the city of Jerusalem. She walked along and felt tired; she sat down to have a rest. She was spinning silk flax, silk thread was ripped off, and the [God's] servant (the name) blood was staunched.³²

The spinning motif that came on the icons from the Gospel of James depicts the Virgin Mary doing traditional women's work (see *Fig. 2*). But it receives a symbolic interpretation in the iconography of the Annunciation. It is accepted that the blood-red threads in the Virgin Mary's hands are a sign of spinning (= forming) a new life in her body. Charms simplify this content. Red threads look very similar to a flow of blood, therefore in magic formulas it is more convenient to associate them with sewing up wounds or tying of flowing blood. So in magic formulas used for stopping bleeding, the Mother of God is often depicted as sewing, not spinning.

³⁰ In particular, Адоньева 1996; Фадеева 1997; Адоньева 2005; Фадеева 2005.

³¹ Nizhny Novgorod region; Коровашко - Корепова 1997, 28 (N. 92).

³² Saratov region; Булушева 1994, 52.



Figure 2. – “Ustyug Annunciation”. 12th century, Novgorod.
Image courtesy of The State Tretyakov Gallery, Russia.

2.3.

Although the spinning of purple threads by the Virgin Mary was most widespread among ancient Russian icon painters, the trace of the iconography of the Annunciation in charms is associated not only with it. In eastern Belarus and on the Russian-Belarusian borderland, we meet the motif *the Virgin Mary draws water from a river / spring and heals diseases with it*, which can be related to the type of the Annunciation at the well:

Су стоцкаго су восходзімага сонца процекала река быстрая, выходзіла Маць Прячистая с усімі сабранымі, черпала воду святою рукою, златым кубком, і промывала раба божаго (такого-то) нараджонага, хрысціонага из рук, из ног, два шершэня з рэцываго серца, с косьцей, с мождей, с белаго бумажнаго цела и т.д. [...]

From the east, from the rising sun a fast river flowed; the Most Pure Mother went out with all gathered, She drew water with the holy hand, the golden goblet and washed the God's servant (the name) who was born, who was baptized – from the hands, from the legs, two hornets (?) from the fervent heart, from bones, from nerves, from white paper body, etc. [...] ³³

На мыри, на кыяни стыяў дуб с каринямі; с-пад тога дуба бягит вадица кипучая и гримучая. Божжия Матирь вадицу брала, на Сояньской гаре пасвищала, такога-то чиловека па галаве умывала.

On the sea, on the ocean there was an oak with roots; boiling and raging water ran from this oak. The Mother of God took this water, blessed it on the Zion mountain and washed the head of so and so man. ³⁴

The type of the Annunciation near the well was not too popular in the Russian Christian iconography. It was more often found in book illustrations and in the murals inside the churches. However, we cannot completely exclude its influence on charms. Suffice it to recall that it is present on the frescoes of St. Sophia in Kiev (eleventh century), in the akathist compositions of the murals of the Virgin's Nativity Cathedral in Ferapontovo (sixteenth century) and the Assumption Cathedral of the Princess' convent in Vladimir (seventeenth century), as well as in the life cycles of the Virgin Mary in the border scenes of icons devoted to the holidays dedicated to her – first of all, the Nativity of the Virgin, the Annunciation, and the Assumption.

³³ Mogilev province; Романов 1891, 148 (N. 36).

³⁴ Smolensk province; Добровольский 1891, 177 (N. 8).

2.4.

One more relevant gesture of the Mother of God in magic formulas, which probably relies on the variant of the iconography of the Annunciation, is *reading a book*:

На море-океане лежит горячий камень. На нем сидит Божья Матерь, книга Евангелие читает, у раба имярек зубную боль выгоняет. Аминь.

There is a hot stone on the sea-ocean. The Mother of God sits on it, she reads the Gospel-book and expels a toothache from the servant (say the name). Amen.³⁵

На море-океане, на острове Буяне стоит церковь соборная, соборная, богомольная. В этой церкви соборной, богомольной стоит Мать Пресвятая Богородица. Она книгу-Ивангелье читает, сама слезно плачет, отговаривает: от колдуна, от колдунцы, от виритника, от виритницы, от завистника, от ненавистника, от завистницы, от ненавистницы, от худого часу, от худого глазу. [...]

There is a church, a prayerful cathedral in the sea-ocean, on Buyan island. There is the Most Holy Mother of God in this church, in this prayerful cathedral. She reads the Gospel-book; she cries tearfully and breaks the spells of a sorcerer, a sorceress, a wizard, a witch, envious people, haters, from the evil hour, from the evil eye. [...] ³⁶

The book is often presented at the icons of saints from the bishops' rank. The mention in charms of a saint bearing the Gospel possibly links with the traditions of the iconography of saints (and more than that – we must remember the figure of Jesus Christ holding the Gospel on the icons and in charms as well). However, as a gesture of Our Lady in charms it probably responds to an image, very popular in the Western tradition, but in Russia it appeared from the seventeenth century. This scene of Annunciation depicted the Virgin Mary with an open book in front of her or in her lap.

2.5.

The gesture of *protection and cover*, which can also be qualified as one of the most important characteristics of the Mother of God in folklore, is widely known in Christian iconography. In the Russian tradition, it

³⁵ Nizhny Novgorod region; Коровашко - Корепова 1997, 16 (N. 35).

³⁶ Oryol province; Попов 1903, 230 (N. 32).

is associated primarily with the iconography of the autumn Feast of the Intercession (“The Protecting Veil”) of the Most Holy Theotokos, established in Russian church practice from the twelfth century. However, it must be admitted that the inner form of the word *покров* (*cover*) is so transparent, eloquent, and widely used in prayers that the question of the antecedence of the word and visual image seems very difficult in this case. We can see this gesture, for example, in healing charms – from the wildfire disease:

Сама Пречистая Божия Мать за престолом стояла, своими пресвятыми пеленами запеченную крову болящей рабе (имя) закрывала, болезнь удаляла из крещеного тела, из пораженного. [...]

The Most Pure Mother of God stood behind the altar, she covered with her most holy veils the caked blood of the sick [God’s] servant (the name) and removed the disease from the baptized body, from the afflicted body. [...] ³⁷

And it is present in the shepherd’s protective charms:

О Владычице, Царица Небесная, Пресвятая Богородица, Дево Мария! Закрой и защити своею нетленною ризою мене, раба Твоего (имярек), пастуха, и мое счетное стадо коровье, конное и овечье! [...]

Oh, Our Lady, the Queen of Heaven, the Most Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary! Cover and defend me, Thy servant (tell the name), the shepherd and my counted herd of cows, horses and sheep, with your undecayed raiment! [...] ³⁸

2.6.

The mention in charms of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, to be precise, of *his beheading*, connects with the hagiographic icons of the saint (see *Fig. 3*):

Когда у Иоанна Крестителя снимали голову, то не было ни крови, ни руды и не слышал никакой болести, ни костяной, ни жильной. Так и у раба Божия (имя и отчество) не было бы ни крови, ни руды, ни тоски, ни болезни во веки веков. Аминь

³⁷ Kaluga region; Аникин 1998, 279 (N. 1763).

³⁸ Novgorod (?); Майков 1994, 118 (N. 285). L.N. Maikov noted the parallel texts in manuscripts from Arkhangelsk, Olonezk regions and from South Siberia (Майков 1994, 197).

When John the Baptist was beheaded, there was no blood and he did not feel any pain – neither in bones nor in veins. Similarly, the servant of God (name and patronym) would have neither blood, nor grief, nor disease unto ages of ages. Amen.³⁹

It is interesting to note that the martyr's gesture – *под меч главу склонил* ("he bowed the head under the sword") – is used in epic genres of folklore, where it becomes one of the constant poetic formulas. See, in particular, some variants of the spiritual verse about Yegoriy (St. George) the Brave⁴⁰.



Figure 3. – The Beheading of St. John the Baptist. End of 17th century, Onezhsky district of Arkhangelsk region. Image courtesy of The State Museum's Union "The Art Culture of the Russian North", Arkhangelsk, Russia.

³⁹ Vologda province; Попов 1903, 231 (N. 35). One more text from this place is nearly the same: Попов 1903, 246 (N. 132).

⁴⁰ Фадеева 2019, 107.

2.7.

Another motif connected with the hagiography of John the Baptist is *the death of the prophet Zechariah*, the father of St. John. In this episode, Zechariah did not reveal the place where his wife Elizabeth and their little son had taken refuge, so he was stabbed in the temple by the soldiers of Herod. According to *Erminia*, the Greek book of rules for icon-painting (1730-33), in which this episode is described in the cycle of martyrs' suffering, it must be depicted on the icons in the following way: "In the temple, under a shelter, a holy repast (the credence) is set. In front of it St. Zechariah, an old man with a long beard, in clothing of a Jewish priest, stands, raising his eyes and hands to heaven; a warrior, holding him by the hair that is on the crown of the head, impales his neck with a sword"⁴¹. This magical text for bleeding and wounds that refers to Zechariah's death as a precedent situation is a rare acquisition from the Russian North:

Господи Иисусе, между раем и престолом есть убит святой Захарий, у того святого Захария не было ни раны, ни боли, ни крови, ни опухоли, ни отеко-
ли, кости не болели, жилы не шипели, тело белое не скрипело. Также
бы у рабы Божьей не было бы ни раны, ни боли, ни крови, ни опухоли, ни
отеко-ли, кости не болели, жилы не шипели, тело белое не скрипело. Во веки
веков. Аминь.

My Lord Jesus, Saint Zechariah was killed between paradise and the altar;
that Saint Zechariah had no wound, no pain, no blood, no swelling, no
edema; bones didn't ache, veins didn't clench, the white body wasn't sore.
Also the servant of God would have no wound, no pain, no blood, no swell-
ing, no edema; bones wouldn't ache, veins wouldn't clench, the white body
wouldn't be sore. Unto ages of ages. Amen.⁴²

2.8.

St. George/Yegoriy riding on a horse and striking a dragon with a spear perhaps is one of the main symbols of Christianity, marking the victory of good over evil. Even the baby Christ in the Virgin Mary's lap can be depicted as striking a dragon with a spear (it is typical of the iconography of Western Christianity). V.J. Propp emphasized that St. George did not always appear on the icons as an armed horse rider. In the Byzantine and then

⁴¹ Дионисий Фурноаграфит 1868, 207.

⁴² Arkhangelsk region; Аникин 1998, 261 (N. 1629).

in the Russian tradition, icons depicting St. George as a warrior holding a weapon played a prominent role. These icons looked like full-length or half-length portraits⁴³. However, the gesture of the holy rider who strikes a dragon going back to the medieval “George’s Miracle about the Dragon” becomes the most famous and most repeated image over the course of time and charms are not an exception here. Compare this to the magic formulas against the bite of a snake:

В чистом поле лежит горяч камень. Едет Егорий Победоносец на сером коне, горяч камень разбивает, змеино жало вынимает из раба Божьего (имярек). [...]

A hot stone lies in the open field. Egoriy the Victorious rides on a gray horse, smashes the hot stone, gets out the snake’s sting from the servant of God (tell the name). [...] ⁴⁴

or against a pain that struck a man (for example, against the pain of ears):

Егорий Храбрый едет на коне через огненну реку, копьем колет, шестом тычет. Из уш вон кочьму (?) выживает вон. Вон, кочьма, из раба Божьего. Слухи – в уши, слухи – в уши, слухи – в уши.

Egoriy the Brave rides on a horse across the river of fire, pricks with a spear, pokes with a pole. Drives out kochma (?) out of ears. Go out, kochma, from the servant of God. Hearing – in the ears, hearing – in the ears, hearing – in the ears. ⁴⁵

3. CONCLUSION

This short review seems to provide a sufficient base to raise the question of the semantic connections of the East Slavic charms, oral and written, with sacred images in the church. The reproduction of an icon gesture, recognized as a semantic element of an iconographic image, in magic formulas is not only a consequence of the charmer’s (= the subject of a magical ritual) desire, who tries to find an action that will be appropriate and functional (= effective) in a certain situational context. The specific attitude to an icon as a shrine, capable of working miracles, and therefore to heal illnesses and protect from evil, plays here a significant role. Responding to the gesture

⁴³ Пропп 1973.

⁴⁴ Nizhny Novgorod region; Коровашко - Корепова 1997, 31 (N. 110).

⁴⁵ Arkhangelsk region; Аникин 1998, 232 (N. 1386).

captured on the icon, the magic formula is a priory associated with the sphere of the sacred. Through the gesture of the saint, it appeals both to the event conveyed on the icon (if we are talking about the narrative iconography, associated with the recreation of the biblical plot), and to the ritual context of worship, where sacred texts, including visual ones, coexist. A reference to this experience of sacred is relevant for folklore magical practice and can be evaluated as one of the ways to enhance the effectiveness of the magic formula and the charms as a whole.

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UNDOING THE “EVIL EYE” IN ITALY: A COMPARISON OF FOLK DOCUMENTATION FROM 1965-70 WITH PRESENT RESEARCH

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-gian>

ABSTRACT

“Undoing” the evil eye using spoken charms is a traditional remedy in many cultural settings and involves a folk healer drawing the imagined evil (cast by an evil gaze) out of the body of the “victim”. The capacity to erase the magic gaze is applied through the narrative power of a verbal format (a charm or a *historiolae*) that uses performative language and speech actions. This essay is based on a researcher’s daughter resurveying a territory investigated half a century ago by her father. The article can thus focus on the traditional culture of Abruzzo, analyzing the folk documentation collected in 1965-70 and in the present time. Anthropological records mention the popular belief that the evil eye produces illness, discomfort, and bad luck, but this is a reversible condition. The best way to save victims is to eliminate the evil eye by using “professional charms”, which are still practiced and handed down to new generations of charmers. Anthropological records also mention that this technique is practiced above all by elderly women within their family group, and that they do not charge for their magic work. These women enhance their prestige in their social in-group through their skills in removing the evil eye. By performing a caring act for a person, based on protection and interdependence between older and younger generations, an evil eye set of beliefs is handed down and is still very much alive.

Keywords: Abruzzi; ethnography; magic; spells; transmission between generations.

1. WORDS THAT CURE THE PERSON: A RITE THAT REMOVES THE “MALOCCHIO”

Like all other rituals, the practices that focus on the body and overcoming malaise and illness are part of a specific cultural system and cannot be read as “isolated phenomena”. These rituals are interwoven with ideologies and change people’s lives in an inexplicable way not quantifiable by Western medical science. Therapies used by “traditional medicine” actually tend to consider body and soul in the same framework, and are put in place using healing dynamics that go from soul to body, and vice versa, without the limitations posed by Western medical science¹, which is highly technical and technological. “Traditional medicine” is frequently based on magic and is intended to help the patient overcome an ailment that is as real as it is imaginary, combining speech, gestures, song, music, dance, and prayer to represent the expulsion of evil and the incorporation of good².

This essay examines the tradition of undoing the “evil eye” in Abruzzo, and I have used the folk documentation collected in the past by my father Emiliano Giancristofaro (1965-70), which I compare with documentation I collected myself in recent times during fieldwork conducted over the decade 2008-20. “Undoing” a magic spell with words is the traditional remedy applied in many cultural contexts and it is performed by a folk healer who draws the imaginary evil (brought by an evil eye) out of the body of the “victim”. The capacity to cancel the power of the person with the evil eye is applied through a narrative based on a spoken long format (*historiola*) that uses performative language and speech actions³.

My father was an ethnologist who concentrated on traditional Abruzzo culture. In this context he analysed folk documentation he had collected in 1965-70⁴. His ethnological records (around two thousand hours of inter-

¹ In some respects, Western medical science also constitutes “traditional knowledge”, as it is one part of Western culture; however, Western medical science differs from “traditional medicines” in that it separates care of the body from care of the psyche (or of the soul, for those who believe in it).

² Anthropology began observing “faith” healing in the late nineteenth century with Jean-Martin Charcot (1897), whose ideas were an inspiration and were even pursued by Sigmund Freud, reaching us with Gallini 1998. See also Seppilli 2019.

³ The *historiola* is a modern term for a kind of incantation incorporating a short mythic story that provides the paradigm for the desired magical action (in this case, the elimination of the evil eye is made by a religious intervention).

⁴ Giancristofaro 1971.

views with people local to Abruzzo and Molise) comprise audio-visual files produced by means of a tape recorder and camera, and are now available for public consultation in Rome at the Archivio Sonoro Franco Coggiola. About three hundred people were interviewed, all of whom believed in the evil eye and described the charms used to undo it⁵. This collection of ethnological records documents the belief that the evil eye produces illness, malaise, or possibly death for babies or animals, and also damage to inanimate objects like cars or houses. The established method for saving the victims was to undo the spell using the “professional charm” of a *magaro* or a *magara*, namely, a local charmer. Those charmers are paid for their services in cash or in kind. But this collection of ethnological records suggests in no uncertain terms that magical skills are very common among women and are used by older female relatives to help younger generations, and are free of charge⁶.

The knowledge of such a folk healer is a sum of skills and practices based on native theories, beliefs, and experiences, whether rational or otherwise, applied to safeguard health as well as diagnose or treat illness, anxiety, and danger. These health practices are not part of conventional Italian medicine and are not integrated into the major healthcare system, but today they are used interchangeably with that system, just as they were fifty years ago. Put simply, people consult their doctor but they also consult a charmer to be on the safe side.

2. UNDOING THE EVIL EYE IN ABRUZZO, PAST AND PRESENT

The main theoretical and methodological reference accompanying this field research drew above all on three areas of anthropology: ritual, corporal, and the work of central Italy. With regard to charms and rites discussed in this article, the theorizations of both Malinowski (1954) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952) suggest seeking the manifestation of the legitimacy of important collective values in rituality. Tambiah (1985) points us in the direction of gestures and words, which all the observed charms and rituals possess in profusion.

There was also careful attention to the most appropriate investigative strategy. This article favors the diachronic line of research (almost sixty

⁵ Giancristofaro 2018.

⁶ Giancristofaro 1971, 180.

years of monitoring the same culture in the same region), so I regret that a more sociological analysis here could not really be developed, making room for questions of social inequalities and gender. I am attempting to give some indication of the status of the people I have spoken to, but I think this article fits with linguistics, ethnology, and religious studies rather than the critical theoretical fields of health anthropology and sociology. My father's fieldwork was spread over five years, from 1965 to 1970, and was inspired by Malinowski's theories highlighting psychological functions, and also the ideas of De Martino (1961) of the rite as a symbolic solution for "expelling negativity from the story"⁷.

My fieldwork was undertaken from 2008 to 2020 and conducted using interpretive anthropology⁸. A thick description explains the concept of the rite as being conveyed by informants in the researched community, and they never see it as a joke or something silly. In each interview, the charmer expressed the intention to show that all efforts are concentrated on producing a traditional charm and ritual that will help people as much as possible. The significance was then analyzed through the tools offered by the tradition of anthropological theory⁹.

Both field surveys were conducted through participant observation: the various charms and rites were seen during the preparatory, development, and concluding phases. It was a long process to observe the changes in the preparation and performance of the charm ritual in each family encountered by me or my father. After each observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with the different players in the community so as to explore the studied rites and underlying dynamics further. Because of new European privacy laws (namely, General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR), I am unable to publish interviews with all personal stories and names, only a transcription of my notes on stories and actions¹⁰. Both field surveys identified various key informants and developed interactions with them. The life stories of three charmers were also

⁷ Giancristofaro 1971, 43.

⁸ Geertz 1973.

⁹ Among others, Rappaport 1999; Gluckman 1962; Turner 1982.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, the GDPR makes it impossible to cite the personal and private stories of the informants. Conversely, field and archival researchers in past situations have managed to do this without breaking the law. This leaves the reading with an interesting but somewhat "general" feeling until we get to the ethnographic data about the university student. I hope to add extra ethnographic data with more fieldwork testimonies without breaking the law. I hope anyway that this article is a contribution as it currently stands, and will be of interest to a wide readership.

collected and this made it possible to explore their identity in a “professional” dimension. Specific visual anthropology methods (pictures) were not used because of privacy restrictions, as demanded by the persons I interviewed. Both field surveys highlight that the rituals aiming to undo the “evil eye” are appreciated by the young generation and controlled by the older members of the community. But how does the evil eye mechanism work in Abruzzo?

The “evil eye” comes in the guise of a malevolent glance with subsequent negative effects such as malaise, illness, or misfortune. In Abruzzo society, indeed throughout the south of Italy, the evil eye “set of beliefs” has been handed down since Roman times, and the proof is found in the amulets displayed in Chieti National Archaeological Museum¹¹. Those who espouse this belief are convinced this malevolent glance can be erased through the specific ritual of chanting a formula and making signs over a dish of water. Many families decide to call in someone to undo the evil eye each time a person is sick, and these are mainly elderly women. The charm performance is interesting as it is related not only to the body and the sacred, but also to strategies of recognition and affirmation of roles and social hierarchy. The ritual event, closely related to the family context, is performed in the home. In the most serious cases of a “resistant evil eye”, the family turns to a professional charmer, who is paid for their work. When the spell is cast at home by a grandmother or an aunt, no payment is needed.

When a person feels the effects of the evil eye, the family takes it very seriously and decides to practice the well-known “dish of water” ritual, which serves to ascertain whether a person has actually been affected by the evil eye, and to expel it if there is a positive response from the oracle. The victim of the evil eye and a specific person – often an elderly woman deemed to have the power to neutralize the spell – sit at the kitchen table. Other people close to the victim may sit at the table too, but must remain silent. The charmer fills a soup dish with water and puts a metal knife or scissors in it, symbolically intended to cut the evil eye. In silence, the woman pours a drop of olive oil into the water: if it spreads, it means the person has come under the evil eye (*Figs. 1 and 2*). The reaction of the water is an analogy of the malevolent glance, expanding to harm the victim. Then the charmer has to attack this drop of oil, which symbolizes the evil eye’s merciless effect on the victim. With the knife or scissors, she makes the gesture of cutting the drop of oil and recites the charm or

¹¹ Giancristofaro 1971; Papi 2006.

sometimes the entire *historiola*, which varies depending on which person is believed to cast the evil eye and, of course, depending on the location. The spell invokes saints, demonstrating that today's popular tradition is woven from Catholicism and paganism. Consider below the most common charm formula found in 1965-70 by Giancristofaro senior:

Du ucchie t'à ucchiate (two eyes looked at you in envy) / *Tre Sante t'à iutate* (three saints helped you) / *'ncbe lu nome de lu Patre* (in the name of the Father) / *lu Fijolo e Spiridu Sante* (the Son and the Holy Spirit) / *lu malucchie va 'rrete e* (the evil eye goes back and) / *nne vva cchiù avante* (no longer goes forward).¹²

The charmer recites these words three times, signing the victim's forehead with three crosses with her right thumb, which she dips into the water in the dish (*Fig. 1*).

Another variant is used when an unmarried woman casts the evil eye. It is widely believed in peasant societies that women without husbands and children are a negative element because they do not contribute to the reproduction of the labor force:

Ddu ucchie t'à dducchiàte (two eyes looked at you in envy) / *Tre sante t'à jutate* (three saints helped you) / *Occhie di zitelle* (spinster's eye) / *Va pe la terre* (travels the land) / *Ucchie di maritate* (bride's eye) / *Va pe li case* (travels houses) / *lu nome de lu Padre, Fijole* (in the name of the Father, the Son) / *e Spirite Sante* (and the Holy Spirit); *Malucchie e quirnicille* (evil eye and horns) / *Crepe l'ammidie* (ill envy) / *E schiatte lu malucchie* (and destroy the evil eye).¹³

The evil eye can be avoided by wearing horn-shaped – namely phallic – amulets, or other types of lucky charms: the number thirteen; index and little fingers making horns; a small hunchback man; a horseshoe; a broom. People think that the phallus, the organ of fertility, is the most powerful magic symbol in fighting off the evil eye. However, when someone is the victim of the evil eye, a charm is the only way to undo the spell.

¹² Formula heard in the provinces of Chieti, Pescara, Teramo, and in Molise; Giancristofaro 1971, 91-93.

¹³ I heard this formula in the province of Chieti; Giancristofaro 1971, 94.

3. THE ART OF CONTROLLING SOCIETY: CHARMS AS A “WIDER SOCIAL TEXT” IN VERNACULAR LANGUAGE

Those who believe in supernatural forces think they can be dominated thanks to secret gestures and words¹⁴. In Abruzzo, people believe that handing down these methods from one generation of charmers to the next takes place at particular times of the year, namely at midnight on Christmas Eve or on the Eve of Saint John (June 23rd). Only on these occasions, corresponding to the winter and summer solstices, can a new charmer be created thanks to a spell spoken by the older charmer¹⁵. There is a preference for white magic aimed at making dreams come true and at beneficial goals, such as casting out the evil eye and treating illnesses. Only a small part of these arts aims to cause the death of people (black magic). Indeed, the evil eye is the gaze cast by those who are envious, or feel hatred and resentment, but it only intends to bring bad luck and malaise, not to cause the death of the victim. This characteristic of the evil eye is also documented by many other scholars¹⁶.

The belief in the evil eye is widespread throughout the Western world and has intrigued many scholars. Italian ethnologist Clara Gallini has moved beyond the psychological explanation and argues that the evil eye is a social norm through which the group affirms its authoritarian and punitive function as its right. In short, in a conservative society, where we must all be equal, the evil eye and its negative consequences are a punishment for those who seek to rise above equality or have not shared their good fortune with the community¹⁷. Indeed, the evil eye does not affect those who are poor, but rather those who feel fortunate for a lovely family, an expensive car, a beautiful home, good earnings, or good health. This belief is not irrational, therefore, because it meets the cultural needs of people and groups.

The characteristics of this belief are connected to the old peasant world, closely linked in Italy to the economic and social structure of the farmstead. Exploring the reasons for the establishment, persistence, and local diffusion of these magic practices, our focus offers some general considerations on Catholicism and southern Italy. The evil eye can

¹⁴ Magic includes agents, acts, and representations: the individual performing the magic acts is called a *magician*; we define as *magical representations* the ideas and beliefs that correspond to magic acts; and the acts are called *rites of magic* (Mauss - Hubert 1903).

¹⁵ Giancristofaro 1971.

¹⁶ Among others, Gallini 1973 and Dundes 1981.

¹⁷ Gallini 1973.

be attributed to the sphere of fertility and most probably originated in ancient times, from pre-Christian agricultural cults, as the ancient amulets (eyes, horns and fingers) found in the Abruzzo archaeological sites demonstrate¹⁸. Similar rituals and beliefs have also been studied and described in other regions in the world¹⁹. We might then place this practice in a broader context in terms of the anthropological research into religion and holiness over a century or more²⁰. In Italy, an important reference could be *The Land of Remorse* (*La Terra del Rimorso*, first Italian edition 1961), a classic work by Ernesto De Martino, the founding figure of Italian cultural anthropology. Based on fieldwork conducted in southern Italy in 1959, the study deals with the phenomenon of “tarantism” in Puglia, a form of possession related to the belief in the bite of a mythical tarantula and its ritual cure in the “taranta dance”. Most of those suffering from this type of possession were women, and official medical science tended to believe this was a result of female physical and mental weakness. As both an ethnologist and classically trained religious historian, the author reviews field data with a historical analysis. The result is a compassionate and compelling account of this kind of belief, which no longer appears as mere mental illness or as a survival of irrationality, but as a product of a cultural history defined from above, endowed with its own forms of rationality. In particular, the culture of southern Italy was one of violence toward and repression of women, and this triggered an erratic reaction in every female. Over the centuries, that type of culture developed a holistic rehabilitation of mind and body that expressed itself in the spider (taranta) syndrome and in the magical rite of removing the venom through a lengthy collective dance performed in the sanctuary of San Paolo, in Galatina, province of Lecce. In Italy, all historical and anthropological studies of magic have been deeply conditioned by the interpretations of De Martino, who was Clara Gallini’s mentor. He also published *The World of Magic* (*Il mondo magico*, 1948) and *Magic: A Theory from the South* (*Sud e magia*, 1959), investigating the ethical condition of the population and the persistence of beliefs in the modern age.

The rigidity of the cultural framework of rural Italy within which magic flourishes explains why this kind of treatment or this solution to

¹⁸ Papi 2006.

¹⁹ Belief in the evil eye is documented in Greece, Germany, Spain, France, Russia, and also in the Balkans, India, Israel, and the Middle East (Elworthy 1895; Van Gennep 1943; Dundes 1981).

²⁰ For example, Elworthy 1895 and Van Gennep 1909.

human suffering was not useful in improving the conditions of suffering people or in driving them to seek a new sense of their existence, leaving them in a perpetual lack of awareness²¹. The goal of this cultural and religious system is to adjust disrupted and painful emotional elements, restoring in people their physical strength to work and survive under the protective value of popular and local religion – in other words, of spells. Other Italian authors, above all Alfonso M. Di Nola, point out that the population still has a conservative vision of saints, similar to the medieval vision of the saint-healer widespread before the Counter-Reformation. Therefore, the evil eye belief still requires the evocation of the saints. This symbolic dialog with the saints and the fact that many positive events like healings are still attributed to saints explain why the expectation of miracles – namely the special intervention through a saint – persists in southern Italy²².

4. THE ALPHABET OF MAGIC FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

The need for certainties crucial for living life with the right kind of optimism fosters the belief in horoscopes and evil eyes. Today, most of the population is superstitious, but there is an increase in “professional magic” based on conjuring up the devil and breaking down the relationship with homespun white magic²³. White magic continues to be practiced in homes and among families, and while the charm retains its magical function, it also fuses with prayer. Obviously, the spell is cast on natural forces, while prayer excludes this kind of domination because it is a simple supplication to a saint. However, even charms to cast out the evil eye invoke saints (Virgin Mary, Holy Trinity, Jesus), so it is a kind of prayer to a higher power that is called in to help people in the fight against evil.

Sometimes the charm formula for healing ailments (upset stomach, rheumatism), apart from the evil eye, appears as a short rhyming tale explaining that Mary or Jesus suffered the same illness and they recovered. In the house, when the charmer repeats the story, she transmits a benefit to the victim of evil, who feels better because of the symbolic effectiveness

²¹ Crapanzano 2005.

²² Di Nola 1976.

²³ Di Nola 1987.

of the ritual, as identified by Lévi Strauss²⁴. In the past, the Church condemned these practices and those who practiced them ended up at stake, but today there is more tolerance of folk use of saint names and the mixture of magical formulas and religious invocations²⁵.

Even today, magic is a means of addressing what impacts our existence and triggers a crisis. People are troubled by financial loss, an accident, a quarrel, a broken heart, or a minor illness, and they blame the evil eye for these events, but what they truly want is to change the situation. The documentation I collected in 2008-18 with the help of my university students shows that the belief in the evil eye is still very much alive, and that each day in a home somewhere, someone is removing the evil eye from children and grandchildren. My university students, mostly women, told me they sought a charmer to cast out the evil eye when they broke up with a boyfriend or failed an exam. The charm was uttered by the grandmother or an elderly family member, and they agreed to try it, feeling better after the ritual.

The formula has the same traditional incipit as collected in 1965-70 (see in preceding pages Giancristofaro 1971), that is, *Du ucchie t'à ucchiate* (two eyes looked at you in envy) / *Tre Sante t'à iutate* (three saints helped you) or *la Madonna t'à iutate* (Our Lady helped you). The informants were chiefly women, and they specified that the words cannot be spoken casually and must be part of a magic rite. They also emphasize that the ritual must be carried out sitting around the kitchen table, with a white plate, in candlelight, and in silence. In short, people still take this belief very seriously. A first-year student in 2017 told me she could perform a less powerful charm to stop hiccoughs by using these words:

Sijjòzze, sijjòzze (hiccoughs, hiccoughs) / *vatten'abballe pe' lu pozze* (fall down the well) / *Se m'aiute Gesù* (if Jesus helps me) / *lu sijjòzze non viè cchiù* (the hiccoughs go away).

²⁴ After Charcot, Lévi Strauss also investigated social, psychological, and physiological mechanisms of healing (Lévi-Strauss 1949). I also mention here the approach of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), where everything in the social and natural worlds exists in constantly shifting networks of relationships (Latour 1993).

²⁵ Of course, in Italy the historical and anthropological study of these phenomena of popular religion found in southern Italy (Di Nola 1976; De Rosa 1978, and many others) was conditioned by the fundamental work of Ernesto De Martino: next to the *Land of Remorse*, we mention *Sud e magia* (1959), where De Martino investigates the dramatic social and ethical condition of the population and embarked on the study of folklore, popular Catholicism, and the persistence of belief in magic.

The student says that the moment of the spell is sacred and cannot be interrupted. The reference to saints and Christian mythology legitimizes this – white – magic for good aims, and serves to remove evil, not to cause it. She says the spell must be done by sitting around the kitchen table, in silence, and making the sign of the cross with closed scissors in front of the throat of the person suffering the hiccoughs. But she also knows a short charm to stop general bad luck that precludes people from passing exams at university:

Du ucchie t’ à ucchiate (two eyes looked at you in envy) / *la Madonna t’ à iutate* (Our Lady helped you) / *lu malucchie va ‘rrete e* (the evil eye goes back and) / *nne vva cchiù avante* (no longer goes forward) / *l’esame va ‘nienze* (examinations go ahead) / *in nome di li Sante* (in the name of the saints).

She is an arts student and hopes to receive as soon as possible (maybe next Christmas) the power from her grandmother to remove the evil eye in persistent cases and to develop the magic skills as a career parallel to that of teaching. She says that most of the people who request this kind of help are women and also that women are particularly susceptible to the evil eye because they are weaker. She explains this weakness by making reference to the “empty nature” of a female body. Of course, she is not paid by the girlfriends who benefit from her white magic skills but she feels privileged in a social role – the *fatarella* (little sorceress) – still admired in local culture. She declares that through this power, she can be of use to her girlfriends and, in future, to her children and grandchildren.

All anthropological records cited in this article also show that this technique is practiced by elderly women within their family group. The work of these charmers is free. These women enhance their prestige in their social in-group through their skills in removing the evil eye. By performing a caring act for a person, based on protection and interdependence between older and younger generations, the evil eye ideology is handed down and is still very much alive.

5. CONCLUSION: PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN MAGIC

Observation as a participant of these very intimate situations is quite a challenge and researchers still have a long way to go. As we have already said, a comparison of folk documentation from 1965-70 with present research highlights a constant element for the transmission of this magical credo: women. While a male (the *magaro*) exercising magical arts is paid

as a professional²⁶, women practice the skill mainly in the family circle and do not ask to be paid except with kudos. In this way, women convey belief in the evil eye to other women and repeatedly endorse the concept that women are especially susceptible to magic.

In the anthropological records presented in this article, the reason women are more likely to be victims of evil eye and possession is attributed to their “empty nature”. In the minds of these women, a man has substance, while the woman is an empty shell and this void can only be filled by male substance, as often happens in gendered beliefs²⁷. Older women pass down these gender notions and the belief that the supernatural affects females. In so doing, they benefit from the increased respect of the younger generation. Women, however, tend to take fewer risks and engage in the corporal care of other family members in their social group. If they do not do this, they are seen as dangerous²⁸. In short, through a transversal perspective suggested by recent research²⁹, this comparison of ethnographic data highlights gender inequalities which, in theory and in practice, confine the role of women to a position of cultural subordination, struggling to achieve emancipation.

Magic rites are used for health, love, or money issues because the loss of any of these aspects of an object of desire brings frustration and anguish. Nonetheless, today’s aspiration to govern reality has spawned a new black magic business that brings huge earnings. In Abruzzo, magicians, fortune-tellers and card-readers (often men) advertise their services on the web and on television. Their services, which they define as “scientific”, develop dependence and malaise in their clients, who are unaware of the purely psychological effects of the magic and are thus incapable of seeking different solutions to their problems. In short, among many groups primary orality related to magic belief still survives through women, and it is women who hand it down in the family, engaging younger females. This mnemonic and empathic thought³⁰ is able to express and strengthen relationships among people with a rite of care focused on solving problems of the present but can have a negative impact on the future, both on the life of individuals and on gender equilibrium and equality.

²⁶ Giancristofaro 1971, 180-183.

²⁷ Hérítier 1996.

²⁸ Douglas 1966.

²⁹ Among others, Dill - Zambrana 2009.

³⁰ Ong 1982.



Figure 1. – Left: A woman takes the evil eye out of her niece by telling traditional formulas.
 Photo made by Lia Giancristofaro in Abruzzo, 2017.

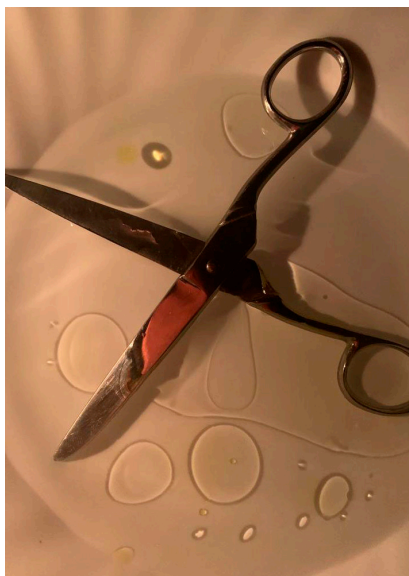


Figure 2. – Right: The woman drops oil into a dish full of water, and, reciting the holy formulas, she simulates cutting the large drops (evil eye) with scissors.
 Photo made by Lia Giancristofaro in Abruzzo, 2017.

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TABOO WORDS AND SECRET LANGUAGE AS VERBAL MAGIC IN CHILDBIRTH (RUSSIAN NORTH)

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-goku>

ABSTRACT

From the end of the nineteenth century up to the 1970s and 1980s, the practice of childbirth was concealed in the rituals of the Russian North. The secrecy surrounding birth determined the key rules of maternity practices in the village. The circumstances of pregnancy, the onset of labor, and the choice of location for delivery were all concealed to protect a woman and a child from evil spirits. A special language was used to discuss childbirth. Expectant mothers tried to veil their state or just kept quiet about it. Birthing assistants also tried to speak in euphemisms, replacing direct indications of what was happening with pronouns and definitive attributes. Older women (mothers-in-law and midwives) taught the young by means of prohibitions (for example, prohibiting them from talking to people they met during labor) and used special speech tactics adopted by a woman in labor.

Keywords: midwives; practice of childbirth; ritual register; ritual speech; Russian North; Russian village.

This article focuses on the practice and discourse of the birth ritual in the territory of the Russian North. It covers a period starting from the end of the nineteenth century and up to the 1970s of the twentieth century. The Russian North refers to the northern regions of the European part of Russia, namely the Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions. In this territory, until the 1970s, women gave birth at home. They relied on the help of a mother-in-law or other older women, village midwives who possessed magic treatment techniques and helped women during delivery.

First-aid stations in the Vologda and Arkhangelsk regions started to appear in large villages in the 1930s and 1940s. A village woman had a

choice between giving birth with medical assistance (in a hospital or at home), or with an older female relative. Our materials show that more often women chose to give birth with a mother-in-law or a midwife. Women asked for help from older women or gave birth on their own because in most cases they did not have time to get to the medical station. The majority of older women had obstetric skills since they assisted in the birth of their livestock and they were experienced mothers themselves.

In this area it was customary for a bride to live in the husband's house, which could be located in a different village. After the wedding, the young family lived in the same house side-by-side with the parents of the spouse. When becoming a mother, a woman learned the skills of caring for an infant, such as ways of swaddling and calming a child, from her mother-in-law and not from her mother as often happens in modern Russian urban culture. The birth of the first child was a way of initiating a new relationship with her mother-in-law. It was the mother-in-law who was the mentor of a young woman and took upon herself the functions of caring for her and the baby. For example, she treated the baby in case of illness and steamed the baby in a sauna during his first year of life. This was not only a hygienic procedure but also considered an act of magical protection from the evil eye of neighbors or the negative influence of supernatural forces.

At the same time, a woman entered a new community – a community of mothers who gave birth. They provided each other with support and care, for example, by bringing food to the woman after the delivery. Initiation into a new community included two types of practices, physical and verbal. We distinguish the bodily practices and the discursive forms that accompany them. The demonstration of bodily skills could be accompanied by words. For example, a midwife prompted poses for delivery (in the village tradition in this area, women often gave birth standing, leaning on something, or squatting). A midwife took the baby in her arms after birth and tied the umbilical cord.

While observing the village practices and going through childbirth ourselves, we found out that there is a different way of talking about pregnancy and childbirth in the village. While urban citizens calmly discuss pregnancy and exchange information about it, in the village it is still a taboo. The conviction underlying the taboo is based on the concept of the *sglaz* ("evil eye") and *porcha* ("direct damage"). The evil eye and direct damage are included in the magical practices of the village and they are still important to this community. Village women say that the fewer people know about the onset of labor, the easier it will be. Therefore, the future

mother and her family tried to hide the circumstances of pregnancy, the onset of labor, and the choice of a place for delivery.

To discuss childbirth, women use a special type of speech that they learn in the process of their first birth. These new discursive skills are a way to talk about childbirth and a way of going through the process of initiation into maternity. Our research suggests that this is not only about covert bodily practices, but also about speech during the practice. Changing speech behavior through allegory and euphemisms is one response to discuss taboo subjects when language use becomes shaped by fear or distaste¹. Based on the taboo nature of childbirth, we assume we are dealing with a particular ritual speech.

According to J. Du Bois², who studied the general properties of ritual speech based on the material of various languages of Central and North America, Madagascar, Indonesia, and other regions, taboos, concepts substitution, allegories, and metaphors are common features of the ritual register. These are the verbal tools that village women use when they need to talk about childbirth. Below, we discuss the participants of this speech and the way they practice it, the conventions that regulate it, and the purposes it serves.

Northern Russian villagers do not talk about pregnancy and the onset of childbirth. A pregnant woman, a woman in labor, and the baby are all in a liminal state; they are subject to the influence of supernatural forces and the evil eye. The evil eye is associated with a person's ability to look at you or think something wrong³. For example, a woman born in 1915 was talking about her difficult labor. An old neighbor went into the house where the woman in labor was having contractions and directly asked if she was in delivery. According to the narrator, a direct question was enough to disrupt the birth process because a neighbor jinxed her. She concluded her story with the following advice: "no one should see you when you go to give birth". It means that a pregnant woman should avoid any extraneous contact.

Researchers in ethnographic descriptions of the rites of passage associated with pregnancy and childbirth most often emphasize concealing the birth process to facilitate it and protect it from evil spirits⁴. One of the methods of such magical protection was a particular restraint in the use of

¹ Crawford 2008.

² Du Bois 1986.

³ Olson - Adonyeva 2016, 235-242; Veselova - Marinicheva 2012, 51-75.

⁴ Gennep 1999, 44; Frazer 1980, 201-202.

words. There is a rule not to notice someone else's pregnancy or talk about it. For example, a male neighbor joked about a pregnant woman, comparing her situation to a chicken sitting on eggs. He was sick after some time and explained the cause of his illness by the pregnant woman's evil eye because he violated the taboo on direct questions about pregnancy⁵.

Younger women did not directly discuss the upcoming event with the older ones. However, women indicate that the older women (i.e., women much older than the woman in labor) dedicated them to childbearing issues. The older women did not talk about childbirth but taught the younger ones a new way of perceiving the world in which there are not only people but also supernatural forces⁶. Elders do not explain why it is better not to tell anyone about the onset of childbirth. This action should protect the young woman, who does not fully understand what is happening. As any neophyte, the woman in labor must completely trust the mentor (mother-in-law). E.A. Belousova, while studying modern urban childbirth in Russia, noted that medical workers also use euphemisms in communicating with pregnant women and women in labor. For example, during birth, midwives will call for women with the phrase "come on!". The modern urban tradition, similar to the village, treats the birth process knowledge as a special secret (taboo). Doctors give advice and prescriptions not directly but in a form of a threat, reproach, or invective⁷.

As I.A. Sedakova notes, the women's speech behavior changes during birth and for some time after⁸. She speaks quietly, does not raise her voice, or shout. Such rules appear in our materials. In the interview examples, we see how women in labor who have begun the birth process are silent about this, not talking about their condition to their mother-in-law, who will later help them in delivery⁹. Our interlocutors reported that during childbirth it is necessary to restrain screaming. G.I. Kabakova, on the material of the Southern Slavic dialects, notes that women and her entourage do not directly name the approach of childbirth but replace it with euphemisms¹⁰.

Researchers of the modern urban maternity rite in Russia also note the taboo associated with delivery. T.B. Shchepanskaya notes that those around her often use taboo advice to communicate with a pregnant woman

⁵ Folklore Archive of the Philological Faculty of St. Petersburg State University (hereafter FA) Bel 19-116.

⁶ Olson - Adonyeva 2016, 252-256.

⁷ Belousova 2003, 344.

⁸ Sedakova 1998, 205-206.

⁹ FA Lesh10-88; FA Lesh10-152.

¹⁰ Kabakova 2001, 208.

in the city¹¹. For example, it is understood that a pregnant woman should not be afraid, talk about difficult births, or mention a baby's pathologies. You cannot quarrel in the presence of a pregnant woman. Even in maternity hospitals, women did not inform their relatives about the start of childbirth in order for it to be successful¹².

This essay is based on the material of our own field research and the research of our colleagues, records which are stored in the open Russian Archive of Russian Daily Life and Folklore Archive at St. Petersburg State University. The interviews were conducted in the territory of the Russian North: in the Vologda region from 1980 to 2006 and in the Arkhangelsk region from 2007 to 2018. We analyzed nearly 300 stories in which village women talk about their childbirth. The oldest women interviewed were born at the beginning of the twentieth century, the youngest ones were born at the beginning of the 1960s. It is important to consider age when discussing changes or preservation of the tradition.

1. RITUAL SPEECH IN THE PROCESS OF DELIVERY

Village women use a special discourse to discuss delivery. Evidence of this fact can be found in ethnographic sources from the end of the nineteenth century. For example, a relative who leaves for the help of a midwife tries to conceal his or her route (i.e., does not show where he or she goes), and then begins a conversation with the midwife allegorically, using formulas known only to them. They might speak allegorically without uttering the word "delivery" itself, but by using euphemisms such as "the wife broke a leg"¹³. Our materials show that women try to avoid referring to childbirth directly. According to the signs of ritual speech by Du Bois, in the speech of women, there are allegories and metaphors instead of direct indications of the state of the woman in labor.

1.1. *Euphemisms and metaphors*

A woman born in 1933 in the Arkhangelsk oblast, while talking about her labor, recalls that she did not tell her mother-in-law that she had con-

¹¹ Shepanskaya 2001, 240.

¹² Kruglyakova 2001, 222.

¹³ Baranov *et al.* 2005, 458.

tractions. When her mother-in-law came home and noticed the state of her daughter-in-law and realized what was happening to her, she did not say so directly. The mother-in-law only said: "You're not feeling (looking) so well today, mother (dear)"¹⁴, without naming her state aloud. The mother-in-law uses the euphemism "not well", which indirectly indicates the physical condition of the woman in labor. Also, when addressing her daughter-in-law, the mother-in-law uses the word "mother" to address her. In ordinary speech, it is impossible for seniors to address younger ones like this. This indicates a switch to the ritual register¹⁵.

A woman from the Leshukonsky District (Arkhangelsk oblast), born in 1929, said that when she had contractions, two women came to ask for water. The older one understood what was happening but did not ask the woman directly. She went to the woman's mother-in-law and hinted allegorically that the daughter-in-law was in agony. "Agafya Andreevna, *your molodka* (daughter-in-law), she is in her time, and she is all alone"¹⁶. In this phrase, the direct naming of the beginning of contractions is replaced by the circumstance of time, and an indication that the woman gives birth alone, which means that she needs help.

Female solidarity and an understanding of what is happening without additional words can be confirmed by other examples. A mother-in-law sent her neighbors to visit her daughter-in-law who was pregnant and lived in a different village, and there had been no news from her for a few days. The mother-in-law talked to the neighbor like this: "Please, go, my *molodka* (my girl) hasn't come back from Edoma for a few days, she's a little pregnant [...]"¹⁷. "A little pregnant" is a diminishing of the significance of the condition of a pregnant woman. She also calls her pregnant daughter-in-law *devka* (a girl). Such appeal is used only for addressing young and not married women, but not for a daughter-in-law.

1.2. Opaque meanings

We found the following examples in which women, when talking about the onset of labor, use meaning opaqueness¹⁸ or generally avoid naming

¹⁴ FA Lesh10-88.

¹⁵ Adonyeva 2018, 148.

¹⁶ FA Lesh10-228.

¹⁷ Electronic Archive "Russian Everyday Life" (Propp Centre), <http://daytodaydata.ru> (hereafter EA) DTxt11-125_Arch-Lesh_11-07-11.

¹⁸ Du Bois 1986, 318.

this process in any way. A woman born in 1930, who went into labor during haymaking and did not have time to return home to the village, hid in the tent and called her mother-in-law to help her without mentioning directly what kind of help she needed: “Vasilisa Ivanovna, come here [...] I kind of need help”¹⁹.

Village midwives helped in case of a difficult childbirth. As a rule, women gave birth on their own, and a mother-in-law helped to take care of the baby and tie the umbilical cord. A woman, addressing her mother-in-law, could say: “Look there, I’m leaving”²⁰. This phrase means that she is gone for delivery but naming the process of labor is completely absent. When the mother-in-law understood that her daughter-in-law is in labor, she could say: “Let’s go, *molodka* (mother), to the barn”²¹. In this example, there are diminutives of “mother” and “barn”. The increase of diminutives in speech indicates a switch to the ritual register. Instead of naming the childbirth process, the mother-in-law talks about the place of birth, the barn.

Casual communication between close people consists of such omissions, which are understandable to relatives but completely incomprehensible to a stranger without further clarification. According to G. Garfinkel²², background knowledge, in which familiar life situations unfold, makes it possible to have a common understanding and agreement of reality. For a mother-in-law, a husband, and a midwife, and for everybody who knows in general, there are enough euphemistic indications of the state of the woman in labor. This is because it is expressed not only verbally, but also physically. “She is not looking so well” is a clear indication for a midwife.

General background knowledge shared between relatives is based not on direct speech, but on the woman’s body language. In close relations with the mother-in-law, the daughter-in-law does not need to say anything at all. A sensitive mother-in-law can understand just an ordinary gesture or sign. For example, a Mezen’ woman born in 1922 recalled her mother’s labor²³. After the delivery, her mother knocked on the wall of a barn with a shovel. It was a sign which meant that she needed help with her newborn: her mother-in-law (who was also present in the house) had to go to the barn and take the infant.

¹⁹ FA Lesh10-189.

²⁰ EA DAu02-077_Vol-Bel_02-07-15.

²¹ EA DAu02-076_Vol-Bel_02-07-13 FA.

²² Garfinkel 1967.

²³ FA Mez10-241.

2. VOCABULARY FOR DESCRIBING THE DELIVERY

Despite prohibitions on discussing the state of the woman in labor, there is a large number of verbs in the speech of village women that denote the physical condition of the woman in labor and describe it quite accurately. Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, medical aid stations appeared in the villages, and a nurse or a professional midwife would often help women during childbirth. Village women, especially those born in the 1940s and 1950s, used the word “contractions” in their speech to denote the very beginning of labor. These women, while talking about delivery, used medical terms (“childbirth”, “contractions”, “pushing”) because they gave birth with medical assistants. Women of the previous generation called childbirth *prinosi*. This word has the same root as the verb “to bring” (*prinosit*) as children were literally “brought” in the hems of their sundresses.

2.1. *Verbal forms*

When speaking of childbirth, women often use special verbal forms. For example:

- Khvatat'/prikhvatyvat' — to catch
- Prinimat'/zaprinimat' — to take
- Zamotat'sya — to be tired out (to worn out)
- Priperet' — to press
- Muchat'/zamuchat' — to torture
- Pritoropit' — to hurry up
- Zabrat' — to take
- Vikryakat' — to make a quacking sound

Unfortunately, the translations here do not convey the meaning of these dialect verbs; they are used only in dialect discourse, and they are far from medical terms.

2.2. *Shifter avoidance*

Phrases used to indicate childbirth are usually impersonal forms in a passive voice:

- Menya zaprinimalo — I was taken in
- Menya pritoropilo — I was hurried out
- Menya stalo brat' nakorotki — I began to be taken on short ones

This language allows a woman, on one hand, to accurately describe what is happening to her with the onset of labor at the level of bodily feelings. And on the other hand, the woman in labor abandons the responsibility for her condition at the level of speech. Impersonal forms emphasize her absence as a subject, stressing the body feelings.

2.3. *Metaphors and onomatopoeia*

The physical vocabulary of the woman in labor is very metaphorical, which also allows us to say that when a woman speaks about herself during delivery, she switches the register of speech. As such, one of the most frequently used words meaning delivery is the lexeme with the root “torture”. In the *Explanatory Dictionary* of Vladimir Dahl among the examples for the word “torment” there are such phrases as “a woman in agony / torment”, in the meaning of “woman in delivery”²⁴. Another example is the process of pushing: women use the verb *vikryakat* (to make a quacking sound), formed from the onomatopoeia “quack”.

The situation changed in the middle of the twentieth century. The help of a village midwife or a mother-in-law began to be supplemented by medical professionals. Medical records and the monitoring of pregnancy were introduced in the villages beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. In large villages, women were obliged to consult a doctor. However, young women continued to hide the symptoms of an approaching delivery before the onset of the contractions. For example, a woman born in 1926, while sharing her experience, told us that she had endured contractions for so long that when she was in the medical center, she did not have time to go up to the second floor and so gave birth on the stairs²⁵.

We have a large number of stories about childbirth on the way to the hospital as a reflection of this. Due to the medical advances, women decided to give birth not at home, but with medical assistance. However, they went to the medical center too late; for the women, the signal to go to the hospital was the point when contractions were close to their end because this was the signal used when they delivered to mothers-in-law and midwives.

²⁴ Dahl 1912, 950.

²⁵ EA Siam 06.07.06. L.K.txt.

3. CONCLUSION

Analyzing interviews with village women who talked about childbirth, we noticed that their spontaneous speech on the subject shares the same language strategies with ritual speech²⁶. Moreover, these language qualities persist even when women remember their own childbearing. In villages, older women (midwives, mothers-in-law) were assistants and mentors in childbirth for a long time. The main task of the midwife was to provide emotional support to the mother. The elders taught the younger ones a new perception of the world, in which it is now necessary to interact with people and supernatural forces. Analysis of the interview texts shows that our informants most often use euphemisms, allegory, and diminutives in stories about childbirth. Also, a change in speech tempo and intonation indicates a switch to the ritual speech. Such speech qualities mean that women in labor and midwives address people and supernatural powers. Euphemisms and speech taboos appear in women's speech not only because this topic was taboo or shameful. The task, among other things, was to protect women in labor from the evil eye of people and the negative influence of supernatural powers.

In the second half of the twentieth century, shame was another reason why women tried not to talk to others about what was happening to them. In conclusion, we only touch on the larger topic of the medicalization of childbirth. Many researchers of modern maternity practices indicate that shame was planted by medical personnel who tried to control the female body. As a result, the habitus of concealment and sacralization of childbirth can be observed in studies of both village and urban culture up to the present day. In the village, women assess risks, justify preferences and make choices between the allegory of mothers-in-law and the direct and degrading discourse of doctors.

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CHARMS, CHANGELINGS, AND CHATTER: SONIC MAGIC IN THE “SECUNDA PASTORUM”

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-harl>

ABSTRACT

Mak, a sheep thief and occasional “nigromancer”, performs several acts of magic in the course of the *Second Shepherds’ Play* (*Secunda Pastorum*), including a charm and a multilingual incantation. The play’s subplot parallels the story of the Christ child’s birth and is sometimes seen as a demonic inversion of that holy narrative. But outlaw Mak and his trickster wife are not the only characters who resort to verbal magic. The shepherds utter macaronic charms and so too does the Virgin Mary at the sublime conclusion of the play. It has long been noted that the author was fascinated with the power of words – both profane and holy – and music – both cacophonous and sublime. In his sonic universe, magical language plays a similarly important role. Intriguingly, the Wakefield Master does not use a binary evaluatory system for verbal magic like the one he implies for speech or music. Instead, verbal magic in the form of charms, incantations, and folk prayers is the tool of sinners and saints. Characters in the *Secunda Pastorum* perform a wide range of verbal magic which likely cast a rhetorical spell on early audience members, many of whom used similar verbal magic in their own lives.

Keywords: charms; magic; performance; *Second Shepherds’ Play*; sound.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mak, a sheep thief and occasional “nigromancer”, performs several acts of magic in the course of the *Second Shepherds’ Play* (*Secunda Pastorum*), including a charm and a multilingual incantation. The play’s subplot (concerning Mak’s sheep-stealing) parallels the story of the Christ child’s birth and is sometimes seen as a demonic inversion of that holy narrative. Mak,

in his role as a trickster, a magician, and the father of a “horned child”, has been seen by critics as a type of the Antichrist. But outlaw Mak and his trickster wife are not the only characters who resort to verbal magic in this famous play. The shepherds utter macaronic charms and so too, arguably, does the Virgin Mary at the sublime conclusion of the play.

It has long been noted that the author of this most powerful and idiosyncratic of the Towneley mystery plays, the so-called Wakefield Master, was fascinated with the power of words – both profane and holy – and music – both cacophonous and sublime¹. In his sonic universe, magical language plays an important role. Intriguingly, the Wakefield Master does not present us with a binary evaluatory system for verbal magic like the one he implies for the spoken word (mad bluster and verbosity are presented as agents of evil; calm, measured, or lyrical words as serving the holy) or music (crotchety or off-key singing versus the harmonizing of the angels). Instead, verbal magic in the form of charms, incantations, and folk prayers is the tool of both sinners and saints. Characters in the *Secunda Pastorum* perform a wide range of verbal magic, and in doing so probably cast a rhetorical spell over the late medieval audience as well, many of whom likely used similar charms, incantations, and prayers in their own lives.

The author of the play connects the performance of magic with the magic of miracle, and even conflates them at the end of the play. Rather than demonize all acts of magic, the playwright contextualizes folk magic within a larger frame of supernatural wonder and miracle². Drawing upon current scholarship on the magic practice of both laypeople and clergy in late medieval Britain, this study examines the magic utterances in the *Secunda Pastorum*, which were scripted to impact a crowd that might have reacted powerfully to the performance of spells, gibberish, and magical inversions. Audiences could have seen their own living practice mirrored in the play, and would thus have been brought to contemplate the greatest magic of all – the miracle of Christ’s birth at the play’s culmination.

¹ The notion of a Wakefield Master, a single author of the five plays in bob and wheel stanzaic form and preserved in Huntington MS HM 1, has been thoroughly and convincingly challenged by Dane 2009, 57-74, and Epp 2017, among others. I continue to use the controversial and admittedly retrograde epithet “Wakefield Master” as a shorthand for the author/s of this marvelous play, simply because it *is* a masterpiece, and the person/s who created it deserves the epithet.

² St. Augustine argued that all magic issued from the Devil or was assisted by demonic forces. See *de Civitate Dei*, VII 19, translated by Dyson, Augustine 1998, 339-341.

2. CHARMS, CHANGELINGS, AND CHERRIES

The *Secunda Pastorum* begins with three shepherds – Col, Gib, and Daw – watching over their flocks by night. They are met by the trickster and thief Mak, who joins their group and steals a sheep while the other shepherds sleep (Mak has charmed them in order to rob them). The three shepherds awaken to find their sheep missing and track it back to Mak’s home, where he and his wife have swaddled the animal and laid it in a cradle. The shepherds recover the lost sheep and then hear the angels singing about the birth of the Christ child. They then visit the nativity and present gifts to Mary and the baby.

In general, the charms and incantations performed in the play are pastiches of groups of prayers and cross-signings found in vernacular sources and in some contemporary books of hours. This large number of sources suggests widespread use and knowledge³. The first occurs when the trickster Mak enters the dramatic action clad in a cloak and utters a strange prayer to God with his seven names⁴:

Now, Lord, for thy naymes sevn,
 That made both moyn and starnes
 Well mo then I can neven,
 Thi will, Lorde, of me tharnys.
 I am all uneven;
 That moves oft my harnes.
 Now wold God I were in heaven,
 For ther wepe no barnes
 So styll. (274-282)

The troubles and irritations of everyday life have thrown Mak out of alignment; his evocation of cosmic order suggests he can be redeemed – and that the Wakefield Master has sympathy for him. But his use of the names of God in his wry deathwish also aligns him with magic. Robert E. Jungmann has noted that this invocation is likely an indication that the Wakefield Master was knowledgeable about medieval magic and demonology, as the seven names of God are used to make acts of conjuring more efficacious⁵. Mak’s entrance into the action (on a dark night in the wilderness)

³ See Munson 1985, 187.

⁴ *Tunc intrat Mak in clamide se super logam vestitus*. For a discussion of parallels in the Chester Plays and *Lay La Fresne*, see Marshall 1972, 720-736.

⁵ Jungmann 1982, 27, points to a parallel in the *Lemegeton* and argues: “It does seem from the context of the play, however, that the author of the *Secunda Pastorum* was very

certainly aligns him dramatically with supernatural power, and, as we will soon see, he is indeed a conjuror.

The three shepherds (Mak's soon-to-be victims) are quite sensitive to the nocturnal uncanny as the Shepherd 3 (Daw) shows us when he joins the action: "We that walk on the nyghtys / Oure catell to kepe, We se sodan syghtys / When othere men slepe" (196-199). Such (implicitly supernatural) sudden sights make the three companions disinclined to trust visitors, but when Mak meets them in the bleak, cold fields, they reluctantly admit him into their company. When it is time to rest, they ask him to lie between them so he can't betray them. As Mak settles down to sleep, he utters the remarkable prayer:

Fro my top to my too,
Manus tuas commendo
Poncio Pilato;
 Cryst crosse me spede. (383-386)

As the editor notes, this "night spell" "echoes, in garbled Latin, part of a prayer recorded in a 1555 book of York Hours, which likewise calls for making the sign of the cross"⁶. This inappropriate parody of Christ's final words is amusing, but also sinister. The audience might have recognized a charm, or at least some profane mockery of ecclesiastical and liturgical speech. Whether effectual or not, Mak's corruption of biblical language, and his invocation of the Roman governor partially responsible for the passion, is problematic at best. His prayer is dramatically ironic – though it may fool the three shepherds into thinking the prayer will protect the sleepers from evil, the feared evil is literally in their midst, in the form of Mak himself. Mak then surges up from his deceptively recumbent position and casts a spell on the already sleeping shepherds:

Bot abowte you a serkyll
 As rownde as a moyn
 To I have done that I wyll,
 Tyll that it be noyn,
 That ye lyg stone styll

much aware of the special meaning which a reference to the seven names of God would have for anyone knowledgeable in medieval magic and demonology. That the Wakefield poet was himself knowledgeable in this area can be seen elsewhere".

⁶ The *Horae Eboracenses* (Wordsworth 1920, 26), a "layman's prayerbook" reads: *Per crucis hoc signum: fugiat procul omne malignum. Et per idem signum: saluetur quodque benignum. Per signum sancte crucis de inimicis nostris libera nos, Deus noster. In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum: redemisti me, Domine, Deus veritatis. Amen.*

To that I have doyne,
 And I shall say thertyll
 Of good wordys a foyne
 On hight:
 Over youre heydys my hand I lyft;
 Outt go youre een, fordo your syght
 Bot yit I must make better shyft
 And it be right. (400-411)

Mak draws “or otherwise creates” a classic charmed circle around the shepherds to keep them asleep until he escapes with the sheep he intends to steal⁷. Mak’s extravagant crossing of his whole body moves beyond habitual ritual into a magical performance⁸. When he says he must “make better shyft /and it be right”, there are likely other actions he must take to make the spell hold. Mak is invoking inanimate objects (the moon, a stone) that embody the trait he wishes to impose on his victims – immobility. The curse on the eyes is a spell that appears elsewhere in British folklore. This blindness motif occurs in extant materials in connection with supernatural (specifically fairy) activity⁹. Eyes are often a focus of magical anxiety (consider, for example, the widespread belief in the evil eye), and it seems that fairies have the power to take away human eyesight¹⁰. Mak’s symbolic “plucking out” of the recumbent shepherds’ eyes would likely have been seen as a sinister act aligned with occult forces like fairies and other invisible beings. His magic allows Mak to steal a “fat shepe” undetected, and head home to his wife (422).

After Mak has successfully stolen this sheep, Shepherd 1 (Coll) awakens and chants or sings a garbled (and presumably habitual) morning prayer:

Resurrex a mortuis,
Have hald my hand.
Judas carnas dominus,
I may not well stand;

⁷ See Epp 2017, editorial note, 400-412 for this discussion. Though many critics have read Mak’s spell as ineffectual and comically behind the dramatic action (since the shepherds have already resolved to sleep before Mak charms them), the way the shepherds become uncontrollably drowsy is nevertheless unnatural and uncanny.

⁸ Specifically, charms, which can be pastiches of groups of prayers and cross-signings found in vernacular sources and in contemporary books of hours (cf. Munson 1985, 187).

⁹ Two classic examples are the Middle English romance *Sir Launfal*, in which Guinevere is blinded by Sir Launfal’s fairy mistress (1006-1008); and *Tam Lin* (Child 39), in which the Queen of Fairy regrets she had not blinded Tam Lin before he escaped her realm.

¹⁰ See also Shepherd 2’s curse on Mak: “Mak, the dewill in youre ee” (313).

My foytt slepys, by Jesus,
 And I walter fastand.
 I thoght that we layd us
 Full nere Yngland. (504-511)

As Garrett Epp notes, “The first of these garbled Latin lines echoes the Creed (and part of a traditional morning prayer), ‘he rose from the dead’ (*resurrexit a mortuis*), while the second – likely a parodic distortion of a phrase such as *laudes canas domino* (‘sing praises to the lord’) translates as ‘Judas, flesh, lord’”¹¹. Coll’s awakening charm is humorously interlarded with protestations of creaky joints and feet that have fallen asleep, and the winking observation that they have awoken somewhere that looks remarkably like England, not the Holy Land¹². In this homely context, as compared to the malevolent prayer uttered by his false companion Mak, his inadvertent misuse of Christian prayer and substitution of the other great villain of the Passion seems ingenuous rather than sinister. His mistake is further domesticated by his aching mortal body¹³. In such a context, his sinful ignorance and his use of a garbled charm becomes endearing to the audience who recognize him as vulnerable to Mak’s trickery¹⁴.

As they awkwardly awaken from sleep, the shepherds gradually realize something is amiss. Sensing some diffuse malevolence, Shepherd 3 (Daw) becomes afraid; he thus uses a blessing as a prophylactic charm: “Bensté be herein! / So me qwakys; / my hart is out of skyn” (517-519). He goes on to describe a prophetic dream about Mak, who appeared “lapt / In a wolfe skyn” (531-532). He is enjoined by the second shepherd to “Be styll, / Thi dreame makys thee woode. / It is bot fantom, by the roode. / Now God turne all to good, / If it be his wyll” (538-542). Daw’s truthful dream plays with the commonplace that outlaws wear the wolf’s skin, and serves to further mark Mak as a dangerous, even demonic, figure¹⁵. Daw has been

¹¹ See Epp 2017, editorial note, 504-506, for this discussion.

¹² Morgan suggests there may be “a hint of magic or miracle in the Shepherd’s lines” here. See Morgan 1964, 678.

¹³ The prayer is in intertextual conversation with books of hours and courtesy manuals. See Munson 1985, 187: “Both charms mix fragments from the same group of prayers and cross-signing for laymen found in Books of Hours and indicated in vernacular sources”.

¹⁴ The shepherds use charms in *Prima Pastorum* as well, and there too their well-intentioned “charm casting” uses somewhat garbled Latin. See lines 417-425 and Epp’s note on the contexts of Gramarye.

¹⁵ See Edminster 2005 for a book-length discussion of this play cycle’s anticlerical carnivalesque satire involving the predatory preacher, and Harlan-Haughey 2016, 15-16 for an overview of medieval literature involving the vulpine or lupine outlaw.

vouchsafed divine knowledge from God that counteracts Mak’s malignant charm, and even though Shepherd 2 (Gib) dismisses the dream as phantasmic, it is in fact prophetic¹⁶. Nevertheless, in spite of his misreading of the situation, his extempore prayer arguably dispels the miasma that oppresses the scene owing to the previously misused words of power. This prayer possibly saves these lovable blunderers from their own ignorance and the forces of evil that conspire against them, as we shall see. Mak’s malign use of spells and charms is thus counterpointed by the other shepherds’ more innocent – even reflexive or habitual – use of incantation. Daw, arguably the hero of the episode, models the typical (albeit exaggeratedly incompetent) everyday use of charms, prophylactic prayers, and the like, while Mak’s spellcasting is extreme and dangerous¹⁷. Nevertheless the two contextualize one another within a continuum of normalcy. It is interesting to note that elsewhere in the play, the shepherds display a sound knowledge of doctrine and a graceful macaronic literacy – their ineptitude here is thus striking¹⁸.

A comic interlude follows the rustling of the sheep. The shepherds search for their stolen animal and, after some humorous obfuscation on the part of Mak and his wife Gill, find it swaddled in the couple’s much-used cradle. As the shepherds first offer gifts and congratulations, then become suspicious of the “baby”, the two thieves become more outrageous in their lies. Consider, for example, this blasphemous oath, uttered by Gill to assuage the shepherds’ suspicions:

A, my medyll.
 I pray to God so mylde,
 If ever I you begyld,
 That I ete this chylde
 That lygys in this credyll. (772-776)

¹⁶ For the distinction between different types of dreams, see Macrobius’ *Somnium Scipionis*, 87-92. Other Middle English fictions in which a character fatefully misinterprets the type of dream he has been vouchsafed include Chaucer’s “Nun’s Priest’s Tale”, in which Pertelote wrongly dismisses Chaunticler’s prophetic dream of the fox as a product of indigestion, and *The Lytel Geste of Robin Hode*, in which Little John dismisses Robin’s dream of capture as a “swift sweven” (lines 13-17).

¹⁷ See Mack 1978, 81, for a reading of Mak’s magic as inept and ineffectual.

¹⁸ Consider Gib’s: “For Isay sayd so: / *Ecce virgo / Concipiet a chylde that is nakyd*” (982-983). And Shepherd 1: “Patryarkes that has bene, / And prophetys beforne, / Thay desyryd to have sene / This chylde that is borne. / Thay ar gone full clene; / That have thay lorne. / We shall se hym, I weyn, / Or it be morne / To tokyn” (998-1006).

This oath seems false but is actually technically true – Mak and his wife do intend to consume their ill-gotten sheep-baby. The strangeness intensifies, as does the threat of the supernatural, as Daw wryly observes the oddity of the swaddling job:

Wyll ye se how thay swedyll
 His foure feytt in the medyll?
 Sagh I never in a credyll
 A hornyd lad or now. (364-367)

The baby is now both decidedly unsettling and humorously demonic. This uncertainty about its ontology feeds into anxieties about changelings and the power of language to transform reality. As Mak and his wife become aware they can no longer hide their horned lad's true nature, they play their most desperate hand – one which plays on the shepherds' superstitions:

He was takyn with an elfe;
 I saw it myself.
 When the klok stroke twelf
 Was he forshapyn. (890-893)

Such a monstrous “forshapyn” child would be a changeling, a human baby who was “stolen” by supernatural agents and replaced with an uncanny double¹⁹. The concept of the changeling appears frequently in English mystery plays, perhaps reflecting vernacular anxieties about Christ as a sort of changeling Himself²⁰. In this case, the sheep baby is literally a changeling, if not of the supernatural kind. The humor and dramatic irony around his advent in Mak and his wife's hut gains its power from the sheep-baby's contrast with the truly supernatural baby lying in another cradle nearby. Though the shepherds discover the trick and punish the rustlers, the specter of the changeling has been raised, and will haunt the rest of the play.

After the absurd comedy of the false nativity, the shepherds are guided by the angels' transcendent polyphonic song to the true nativity, where they marvel at the scene and offer the Christ child some idiosyncratic gifts – a “handsel for the mare” (a charm to scare off night demons) and a miraculous bunch of winter cherries. Again, their use of charms to ward off evil is sweetly misguided – the Christ child will be the greatest warder-off of evil the world has seen, and presumably needs no handsel. The author,

¹⁹ This is “a parodic nativity whose force cannot have been lost on even the most obtuse spectator” (Green 2016, 132).

²⁰ Green 2016, 128.

however, allows no note of ridicule to intrude on the tender scene. In fact, the inclusion of the cherry bob serves to mark the shepherds as uniquely blessed, in spite of themselves. The cherry tree miracle functions in clear contrast to Mak’s false miracles, and connects the action of the first half of the play to the divine birth. Note the tone of relief in the shepherds’ words as they laugh and play with the infant, whose birth has foiled the “warlock” (ambiguously either the Devil or Mak)²¹:

Thou has waryd, I weyne,
 The warlo so wylde;
 The fals gyler of teyn
 Now goys he begylde.
 Lo, he merys.
 Lo, he laghys, my swetyng.
 A welfare metyng;
 I have holden my hetyng.
 Have a bob of cherys. (1028-1036)

The cherry tree miracle is a common folk motif in Middle English literature. Miraculous unseasonality appears as early as the Old English *Andreas*, and the specific motif of the cherry in midwinter appears in the “Cherry Tree Carol”, in the N-Town Cycle “Nativity Play”, the romance *Sir Cliges*, and here²². In each case the cherry tree produces its miraculous fruit in response to a rash speech act (Joseph’s shame at cuckoldry, Sir Cleges’ despair at his bankruptcy, and as I argue, in this play, the misuse of powerful verbal magic). The cherry tree miracle is a Marian (or at least a Christmas) miracle, with its fruitful abundance in winter, but it is also certainly a verbal magic – though in this play the miracle might seem oblique²³.

The transgression of the play is righted by Mary’s correct use of the same numinous lexicon originally invoked by Mak when he called upon

²¹ “The reference to the seven names of God helps to characterize Mak as an inept magician or warlock, that is, a male witch” (Jungmann 1982, 26).

²² See *Andreas* lines 1448-1449, and “Nativity” (N-Town), lines 26-43. The “Cherry-Tree Carol”: “O then bespoke Joseph, / With words most unkind: Let him pluck thee a cherry / That brought thee with child” (Child 1860, 2.2). Douglas Sugano, the editor of the N-Town “Nativity”, notes the “cheerful spontaneity of Coll’s ‘Have a bob of cherys’ at the end of the Second Shepherd’s Play (Towneley 13.1036), which also celebrates the generous a-seasonality of the Christmas gift” (Sugano 2007, note to line 39). This joyful offering contrasts sharply with Joseph’s attempted reprimand of his wife in “The Cherry-Tree Carol”.

²³ See Guilfoyle 1978, 212-215 for a discussion of the cherry branch incident in this play.

the seven names of God. After the shepherds' gift giving, Mary speaks and arguably closes the magical circle opened by Mak when he alluded to the seven names of God. Mary's charm – and her echo of God's seven names in her rhyme – is true magic, straight from the source, and it links with the earlier stanza in repeated imagery and rhyme:

The Fader of heven,
 God omny potent,
 That sett all on seven,
 His Son has he sent.
 My name couth he neven
 And lyght or he went.
 I conceyvyd hym full even
 Through myght as he ment,
 And now is he borne.
 He kepe you fro wo;
 I shall pray hym so.
 Tell furth as ye go
 And myn on this morne. (1063-1075)²⁴

Mary's peroration deploys specific diction shared with Mak's charm (seven, heaven, naming, God). It returns to themes introduced in Mak's speech and reverses them. If Mak rued the birth of unwanted "barnes" that weep, Mary revels in her child's birth; if Mak spoke feelingly of mortal woe, Mary prays that God keep the shepherds from it. There can be little doubt that this is an intentional chiasitic structure that is meant to call our memory back to Mak's charm and neutralize it.

Mary is a common actor in charms and her actions serve to protect, cure, and ward off danger, natural and supernatural. Here, her counter-charm protects the previously vulnerable shepherds from "woe", but the performance of this incantation charms the audience as well. The author's careful chiasitic structure – with Mak's introduction of the seven names of God and Mary's closure with the same – opens up a magic space within the play where words have power to invoke the supernatural, and anything becomes possible. As a result, we see a wide range of different kinds of charms, folk prayers, and spells. I argue here that the Wakefield Master sees these as a set of related practices, and presents them as such²⁵.

²⁴ For further discussion, see Zimbardo 1978, 405.

²⁵ In this, the playwright is in sync with pastoral writers, who, as Rider notes, may have been making "realistic concession[s] to current attitudes" when they "shared this widespread view that not all charms were magic". They recognized that many were useful,

3. THE SONIC CHARMING CONTINUUM

Secunda Pastorum operates in a dream logic of analogy and inversion, veering wildly from horror to hilarity, from nonsense to wondrous sublimity²⁶. The play is rich with symbolism and magic, and features many incantatory speech acts, including several charms, the invocation of the specter of changelings, the verbal transformation of an outlaw into a wolf/Satan, the use of handsels, and arguably, an episode of great white magic in the *magnum mysterium* of Christ’s birth. The play’s episodes mirror one another – the demonic changeling is mirrored or counteracted by the Christ child, and the malignant magic of Mak and the inept use of charms by the shepherds is enclosed or contained by Mary’s completion of his opening rhyme and the cherry tree miracle²⁷. Albin, in particular, has shown that the work is sonically coherent:

Sensitivity to the Chester Shepherds’ soundedness in performance reveals that its climactic action – an angel singing a sophisticated Gloria, its audience of shepherds responding with playful macaronic Latin – stands not as an isolated outburst but rather as the concentrated centre of a thoroughgoing network of meaningful sound that stretches from the play’s first to its last line. By reading the Chester Shepherds play with ears attuned to its sounded dimension, we gain insight into how the play fostered opportunities for interanimating presence, identity, and community by manipulating the aural space of late-medieval theatrical enactment to draw an audience into sonorous presence. The play patterns sounds, verbal and otherwise, into a meaning-bearing experience of sound in its own right in order to develop a dynamic acoustic space in which present sounding and hearing can become the fulcrum of redemptive meaning.²⁸

The Wakefield Master sets up a marvelous concatenation of sound, charm, magic, and miracle. What is intriguing about the author’s use of verbal

and “churchmen’s views of magical cures probably also shaped the charms that were copied in medieval England”. It is significant that “the majority of surviving charms do not include unknown words. Instead, they used words which were known, such as Greek words like *agios* (meaning ‘holy’), names for God, or the names of saints and other biblical figures: the names of the three Magi in the New Testament were believed to act as a charm against epilepsy, for example” (Rider 2013, 57). The prayers, charms, and spells performed in this play are mostly known words, though misused – and therein lies the rub.

²⁶ Unsurprisingly, it has lent itself to Bakhtinian readings: see Bowers 2002; Templeton 2001; Edminster 2000.

²⁷ On this see Zimbardo 1988, 405.

²⁸ Albin 2013, 33.

magic is that even when wielded by wicked characters – even ones inverting holy names or using the name of Pontius Pilate instead of that of Jesus Christ – they are not necessarily demonized. The playwright seems to have been too subtle (or merciful) a theologian for that. Some charms and spells (as well such “vayn carpynge” as crotchety songs and demonic gibberish) are certainly products of a postlapsarian, post-babelian world, a world where the Word has become words – scattered between the three realms and used for all sorts of purposes²⁹. As such, they are imperfect in their efficacy, but, to use a relevant example from our play, the shepherds are not punished for using Judas’ name in a waking charm; in fact, they are obliquely rewarded with their privileged and transcendent vision of the holy nativity. This is consonant with current critical opinion of charms and charmings as paraliturgical performance of mainstream religion, not, as previously supposed, relics or evidence of alternative religious practice³⁰. But even this sublime vision does not nudge these mortals away from interaction with magic (the cherry miracle) or the misuse or abuse of language and sound. Their imperfect, if eager and charming, emulation of the divine song of the angels suggests they, and all humans by analogy, will soon slide back to our own imperfect use of language, verbal charms and all. In the expansive and humanistic work of the Wakefield playwright, that is perfectly fine.

4. POPULAR MAGIC AND MIMICRY

The Wakefield Author is attuned to all sonic registers and seems to delight in all of them, while perhaps at the same time, as Stevens notes, “It seems that the Wakefield Author willfully provided a caution against the very fiber of his own art, as if to warn that the voice of poetry in the context of the highest verities can beguile its auditors. There is in the Wakefield Plays a strong, implicit argument against the enchantment of art, and an equally strong affirmation of the artless”³¹. The same is true in the more specific

²⁹ See Stevens 1977, 101-102. Stevens notes: “Catherine Dunn has pointed out that there is a basic lyric voice in the Towneley cycle which she calls ‘the voice of the Church’ (‘la voix de l’église’), a voice that is highly subjective and that speaks or even chants characteristically in patterned sound structures”.

³⁰ See for example Rider 2013, 67-69; Roper 2003b, 26.

³¹ Stevens 1977, 104. On the range and complexity of the Wakefield author’s art, see 105.

instances of the use of verbal magic; even if dangerous in the wrong hands, one senses that the author affirms the simple piety of the shepherds’ attempts to influence the world with their prayers and charms. The play begins with taboo words, gibberish – sound and terror, and the invocation of the monstrous unknown³². Then follow Mak’s entrance and his wolfish behavior and use of malevolent charms. After the shepherd’s macaronic charms, we are led to Gill’s false oath and the uncertainty about the nature of the “baby”, which taps into popular belief about charms, children, and changelings. These verbal magics are followed by the transcendent finale, where spells are echoed and inverted by the voice of the Virgin herself, and the changeling sheep-baby is cancelled out by the true miraculous “changeling”, the Christ child³³.

On the level of the magical sonic continuum, this play preserves a demotic register³⁴. As Richard Firth Green attests, “the mystery plays come closer than most other medieval literary genres to preserving the flavor of common speech”³⁵. The plays spoke peoples’ language on purpose, and the people likely spoke back to the plays – their viewing of the late-medieval spectacles meant entering into a contract of reciprocity, a kind of “binding talk” with a “participation framework specific to it”³⁶. Moreover, when we consider Albin’s reading of sonorous presence and the interanimation of community and identity in late medieval theatre, we must recognize that early audiences would likely be familiar with the types of charms and prayers that are exaggeratedly performed by the players³⁷. In what follows, I speculate about the audience’s engagement with traditions

³² “I trow the shrew can paynt, / The dewyll myght hym hang!” (304-305).

³³ The shepherds’ hail can be read as a performance of the popular sacred, an incantation to God. In contrast to Mak’s misuse of the supernatural (and the shepherd’s deluded charming upon waking), their homespun yet transcendent hail to the newborn child serves as an example of true faith made beautiful in spite of limitations.

³⁴ “There can be little doubt that the farcical plot of the Second Shepherds play was deliberately meant to emphasize the dissonances of everyday life” (Stevens 1977, 115).

³⁵ Green 2016, 128. See also 138 on the voice of the little tradition in the mystery plays.

³⁶ See the discussion of “footing” in Goffman 1979, 140. I follow Martha Feldman’s manifesto here: “The various orders of meaning between onstage action and offstage reaction would be understood as shared and intersecting, and as rituals transacted between audience and staged event. In short, the inclusive view taken (especially) in studies of ceremony would help break down the dichotomy between doer and viewer” (Feldman 1995, 443).

³⁷ See Albin’s discussion of “straddling” (Albin 2013, 35). For a different implied audience, see Johnston 2015, 139-140.

of word magic in late medieval England, asking how audiences might have seen themselves and their neighbors reflected in the play's soundscape of popular charms, crossings, and incantations, and how this may help us understand the role of the charms in the first part of the play – their power and their menace.

While the portrayal of charms is particularly common in late medieval drama, it is not unique to the genre. Popular use and misuse of charms are parodied or mimicked in other late Middle English literature, though as Jonathan Roper has argued, we must distinguish between literary representation of charms and charms themselves³⁸. The charms and prayers performed in this play are either exaggerated parodies or fairly realistic representations of actual practice, the practice of both professionals and laypeople. It is important to emphasize that the use of charms is not at odds with Christian practice. As David Elton Gay notes in his work on the Christianity of incantations: "Christianity has since its inception accorded great power to the demonic and to words of power that could confront and defeat demonic incursions into this world". As charm scholarship has demonstrated, the boundaries between magic and religion are notoriously difficult to demarcate³⁹. Earlier than the late medieval period, clergy had banned all "incantations" but it is unclear what this meant on the ground⁴⁰. Gay notes "the difficulties encountered in defining charms as something other than religious or as completely distinct from prayer"⁴¹. This ambiguity of definition could make performance of charms charged loci of religious praxis⁴². On the one hand, many were commonplace and officially accepted means of effecting power and protection in one's life. On the other hand, the misuse of verbal magic could potentially endanger the user as well as innocent victims.

Thus, the audience might have laughed sympathetically at the shepherds' sleeping and waking prayers, felt a frisson of fear at Mak's occult incantations, and laughed at his parody of the behavior of friars, famous

³⁸ For example, the creation of a magic circle for the purpose of blessing or conjuring is attested in several late Middle English sources. See Green 2016, 131, and Roper 2003, 50.

³⁹ See also Rider 2013, 46, on the "major problem medieval English churchmen faced when they thought about magic: how to distinguish it from legitimate religion. Like the borderline between magic and the natural world, the line between magic and religion was difficult to identify, and different people could take very different views of practices which were close to that borderline".

⁴⁰ Rider 2013, 56.

⁴¹ Gay 2004, 37.

⁴² Gay 2004, 34.

users of charms and benedictions, and they would likely have responded with relief to Mary’s charm at the end of the performance that blesses them and allows them to escape the magic circle. These instances serve to create a web of folk belief and a spell that is cast over the audience, drawing them into the anxieties at the heart of the play⁴³. The atmosphere of black magic created by Mak (specifically by his use of the seven names of God and his necromantic circle), even if it is held at a distance by comedy and its fictive nature, suffuses the world. This miasma is then cleared by the bright light of the miracle of Christ’s work, a transformation that is underpinned by the changing soundscape as we move from the unpleasant crotchets of the thief’s lullaby to his “baby”, to the angels’ glorious and technically proficient singing.

The use of magic in public performance may have been a source of anxiety – the audience might worry about the shepherds’ inadvertent misuse of charms. Though it seems that charms were generally quite faithfully transmitted from user to user, once in a while, “users of charms could mishear, misremember or reshape what came to them”⁴⁴. The Wakefield Master might be commenting on laypeople’s use of words of power without perfect knowledge of Latin. However, elsewhere, the same characters display remarkable macaronic literacy. Some of the magic language is in Latin gibberish and some in English – fluent and menacing⁴⁵. But what if a hapless user of the language of magic accidentally invokes demonic forces instead of holding them at bay? This is a question that the play asks and answers. The other shepherds may use the charms, certainly flubbing the letter of the words, though not the spirit that inspires them. Perhaps for this reason their misuse of words does not rebound on them to their

⁴³ Here I am invoking Victor Turner’s conception of theater as a reflexive device for people to examine the problems inherent in life, as the dramatic crisis presented on stage leads to a breach of social rules and draws the audience into a state of self reflection (see Turner 1982, 16-20). The supernatural space of the play is complex, as each magical speech act creates its own psychic staging, invoking disparate “players” on a sort of stage-within-a-stage. In the words of Ulrika Wolf-Knuts on the psychic staging of charms, “the person who in a certain situation finds it necessary to utter a charm would occupy the central role on the dramatic stage which is, in this case, also populated by a sick cow, Jesus, the Holy Virgin, a bumble-bee, and God, not to mention other curing factors” (Wolf-Knuts 2009, 63). In the psychic staging of this play, the players are the trinity, the demonic forces, the forces of fairy / the supernatural, the mortal characters, and the audience. Each spell or charm uttered invokes two or more of these players.

⁴⁴ Smallwood 2003, 12, 22-23.

⁴⁵ On nonsensical Latin that echoes biblical or liturgical language and “deploys an occult power (virtus)”, see Olsan 2013, 136-137.

detriment. On the contrary, they seem protected from evil and accident by God himself, leading a charmed life, so to speak; the theological argument seems to be that if one's heart is in the right place no elf hath power to charm, and one can't even harm oneself. The verbal gaffes are consistently egregious and anachronistic, as we see in the substitution of the name of Judas for that of God the Father, yet as other critics have noted, their magic and the attempted magic of Mak is ultimately ineffective – or is it? Could it be that the characters' invocation of magic releases powers in the world that make possible their vision of the Christ child? In this case, the misuse of magic words functions typologically as a kind of *felix culpa*⁴⁶.

Another anxiety that this play's performance might have awakened is the use of false oaths – a form of verbal magic that would be potentially quite dangerous. The mild oaths of the shepherds are intensified by the active magic practice of Mak – they serve as a gentle reminder to the audience to take care with their daily use of powerful words. Maks' wife also swears a false (but true) oath when she ironically exclaims to the suspicious shepherds that she will eat her child (772–776). The couple's “hee frawde” is outed by the trio of shepherds – but it is compounded and made more sinister by the demonic/sheepish character of the “infant”. The contexts of witchcraft that inflected audience reaction have long been noted by critics of mystery plays⁴⁷. It seems likely that people felt utterances in the play to have real power. James Paxton has connected the suppression of the “artificial demonic” of the mystery plays to the rise of sixteenth-century witch hunts – that magic was present, or at least seen to be present, in mystery plays is corroborated by the puritans' disgust for (and fear of) the genre⁴⁸. It thus seems possible that the Wakefield Master calculated the fear and sense of unease that these false oaths and dangerous utterances would arouse in the audience, preparing them for the relief of the nativity at the end.

A third related anxiety raised by the play is the common confusion between fairies and other supernatural agents, such as angels. The audience would likely have picked up on the anxieties felt by the shepherds, who appear familiar with fairies and other supernatural visitors (“sudden

⁴⁶ Shepherd 2 and Mak embody subtle positions on the continuum from charms to maleficium. The intimacy of the shepherds' hails and prayers to the “derlyng dere / full of godhead” is a contrast to the use of God's name in the first half of the play – the verbal intimacy of their address to the baby Jesus overcomes the obfuscation and incomprehensibility of bad magic.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Gardner 1974, 74.

⁴⁸ Paxton 1997, 145.

sights”) in the night – they are the best candidates for the angels’ revelation. The problem lies in telling the difference between these two categories of supernatural being, as Shepherd 1 shows us when he tries to describe the angelic song he has heard:

This was a qwant stevyn
 That ever yit I hard.
 It is a mervell to nevyn
 Thus to be skard. (933-936)

This strange voice frightens because it appears out of nowhere and it is uncanny – likely much like the “sudden sights” he has been subjected to in the past. It seems that the art and beauty of the angelic song, as well as his ability to light up the wood in a sudden flash of blinding light, reassures the shepherds. Nevertheless, the author has drawn a clear parallel between the scary appearances of demons and fairies at the beginning of the play, and the overwhelming appearance of the angel at the end. This purposeful confusion of two supernatural categories is just one of several in the play, as our discussion of the ironic parallels between the baby Jesus and the changeling sheep-child shapeshifted at the midnight hour has shown. These clear parallels also draw upon lore familiar to the audience, and thus gain in power and nuance.

5. CONCLUSION

The Wakefield Master presents verbal magic as a continuum. His world is expansive, encompassing angels, devils, mortals of every stamp, and God himself. His compassion for the foibles of humanity is palpable as he juxtaposes necromantic spells with benign forms of charm. He ultimately portrays all of these performances as part of the spectrum of human experience, lives lived with only partial views of eternity and grace, and a limited scope for improvement without divine intervention and mercy⁴⁹. The author’s complex contrapuntal form introduces themes, inverts, develops, and varies them, thus building the intricate structure the play is noted for – everything is interlinked with everything else. *Secunda Pastorum* gains its

⁴⁹ By tossing Mak in a blanket the shepherds are “flouting the church courts” and solving the problem on their own, carnivalesque but relatively merciful, terms (Green 2016, 142).

power from a “thoroughgoing network of meaningful sound that stretches from the play’s first to its last line”⁵⁰. It is ultimately a meditation on magic and the power of words to make things come to be. And drama *is* magic, no more so than in this play. Just as the shepherds’ imperfect attempts to sing with the voice of angels is presented as an example of everyone’s duty to emulate the divine, however impossible that may be, so too is human folk magic presented (and likely seen in the late Middle Ages) as an echo of God’s power. Magic is not wrong or evil, it is merely a miracle seen through the glass darkly – and better left alone without proper knowledge⁵¹.

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⁵⁰ Albin 2013, 34.

⁵¹ My thanks are owed to the efficient editors of this volume, to my two very helpful anonymous reviewers, to the other participants in the conference in Pescara for their helpful questions and feedback, and to the University of Maine’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the McGillicuddy Humanities Center for their support of this project.

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A WRITTEN CHARM IN ORAL TRADITION: “PETER SAT ON A MARBLE STONE” IN IRELAND

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-hill>

ABSTRACT

This contribution examines the Irish variants of the toothache charm known as *Super petram*, one of the most common – and most commented-upon – European narrative charms, which spread throughout Europe from the tenth century onward. The charm is well attested in Ireland, where it is found both in Gaelic and Hiberno-English language traditions. While the Gaelic variants are likely to reach back to the medieval era, the English-language variants attest to later, post-Norman influence from England. This paper focuses on the over 150 English-language variants collected by the Irish Folklore Commission in the first half of the twentieth century, which allow us to reassess the complex question of orality and literacy in the charm’s transmission. While in England, extant variants of *Super petram* emanate from a written transmission context, in Ireland, variants were collected from oral sources and bear features characteristic of oral transmission. The Irish ethnographic evidence thus throws new light on the more sparsely attested English evidence and may help us understand better the elusive and sometimes contradictory information we have about the charm’s performance and transmission.

Keywords: amulet; epic charms; Irish Folklore Commission; narrative charms; oral composition; oral/written transmission; Peter Sat on a Marble Stone; *Super petram*.

The *Super petram* charm against toothache needs no introduction in the present volume: it is one of the best-known and most widely distributed European narrative charms, richly documented in both medieval sources

and modern ethnographic studies. Its presence throughout Europe has been well-documented; Jonathan Roper, in his study of English verbal charms, notes over twenty variants from England and Wales¹, and Claude Lecouteux refers to variants from France, Denmark, and Germany². The charm is also common in Slavic and, to a lesser extent, Baltic languages³. As we shall see, the charm is abundantly popular in Ireland, on Europe's western fringe.

Like many of the most common European narrative charms, *Super petram* belongs to the group of encounter charms⁴: Christ encounters St Peter, whom he finds sitting *super petram*, “on a stone”. In the ensuing dialogue Christ asks Peter why he is unwell; Peter replies that he is suffering from a toothache, and Christ responds by commanding Peter to be well. Despite the charm's popularity in vernacular traditions throughout Europe, the earliest extant texts point to a Latin clerical milieu. The punning wordplay of the Latin charm (*Petrus super petram*) is not replicated in the vernacular translations, yet Peter is depicted as sitting on a stone in most European vernaculars, suggesting the vernacular charms' derivation from the Latin prototype. The spread of the charm throughout Europe appears to have followed ecclesiastic – and specifically monastic – networks⁵.

It is likely that the charm was first introduced into Ireland through these same monastic channels, although no medieval version of *Super petram* has as yet come to light from Ireland. It appears to have been vernacularized into Irish Gaelic at an early date, and certainly before the coming of the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century: about seventy Gaelic variants, representing well-defined regional oicotypes, have been recorded throughout Irish-speaking areas, suggesting that the charm was already well established throughout Gaelic Ireland before the Anglo-Norman invasion. The native Irish oicotypes differ significantly from English regional forms, most notably in their setting: a cluster of variants from the northwestern county of Mayo locates the encounter “in the wilderness” (*ar an bhfásach*), and in the most common oicotype, ranging from the northern province of Ulster to the southern province of Munster, Peter sits by a river⁶. For an understand-

¹ Roper 2005, 122-125.

² Lecouteux 1996, 53.

³ Kencis 2013; Babič 2013, 87.

⁴ On encounter charms, see Ohrt 1936.

⁵ Note the monastic provenance of the twelfth-century Latin variant from Slovenia, written down by the Cistercian monk Bernard; Babič 2013, 87.

⁶ For a brief discussion of the Gaelic variants of *Super petram*, see Hillers 2019, 86-88.

ing of the early history of *Super petram* in Europe, the Gaelic variants are of particular interest: witnesses to the charm's long-standing existence on the western fringe of Europe, these regionally entrenched oicotypes may offer clues about the charm's international transmission and distribution in medieval Europe⁷.

In this contribution, however, I want to focus on Ireland's abundantly documented English-language tradition. A staggering 158 English-language variants of *Super petram* have been recorded from almost every county of Ireland⁸. In their form and wording, the English-language variants so closely resemble *Super petram* charms in England that we must assume an English origin for them. Like most of the variants of the charm collected in England, they contain the distinctive "marble stone" motif in the opening line:

As Peter sat on a marble stone
Jesus came to him all alone.
"Peter why does thou ache?"
"My Lord and Saviour, it is a toothache."
"Rise up, Peter, and follow me,
And from this toothache you will get free."⁹

While overall homogenous in form – at least by comparison with the Irish-language variants – the English-language instances display the characteristic pattern of variation associated with oral-traditional materials. Unlike the *Super petram* variants documented in England, the vast majority of the Irish charms were collected from oral recitation, i.e., the informants communicated the words of the charm to the collectors by word

⁷ The redaction that locates the encounter between Christ and Peter by a river, in particular, does not appear to occur widely outside of Ireland; it may, however, be related to international variants in which Peter's cure takes place near a bridge. Interestingly, the name of this river found in twentieth-century variants is clearly derived from the medieval Irish form of the River Jordan, which suggests this oicotype is likely to be of considerable age.

⁸ No version of *Super petram* has been recorded from County Kildare and from the three counties Derry, Antrim, and Armagh situated in Northern Ireland, where the Schools' Collection was not operative.

⁹ NFCS 760:407, County Longford. All unpublished texts cited with kind permission from the Director of the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin. I am most grateful to the Director, Dr Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, for his help in making available unpublished materials. The NFC Main Manuscripts are referenced here as NFC, the Schools' Manuscripts as NFCS, followed by volume and page number. The texts cited have been lightly edited with regard to punctuation and capitalization, but the spelling of the originals has otherwise been retained.

of mouth. This abundant and unquestionably oral material allows us to examine the apparent paradox at the heart of *Super petram* that was noted by Roper: it is clear that the charm was used widely as a *written* amulet, copied on a scrap of paper and carried on the body, and Roper notes that all of the English variants were preserved in a written context¹⁰. Yet, as he also points out, a significant number of variants contain features, such as rhyme, that in a folk context would more typically indicate that they were intended to be spoken aloud. In fact, as we shall see, the Irish evidence demonstrates that oral enunciation played an essential role in the charm's performance as well as in its transmission. The Irish material offers incontrovertible and plentiful proof that the charm's performance included both writing and speaking, and makes clear that the two modes need not be in contradiction.

In this contribution, I hope to demonstrate what we can learn about a charm tradition if we are privileged to work with a rich ethnographic record. The abundance of variants, the contextual information reflecting on the performance of the charm, and the oral mode of their collection make a study of the Irish material rewarding and give Ireland a special place within western European charm studies.

Let me sketch briefly the background of the Irish material. A smattering of variants of *Super petram* were preserved in nineteenth-century publications and manuscripts. The vast majority, however – over ninety-five percent – were recorded in the twentieth century under the auspices of the legendary Irish Folklore Commission. Formed in 1935 under the directorship of James Hamilton Delargy (Séamus Ó Duilearga), the Commission focused its fieldwork collecting mainly in the tradition-rich Gaelic-speaking west, where the majority of the Gaelic variants of *Super petram* were collected and preserved in the Commission's so-called Main Manuscripts¹¹. To complement the geographically circumscribed scope of the Commission's fieldwork collecting, Delargy collaborated with the Department of Education on a nationwide scheme that employed school children in the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland in collecting folklore from their families and neighbours. The Schools' Collection of 1937-38 was spectacularly successful, resulting in just under half a million pages

¹⁰ The English variants were either "written on a piece of paper carried about by someone, or recorded in a book" (Roper 2005, 124).

¹¹ I am greatly indebted to Maebhe Ní Bhroin's index of the healing charms contained in the Commission's Main Manuscripts, "Orthaí Leighis na hÉireann" ("Irish Healing Charms", Ní Bhroin 1999).

of bound manuscripts, which have recently been digitized¹². The Schools’ Collection has emerged as a major resource for the study of Irish traditional medicine¹³. It is clear that in the 1930s the *Super petram* charm was part of a vibrant living folk medicinal tradition, and that many of the informants knew not merely the words of the charm, but had seen it practiced. As many as 118 variants of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” – seventy-five percent of the total number – are preserved in the Schools’ Collection¹⁴. While folklorists are well-advised to approach the Schools’ Collection with a certain amount of caution, an analysis of the *Super petram* variants leaves little doubt about the material’s authenticity¹⁵. Most variants were recorded along with assorted other charms and cures, and their variety and profusion attest to a living culture of traditional medicine.

1. “PETER SAT ON A MARBLE STONE”

The earliest Irish variant of *Super petram* to appear in print is from Kilkenny. In response to a posting in *Notes & Queries* of a southern English variant, a contributor (“J. G.”) from Kilkenny reports in the March 1850 volume that he has “often heard the charm,” which is “used by the lower orders in the county of Kilkenny”. J. G. cites the distinctive first lines of the charm¹⁶:

¹² See www.duchas.ie. Thanks to a very successful crowdsourcing initiative, over ninety percent of the English-language material is now fully text-searchable.

¹³ The topic of “cures” elicited about nine thousand responses (8170 in English; 722 in Irish).

¹⁴ The charms in the Schools’ Collection were never fully indexed in the Commission’s subject card index (and consequently were not covered in Ní Bhroin 1999). It is likely that more variants of *Super petram* may still come to light once all the material has been digitally transcribed.

¹⁵ The main challenge with Schools’ Collection materials is the tendency of some school children – and some teachers as well – to copy materials from books. In the case of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone”, however, only a small handful of versions of the charm had appeared in print by 1937, and of those few, none were in publications that were either popular or easily accessible.

¹⁶ J. G. may not have felt the need to give the complete charm, since he is responding to a contribution earlier that month of an English version “from the south-eastern counties of England”. However, the omission of the second line might suggest that his recollection of the charm, which he appears to have learned in an oral context, was imperfect and that he did not want to venture the full rendition (J. G. 1850, 349).

Peter sat upon a stone;
Jesus said, "What aileth thee, Peter?"

Aside from the fact that the customary second line is omitted, these lines are strikingly similar to variants collected over eighty years later in Kilkenny, when school children in the county collected six variants as part of the Schools' Collection:

As Peter sat on a marble stone,
Jesus Christ Himself came there alone
Saying, "What ails thee Peter,
That makes thee quake?"
"O Lord God, it is the toothache."
"Rise up Peter and be thee hale
Its not you alone, but all mankind
Whosoever shall repeat these words for my sake,
Shall never be troubled with a toothache."¹⁷

Kilkenny folklore – in common with many areas in the east and northeast of the country – has a strong admixture of early English folk traditions, reflecting a history of settlement by incomers from Britain going back to the medieval period. "Peter Sat on a Marble Stone" is a witness to that heritage; its roots are not in Gaelic charm tradition but originate in England and Wales. Irish variants – such as the ones from Kilkenny – are closely related to variants in England, where *Super petram* is one of the most common charms attested, as Roper has demonstrated¹⁸. The marble stone motif is particularly associated with England: in an eleventh-century Latin manuscript from England the protagonist is seated *super marmoreum*¹⁹, and the motif is plentifully attested in modern variants from England and Wales:

Peter sat on a marble stone.
Jesus came to him all alone.
"What's up, Peter?"
"The toothache, My Lord."
"Rise up, Peter,
And be cured of this pain
And all who carry these few lines for My sake."²⁰

¹⁷ NFCS 866:15, County Kilkenny.

¹⁸ Roper 2005, 122-124.

¹⁹ Storms 1948, 288.

²⁰ Owen (1887) 1896, 264-265.

The English charm’s distinctive first line, as well as the rhyming pair stone/alone, the injunction “Rise up, Peter”, and the promise that “All who carry these [...] lines” shall be exempt from toothache, are all recurrent features in Irish variants of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone”.

The English origin of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” is reflected in the modern distribution of variants throughout Ireland. The charm is found in all the areas that experienced English settlement at various times: along the east coast, in the midland counties, and in the eastern parts of Connacht. It is also well attested in the northern province of Ulster, settled by planters from England and Scotland in the seventeenth century. By contrast, despite the intensive folklore collecting undertaken in the Irish-speaking western counties, including Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and Donegal, only a handful of variants were recorded in those counties²¹.

While a pronounced east/west gradient continued well into the twentieth century, as the use of English expanded, “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” made its way into previously Irish-speaking areas. By the 1930s, it had expanded to the western-most counties and could be encountered, though less profusely, anywhere in the island of Ireland. The process of acculturation and expansion to Irish-speaking or bilingual regions had clearly begun well before the twentieth century. Joseph Flahive documents two English variants of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” among Gaelic charm texts in two nineteenth-century manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy²². One of the manuscripts, dated to 1857, was compiled by a scribe from County Clare, John Lysaght:

Peter sat on a marble stone with his hand under his cheek. Christ, coming by, said “What ails you, Peter?” “My tooth that aches,” said Peter. “Get up, Peter,” said He, “and be thus healed: not you, but whosoever believeth in these words in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.”²³

Lysaght’s charm, copied down at roughly the same time as “J. G.” reported the Kilkenny variant, suggests that the English charm had already reached Gaelic Munster by the mid-nineteenth century. The second variant identified by Flahive throws light on the process of linguistic acculturation by which the charm entered the Gaelic-speaking west: The English charm

²¹ Three or fewer variants each were recorded from Waterford, Donegal, and even from Cork, one of the most populous counties in the republic.

²² Flahive 2019. See also Nicholas Wolf’s survey of medical material in nineteenth-century Gaelic manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland and Royal Irish Academy: of the ninety-three medical charms surveyed, seventeen are against toothache (Wolf 2019, 115).

²³ Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, MS 23 L 40, p. 29; printed in Flahive 2019, 121-122.

was accompanied by an Irish and a Latin translation²⁴. A handful of charm variants from Irish-speaking areas clearly represent such translations into Irish; one example published by Douglas Hyde references a *cloch mbearb-bail*, clearly an attempt to render the English “marble stone”²⁵.

In England, the marble stone motif competed with another, slightly less popular, motif: About a quarter of the English variants locate the encounter between Christ and Peter at the “gate of Jerusalem”²⁶:

As Peter stood at the gate of Jerusalem,
 Jesus saith unto him, “What aileth thee?”
 He said, “My teeth do ache.”
 Jesus said, “Whosoever carrieth these lines about them
 or beareth them in memory
 shall never have the toothache any more,
 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.”²⁷

The Jerusalem gate motif is also found in Ireland. It is already attested in the second of the two nineteenth-century variants printed by Flahive²⁸:

As Peeter sat at the gate of Jerusalem,
 and Jesus came to him and said, “What troubels thee Peeter?”
 Peeter answered, and said, “Lord, I am troubeled with the toothake.”
 And Jesus said, “Arise Peeter and be healed:
 and not you alone but every one whome carrys these words about him
 in the name of the Father, Son, & Holy Gost. Amen.”

But while the marble stone motif is universal in Ireland, the gate of Jerusalem is found in only about a dozen of the 158 English-language variants²⁹. The Royal Irish Academy variant is the only Irish variant known to me in which the Jerusalem gate motif stands on its own; in the twentieth-century oral variants, the Jerusalem gate motif is always found *in combination with* the marble stone:

As Peter sat on a marble stone,
 Outside the gates of Jerusalem,

²⁴ Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, MS 24 C 57, f. 1155v. All three are printed in Flahive 2019, 128-129, note 24.

²⁵ Hyde 1906, 58. The form *mearbbail* may be due to medial lenition; alternatively, it may reflect the form “marvel stone” documented by Roper as a by-form of the more common “marble stone” (2005, 123).

²⁶ On the background and distribution of this motif, see Roper 2005, 124-125.

²⁷ Hartland 1913, 507.

²⁸ Flahive 2019, 128-129, note 24.

²⁹ The motif also occurs in three Irish-language variants.

Our Lord came to him alone.
"What ails thee, Peter?" he said,
And Peter said, "A toothache."
"Rise up, Peter, though healed.
Not you alone but all who carried those lines for my sake."³⁰

This distinctive combination of the two locational motifs, which in England and elsewhere are found in competition with each other, was presumably prompted by the ubiquitous strength of the marble stone motif in Ireland: the marble stone was felt to "belong" in the first line and could not be dislodged from it.

2. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CHARM

So far we have focused on the words of the charm; yet in the performance of a cure, the words are combined with ritual acts, "clothing a metaphorical procedure in the operational or manipulative mode of practical action", to quote Stanley Tambiah's classic formulation³¹. The increased attention paid to the context and performance of charms is one of the most important and beneficial shifts in modern charm studies, benefiting from anthropological approaches such as Tambiah's, and the "performance turn" in folkloristics. Methodologically, it is not always easy to avoid prioritizing text over context, particularly when dealing with pre-modern charms, where the contextual evidence is frequently sparse or altogether lacking.

The survival of decontextualized charm texts from the past is hardly a coincidence. The words may have been viewed as the most stable, tradition-bound and authoritative part of the charm performance, not merely by scholars and collectors, but even by the charmers themselves, who, Tambiah suggests, tend to emphasize the role of the charm's sacro-sanct "words of power":

If the ethnographer questions his informants "Why is this ritual effective?" the reply takes the form of a formally expressed belief that the power is in the "words" even though the words only become effective if uttered in a very special context of other action.³²

³⁰ NFCS 867:296.

³¹ Tambiah 1968, 176.

³² Tambiah 1968, 194.

The documentation gap with regard to context and performance makes the twentieth-century ethnographic material, such as the corpus collected by the Irish Folklore Commission, all the more important. The accounts taken down by the Commission's full-time collectors are particularly rich in contextual ethnographic detail, but even the material from the Schools' Collection – which makes up by far the largest proportion of extant variants of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” – offers valuable insights into the performance context. It is clear from the evidence that the charm was widely known throughout Ireland; the fact that in 1937-38 well over a hundred school children were told the words of the charm by their family or neighbours attests to its popularity, and the Irish evidence begs the question whether the charm may have been similarly widespread elsewhere. Writing in the early 1900s, British folklorist Margaret Eyre calls *Super petram* a “universal incantation”, which suggests that it may have been as widely known in England and Wales then as it was a generation later in Ireland. Eyre made a useful division between “domestic magic” and the cures practised by expert charmers. She specifically mentions “Peter sat on a marble stone” as an example of the former:

By domestic magic I mean ordinary helpful charms, where the power lies in the charm itself, and which can be practised by anyone. “Peter sat on a marble stone,” for instance, is an universal incantation, helpful in itself, to be administered by anybody.³³

It would seem that the Irish material by and large supports Eyre's claim that *Super petram* was a “universal” charm, “practised by anyone”. The abundant ethnographic record shows that the words of the charm were widely known and shared within the community. On the other hand, there is also evidence of the tendency observed in traditional medicine for specific charms to become associated with certain individuals: a number of accounts refer to such healers known locally for their performance of the charm. The healer might “hand on” the charm to another person to carry on the cure, a transfer that was typically carried out from a man to a woman or vice versa, as in this account from Mayo:

A few years ago a woman lived in the neighbourhood of Scregg, Ballyhaunis, and she had a famous cure for toothache. This was given to her by her father at his death. Many people who suffered from toothache went in in order to get the cure.³⁴

³³ Eyre 1905, 167.

³⁴ NFCS 107:259.

However, the informants who describe such local "specialists" are themselves able to provide the words of the charm, indicating that knowledge of the words was not restricted to the specialists. Individual and collective concepts of charm "ownership" need not be mutually exclusive but could happily coexist, as a county Meath informant articulates: "The prayer for the cure of toothache belongs to Julia Coakley of Belleview, Raharney, but many people know the prayer and use it"³⁵.

It is clear that in the 1930s *Super petram* was at least to some extent still practiced in many parts of Ireland. This is suggested by the use of the present tense in many accounts, and by the first-hand testimony collected from charmers and their patients as well as from other eyewitnesses. Some accounts describe healer and patient engaging in a performance that included the words of the charm (whether written or spoken) as well as carefully prescribed actions; some accounts describe the healer's or the patient's actions while performing the charm. A variant from County Clare states, "When a person has a violent pain in the tooth he should kneel down and say three times 'As Peter sat on a marble stone [...]'"³⁶. A variant from county Meath advises, "The person saying the prayer should rub his hand to the jaw at the same time"³⁷.

Many accounts attest to the charm being regarded as efficacious: "If you say this when you have the toothache it will go away and it will never come back"³⁸. A few variants stress the element of faith in the cure: "The person must have belief in the prayer"³⁹, but generally the charm's efficacy is presented as a matter of fact: "Anyone who has a tooth-ache would get cured by saying this"⁴⁰. There is, however, some evidence that the practice was regarded by some informants as a thing of the past. A variant from Carlow hints at a generational disjuncture, associating the charm with "old people" ("*Old people* have a prayer which is *supposed to be* a cure for the toothache"⁴¹).

³⁵ NFCS 694:304.

³⁶ NFC 1371:247.

³⁷ NFCS 694:304.

³⁸ NFCS 942:427.

³⁹ NFCS 402:193.

⁴⁰ NFCS 53:39.

⁴¹ NFCS 911:286; my emphasis.

3. THE CHARM AS AMULET

Super petram is widely regarded as a “predominantly written charm” in international charm scholarship⁴². In England, as in other parts of Europe, *Super petram* was used as an amulet, as Roper has demonstrated: the words of the charm were written on a piece of paper and given to the patient, who wore it on the body⁴³. All the extant English variants appear to emanate from a written context⁴⁴, and Roper has argued that there is no indication that oral recitation played any role in their performance: “None of the contextual data surrounding the twenty-one database examples mentions that the words should be spoken”⁴⁵.

In the face of this overwhelming evidence for *Super petram* as a written charm, my analysis of the Irish evidence presents a dramatically different picture. While the charm’s use as an amulet is attested in Ireland, as I shall outline below, and while writing certainly played a role in the way *Super petram* was performed in Ireland, oral and written aspects appear to have coexisted in Ireland, and there is ample evidence for oral performance and transmission of the charm; in fact, most of the extant evidence points to a vibrant oral charm tradition.

Let us begin by laying out the evidence for the written charm. One of the earliest printed variants from Ireland, reported by Lady Wilde in 1888, suggests that “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” was carried on the body as a written amulet: “This is the charm to be sewn onto the clothes”⁴⁶. Half a century later, the Irish Folklore Commission collected a variant from an informant in Cavan, who described the process as follows: “You write that for the man, and write this on a bit of paper, and tell him to sew it in his clothes and to carry it but not to open it”⁴⁷. The charm’s use as an amulet is also explicitly stated by an informant from county Limerick:

[T]here used to be great charms for toothaches. The charms used to be worn around the neck like a necklace and the toothache would go away. My own

⁴² Roper 2005, 124.

⁴³ Roper 2005, 124.

⁴⁴ “The representatives of this charm-type were either found in use, i.e., written on a piece of paper carried about by someone, or recorded in a book (either in a charmer’s notebook, or on the blank leaves of a sacred book such as the Book of Common Prayer or the Bible), presumably for later written use” (Roper 2005, 124).

⁴⁵ Roper 2005, 123.

⁴⁶ Wilde 1888, 196.

⁴⁷ NFC 212:260.

sister Mary had a toothache very bad and she got a charm one morning and put it on her and, faith, the toothache was gone in the evening.

– What was the charm like?

Yezza, 'twas only a bit of paper and an *ortha* ("charm") written on it.⁴⁸

A County Galway informant, speaking in Irish, describes the actions of a local healer as follows: "When he would give the charm to someone, he would go down on his knees. [...] He'd have the words jotted down on a small piece of paper and when one would be given that paper, one wasn't supposed to read it or to open it at all"⁴⁹. A county Fermanagh practitioner also states the traditional injunction not to read the charm once it is written: "I have a charm for the toothache myself. [...] The way it is used is, I write it out and give it to whoever asks me for it, but they are not supposed to open it or read it"⁵⁰. Other accounts, on the other hand, suggest that the patient *was* supposed to read and recite the charm. Patients of the charmer from Ballyhaunis, County Mayo, already mentioned, were apparently instructed to open the piece of paper and recite the words of the prayer "morning and evening" before folding it up again:

She would write a certain prayer and *this was to be said* morning and evening. She would fold this prayer as a Gospel then she would make the sign of the cross on the side where the toothache was three times. When the person would open the prayer they were again to fold it the same way and always carry it.⁵¹

An account from county Limerick similarly incorporates an element of oral recitation or "repetition" of the words of the charm:

I got a charm for a toothache wan time.... 'Twas from a woman I got it..., and she wrote it down for me, and she gave it to me, and she wrote it in ink, yes, in a paper, for me, and *I used to repeat it* and I used carry it about me."⁵²

In some cases, rather than wearing the written charm on the body, the writing was dissolved in a liquid and ingested, as in the cure performed by a County Clare healer by the name of McKeon that was described by a local informant:

He wrote the cure on a piece of paper and folded three corners of it. You took it with you when you went to him for cure, and brought it home and boiled it in new milk. Drink the milk and burn the paper.⁵³

⁴⁸ NFC 1164:100.

⁴⁹ NFC 433:3; my translation.

⁵⁰ NFC 559:383.

⁵¹ NFCS 107:259; my emphasis.

⁵² NFC 658:84; my emphasis.

⁵³ NFC 1517:190.

An account from County Galway describes the elaborate performance of a local charmer by the name of Tom O'Hara, which involved writing the charm on a piece of wood, apparently without producing an amulet, however. The performance was accompanied by a ritual of the patient taking sips of water and spitting them out again in a carefully prescribed manner:

He was a very clever man. He was able to make a "pass" for the tooth-ache. This is how he did it.

He wrote these words on a black piece of wood:

"As I sat on the marble stone,
 St. Peter came to me alone,
 St. Peter said, arise up for my sake,
 And no more you'll suffer from tooth-ache."

Then he used to get a cup and half-fill it with hot water, and fill the other half with cold water. Then he used to make the sign of the Cross on it three times. He used to give it to the sufferer and he would have to rinse his mouth with it three times, and throw it in behind the fire. He also had to throw what was left in the cup in behind the fire, and after that, the toothache left.⁵⁴

All of these accounts attest to the role of literacy in the charm's performance. One is struck by the variability and range of the performance, where the act of writing takes on a number of functions ranging from the pragmatic to the magical, and interacts with other performative elements, including spoken voice and body movement.

4. "THIS OULD PRAYER": THE SPOKEN CHARM

While there is ample evidence in Ireland for the use of *Super petram* as a written charm, it is equally clear that it was also a charm performed orally and transmitted by word of mouth. By default, the charms collected under the auspices of the Irish Folklore Collection were recorded from oral testimony, and only one of the almost 150 variants of "Peter Sat on a Marble Stone" preserved in the National Folklore Collection was contributed in the form of a written document⁵⁵. Most variants make no mention of writing, and many stress the spoken nature of the charm: "They used to *say*

⁵⁴ NFCS 141:472.

⁵⁵ This is NFCS 738:122, from Mountmurray, County Westmeath. The charm text was accompanied by the following note: "Mrs Slevin, Mt Murray, sent this prayer to school. She says it is a cure for toothache".

the words ‘Peter sat on a marble stone [...]’ (NFC 659:474); “Anyone who has a tooth-ache would get cured by *saying* this” (NFCS 53:39); “If you *say* this when you have the toothache, it will go away” (NFCS 942:427; my emphasis).

An unnamed contributor to the Schools’ Collection located in Marshalstown, County Wexford, reports what appears to be a parent or grandparent’s experience with a local healer, John Saunders. Writing does not appear to have played a role in the healer’s performance:

If you had a toothache you could go to him and ask him to cure it. He would say, “Sit down, my child.” Then he would say:

Saint Peter sat on a marble stone

and Our Lord came up and said “Why do you moan?”

“Toothache, my Lord!” says he.

Then he used to make the sign of the cross and the toothache used to go away.⁵⁶

The remarkable popularity and oral currency of the charm in Ireland is best understood if we recognize its proximity to the genre of the prayer. “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” is commonly referred to as a “prayer” by the tradition bearers⁵⁷: “This ould prayer was said for the cure of the toothache”⁵⁸. There is a clear preference in Irish traditional medicine for the term “prayer” over the term “charm”, which is rarely used except in academic discourse. Verbal charms were regarded as prayers, which put them firmly within the context of legitimate religious lore. In Donegal and Roscommon, *Super petram* was known as “St Peter’s Prayer”⁵⁹; St Peter is a ubiquitous figure in Irish apocryphal tradition⁶⁰, and there is no doubt that the charm’s historiola was viewed as a *bona fide* religious narrative⁶¹. By conceptualizing “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” as a prayer, the performance of the charm is put within the folk-religious framework of the oral

⁵⁶ NFCS 893:40.

⁵⁷ In the Schools’ Collection, “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” is referred to as a “prayer” in seventy-one instances and as a “cure” in forty-seven; only in three cases is it referred to as a “charm”.

⁵⁸ NFC 844:82.

⁵⁹ NFCS 1075:111; NFCS 264:29.

⁶⁰ St Peter is featured in no less than twenty-five distinct religious narratives listed in Frederic Tubach’s *Index Exemplorum*; Tubach 1981. For references to St Peter in Irish religious narrative, see Ó Héaláí 2012 and Ó Súilleabháin 2011.

⁶¹ A County Cavan informant contributed a prose retelling of the historiola along the lines of an apocryphal tale which begins “One day St Peter was sitting on a stone along the wayside weeping” (NFCS 979:45).

performance of prayer; many accounts refer to religious gestures, such as kneeling and making the sign of the cross, as part of the performance, or mention the recitation of liturgical prayers (“After these words say three Hail Marys in honour of Jesus, Mary and Joseph”⁶²). Like a prayer, the charm is often ritually repeated to effect a cure: “This prayer is repeated nine times after each other”⁶³. And like a prayer, the charm might have oral, aural, and written manifestations.

5. “IN MEMORY OR IN WRITING”: A METATEXTUAL CLUE

Roper has astutely pointed out the significance of a line in the charm that refers to its oral/written medium⁶⁴. Christ’s parting words to Peter, in variants in Ireland and England, include the injunction to keep the words of the charm “in memory or in writing”:

Rise up, Peter, and thou shalt be healed;
 not only you alone,
 but anyone that keeps those words
 in memory or in writing for my sake
 shall never be troubled with a tooth-ache.⁶⁵

I agree with Roper that we should regard this injunction as a valuable metatextual clue about *Super petram*’s dual oral/written performance mode: the charm text spells out the legitimacy of both media, oral and written, and endows them with added authority by attributing the lines to Christ.

The flexibility of the tradition, which can accommodate a variety of written and oral performances, is reflected in the highly variable phrasing of the injunction. While a significant number of charm variants (over twenty) feature the phrase “in memory or in writing” (or a close variation thereof), many others introduce significant changes in line with the specific performance context. Charm variants preserved in writing, or associated with contextual information indicating written use and function, tend to drop the reference to oral memory and instead emphasize the charm’s being written and worn as an amulet. The nineteenth-century charm in the Royal Irish Academy, for example, makes no mention of “memory”

⁶² NFCS 895:113.

⁶³ NFCS 402:193.

⁶⁴ “Perhaps a clue is given by a phrase in one version that mentions the charm being carried ‘in memory or wrightin’” (Roper 2005, 124).

⁶⁵ NFCS 53:39.

and instead refers only to wearing the written charm as an amulet (“every one whome carrys these words about him”⁶⁶). The majority of the orally collected variants, on the other hand, drop any reference to writing, and instead employ terms of oral utterance (“memory”, “prayer”, “say”, “repeat”): “all who keep these words in memory”⁶⁷; “anyone who repeats these words”⁶⁸; “all these who say this prayer”⁶⁹. Specific aspects of the charm performance, such as the incorporation of liturgical prayers, may be referenced in the charm: “whoever says three Paters and Aves”.⁷⁰

The tradition is accommodating: write the charm or recite it like a prayer, preserve it in writing or memorize it, or add liturgical prayers or ritual gestures. Not only can the performance of the charm take all these forms, such practices leave their trace in the charm text itself, offering invaluable clues to charm scholars⁷¹. In the living charm tradition, the written and the spoken word coexist. Moreover, writing and oral memory both serve to “keep” the words of the charm. A County Westmeath variant uses the formula “in writing or memory;” underneath the words, the informant added the curt instruction: “Either write or remember it”⁷².

6. CONCLUSION: A WRITTEN CHARM IN ORAL TRADITION

Super petram has a long and complex history in Ireland. While Gaelic variants preserve older oicotypes likely to go back to medieval Latin, this contribution focuses on the English vernacular charm “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone”, which came to Ireland from England, possibly as early as the later Middle Ages. Originally introduced to the eastern parts of Ireland – where it is still more prevalent – the charm had spread throughout the island of Ireland by the twentieth century, when the Irish Folklore Commission began its collecting work. About 150 variants of “Peter Sat on a Marble Stone” are preserved in the Commission’s archives. The rich harvest from

⁶⁶ Flahive 2019, 128-129, note 24.

⁶⁷ NFC 1258:4.

⁶⁸ NFC 792:61.

⁶⁹ NFC 189:182.

⁷⁰ NFC 1517:164.

⁷¹ English and Irish Variants of the *Tres boni fratres* charm, for example, reference extra-textual curative elements, such as oil and wool, within the charm texts themselves; see Roper 2005, 128; Partridge 1980-81, 202; Hillers 2019, 86, note 26; Tuomi 2016, 69-96.

⁷² NFCS 741:109.

the Schools' Collection is particularly suggestive: well over a hundred children, asking about common cures at home, were told the words of the charm by family members or neighbours. Clearly, "Peter Sat on a Marble Stone" was still in popular oral currency in 1930s Ireland, and its words appear to have been known outside the more select circle of charmers or expert tradition bearers.

This rich ethnographic material provides us with a window into a living charm tradition. About half the variants from the Commission's Main Manuscripts and a third of those in the Schools' Manuscripts provide contextual commentary of some kind⁷³. While this may seem like a meagre proportion, given the abundant variants, it makes for a richly detailed and nuanced perspective on twentieth-century charm tradition.

Our investigation of the Irish data showed that charm performances varied greatly, whereas the words of the charm are overall homogenous and stable. There is no indication that charm performances followed a standardized procedure; on the contrary, the evidence suggests that individual charmers freely combined elements from a range of traditional practices. We have seen clear evidence that in Ireland, as in England and elsewhere in Europe, *Super petram* was used as a written charm and carried on the body as an amulet. A relatively small number of accounts describe an exclusively written charm procedure; other accounts indicate that cures involved a combination of written and oral performance elements.

It is equally clear, however, that "Peter Sat on a Marble Stone" in Ireland was first and foremost an oral charm, recited and repeated orally, without recourse to writing. The majority of variants make no reference to writing at all; instead, there are ubiquitous references to oral utterance such as "saying" or "repeating". The charm itself is commonly referred to as a "prayer", a term that in this context is suggestive of oral recitation and performance. Furthermore, since the overwhelming majority of variants were collected from oral testimony, it is clear that the words of the charm were generally known and were transmitted orally.

It is tempting to view oral and literary modes of operation as antithetical, but the two modes are not mutually exclusive or even contradictory. A charmer's use of writing (to produce an amulet) does not necessarily imply that he or she relies on a written exemplar to produce the written amulet. If – as was the case in many parts of Ireland – many people in the community knew the charm by heart, so, assuredly, did the charmer. Oral

⁷³ Above and beyond basic ethnographic data such as time and place of collection, and – usually – the name of the informant.

and literary modes may coexist; they may even complement each other. As Roper has pointed out, the phrase “in memory or in writing”, which is embedded in English and Irish variants of *Super petram*, offers a metatextual clue to the versatility of tradition. Charm tradition relies on both oral and written modes of performance and transmission, and it uses the words of the charm itself to validate both and to teach us how to “keep those words in memory or in writing”.

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ARGUMENTS FOR THE AUTHORITY OF THE “TIETÄJÄ”

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-ilom>

ABSTRACT

In the traditional Finnish-Karelian society a charmer with exceptional mental force *väki* was called *tietäjä* – literally, “knower”. He (she) was a ritual specialist and capable of helping or damaging people. The *tietäjä*’s skills were demonstrated at an incantation event shaped according to the situation: curing, cursing, magical blocking, etc. When the *tietäjä* prepared for enchanting, he recited specific opening lines, which included an allocation of his ritual self as well as a comprehensive description of required magical properties. These rune-lines comprise some critical elements that are proofs of mythical force. Expressed as performative utterances, the claims become true on the grounds of the power of the word and do act as arguments for the *tietäjä*’s authority. The charms studied in this paper are samples from a handwritten corpus recorded during field work at the turn of the twentieth century – in no authentic situation of curing, etc. These argumentative motifs were widely known and even used, but for some people they could be hearsay. Interpreting them as arguments of authority is based on several studies on Finnish folk belief commented in the text.

Keywords: authority; auto-communication; competence; mythical knowledge; ritual specialist.

In the collection Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot (SKVR; “Ancient Poems of the Finnish People”), now also digitized (<https://skvr.fi>), there is a corpus of charms of more than 33,000 items. The material contains verses for solving problems of everyday life, from fishing luck to healing and evoking love. The texts contain curses, spells, invocations of otherworldly assistants, and charms associated with the role of the *tietäjä* (lit. “knower”, sage, or healer). I will look at some of the opening lines of a charm performer preparing for his task as arguments for authority. The goal is not to

describe any personalities whose charms have been recorded and published in this collection, but to consider the performative character of some expressions. In the broad charm corpus available in SKVR, the recurrence of these verbal motifs supports the assumption of their essentiality to the charm.

These charms have been recorded from oral presentations, mostly in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. However, the collectors did not hear any charm in an authentic situation aimed at solving a problem: it was presented on request, in a non-genuine setting. Sometimes, the meta-data recorded with the charm mentions the performer and the setting, but other contextual information is given randomly. If no accompanying conditions are mentioned, the conclusions of the researcher fumble around on the basis of the words alone¹. The texts are textualizations of charms presented to the recorder, but the objective remains open as well as their connection to a verified role of *tietäjä*. Lines associated with the *tietäjä* may have been adopted from somebody else and performed mechanically with no connection to an act of charming. In this paper, the opening lines are not interpreted as elements of certain performers' repertoire, but as a phenomenon of authority depicted through arguments.

The charm event is a dramatic rite, consisting of text spoken out loud alongside various actions. The charm always has an objective, whether eliminating a problem or causing one. A *tietäjä* is a ritual specialist capable of helping as well as damaging people. Achieving the set goal requires mastery of mythical knowledge and rite technique, self-esteem, and confidence in one's own authority². A *tietäjä*'s archaic skill includes recognizing his relationship to magically powerful *väki*, his exceptional mental force. This concept has international counterparts referring to the special personal might of magical character. In Finnish folk belief even supernatural beings, objects, or things in contact with the otherworld were rich in *väki*³. The charmer had to equip himself for menacing contests on the otherworldly field of battle. His charm text commented on a critical situation, the requirements for managing it, and the psychic potency of his own "ritual ego"⁴. In an acute situation, the *tietäjä* activated the ability to attain a mental state bound to mythical reality. The ritual ego of charm speech takes shape by varying the linguistic register of expression and

¹ Tarkka 2013, 62–64; Frog 2019, 232; Roper 2003, 33–49.

² Siikala 2002, 71–76.

³ Siikala 2002, 79–80.

⁴ Ilomäki 2004, 49–51.

the different motifs in terms of their reference. In the chains of motifs, the recurring ones are those in which the *tietäjä* positions himself and describes the elements of his ability. In order to gain a categoric control in the ritual situation, the charmer’s opening lines must be performative utterances. Being spoken in a conventional situation, these words indeed are of illocutive character⁵. The line “Let my words go through the bone” is not just performed; in the spiritual mind of the *tietäjä* it materializes, too. Performative words of charms embody *the power of the word*, which must be differentiated from *väki*, which is a magical force⁶. In this situation they demonstrate the *tietäjä*’s authority, his discretion to decide. He does not expect a response from the otherworld; the recovery of a patient or resolving a problem is a kind of answer.

The *tietäjä* was the authority on mythical knowledge. His role and its associated status might be passed down within the family, but it was not just a property of lineage. Continuous learning and increasing experience guaranteed the status over time⁷. Numerous charm motifs present the competence of the *tietäjä*. Verified authority justified his role in the ritual context. This is expressed with performative utterances known as fixed motifs. The *tietäjä* acting on the boundary between the mundane world and the otherworld addressed himself, but the hearer of a charm might sometimes be the patient or someone present at random. Trust in the ability of the *tietäjä* is an essential part of achieving the charm’s objective. Being cured strengthened his authority in the patient’s mind. Still, a possible listener from the mundane world is not the supposed addressee of a charm, for the *tietäjä*’s charm message is directed to the otherworld. The opening lines of a charm are supposed to reassure a supernatural opponent, too.

1. CHARM MOTIFS AS ARGUMENT

The *argument* is the smallest comprehensive basic unit of reasoning by which an attempt is made to demonstrate facts, for example in a debate or scientific article⁸. The argument has also been categorized as “a unit

⁵ Austin 1967, 6-7, 60.

⁶ Tarkka 2013, 110-111.

⁷ Siikala 2002, 83.

⁸ “Argumentti”, *Tieteen Termipankki* (2019)

<http://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:argumentti>.

of reasoning in which one or more prepositions purport to provide evidence for the truth of another proposition”⁹. This seems to be the case for recorded charms. The concept of argument was already explored by ancient philosophers, later Christopher Tindale, the contemporary researcher of the study of speech communication mentions two features: “An argument has a conclusion and premises in support of it. It is a reason-giving use of language, and its success is determined by evaluating the strength of such reasons”. Argumentation is a convincing use of language, and the credibility of the reasoning and connectivity determines the acceptance of an argument. Both reasoning and connectivity must be valid and unreservedly true¹⁰.

The true value and meaning of an expression are linked to the communicative connection. The argument is accompanied by a background assumption that is approachable by the recipient¹¹. In traditional culture, the relevance of the argument is based on the ability of the performer to embrace and demonstrate the connection of an assertion to socially accepted knowledge¹². In the study of speech communication, the argument is the whole linguistic entity of a proposition and the implicit reasoning that supports it. If an argument is a unit of reasoning in which one or more propositions purport to provide evidence for the truth of another proposition¹³, both must be recognized by the interlocutors. The competence of the performer of folklore in any genre is based on social interaction¹⁴. In ritual performances, the rhetorical force of some motif as a vernacular argument is based on a shared textual background. It means that the motif is intersubjectively recognized. It is known that the assertion “I put fire on my coat, embers on my shoes” does not refer to the ignition of clothes, but to the loading of the charm performer’s psyche with the power of the *väki* of a burning garment as a magic inheritance from the dead, possibly from one’s parents¹⁵. The assertion “I have a black dog, an iron-coloured cur, brass guts in its stomach” (*Onpa mulla musta koira, rakki rauan karvallinen, suolet on vaskiset vatsassa, kupariset kuihaeltu*. VII₄ 1628) describes the *tietäjä*’s helper animal. It is not necessary to mention its supernatural nature, since blackness points to otherworld forces,

⁹ Tindale 1999, 4.

¹⁰ Tindale 2004, 2, 32.

¹¹ Tindale 2004, 116.

¹² Bauman 1992, 183.

¹³ Tindale 1999, 4.

¹⁴ Briggs 1987, 357-359.

¹⁵ Siikala 2002, 288.

and with motifs of metal the dog becomes a magically charged figure. Like its everyday counterpart, it bites and even eats an opponent. The argumentation structure is clear when the statement contains a background assumption: the dog is a being that bites bones. The *tietäjä* controls it, and in relation to the otherworld being, his authority is indubitable. Such assertions act as arguments that witness the *tietäjä*'s capability while the motifs are recognised and used traditionally. The assumption affects the interpretation of what is heard, and the absurd reasoning guarantees the truth of the argument within the magical framework.

The context of the text affects the meaning of the message. In a given society, a sacred text may be untrue for an outsider if the reasoning of its arguments is implicit or not at all comprehensible. Intention influences interpretation¹⁶. This applies to charms, too. However, the reasoning behind charm motifs does not follow everyday logic. Argumentation is knowable use of language, but a charm's link to the category of the supernatural brings irrationality to the expression. As a performative speech act, a charm follows a genre-specific logic, which is described by the term *extrarational*. When the concepts related to the supernatural are characterized as corresponding to the mundane world, the incomprehensible is made observable in mundanely conceptualized terms. The mutual correspondence of the supernatural and the natural is the researcher's starting point, but a charm's linguistic usage is based on the emic interpretation of supernatural concepts¹⁷. According to Mihaly Bakhtin, the corresponding structure that challenges the regularity of mundane life appears in fairy tales when time or the hero's power is measured in everyday terms by magnifying them¹⁸. In a charm, expressions related to the otherworld impart the power of the word, and the interpretation of the argument is based on communally shared and agreed-on knowledge.

The argumentation is interactive by nature and calls for a recipient of the message¹⁹. The argument is linked to an assumed listener, who influences its content and reacts to it²⁰. It may be a matter of a bilateral discussion or a discourse with a broad audience. The meta-communicative framework of the message consists of the responsible attitude of the speaker – also the charm performer – to communal tradition and verbal

¹⁶ Perelman 1996, 50-57, 107.

¹⁷ Nikolic 2019, 88-89.

¹⁸ Bakhtin 1981, 148-151.

¹⁹ Perelman 1996, 16-17; Tindale 1999, 91.

²⁰ Bakhtin 1981, 280; Tindale 2004, 102-103.

competence²¹. The charm-reading event is communicative: the listening opponent is present in the otherworld in the verbal construction of a charm-performing *tietäjä*, even when acting on his own. This is emphasized by the ever-increasing threat to the otherworld adversary: “If you do not obey with that, I call to mind another reminder” (*Kuin et tuotana totelle [...] vielä muistit muistetaan*. VII₄ 1028).

In the field of argument, as envisaged by Plato, there also exists the concept of distanced dialogue, in which the listener is not present²². In the text mentioned earlier, Bakhtin pondered monologic rhetoric as the starting point for singular awareness and for the acceptance of the consciousness of another person. The message is directed to an assumed audience, and the addressee is defined implicitly. The words of a lamenter’s self-pity are *autocommunication*²³, but directed to a decedent. The *tietäjä*’s monologue with traditional motifs of the opening lines is uttered primarily to himself. When addressing his ritual ego, the *tietäjä* draws on a separate aspect of his personality, his *luonto* or *baltija*: “Rise from the notch, my *luonto*, from underneath the branch, my *baltija*” (*Nouse luontoni lovesta, havon alta baltijani*. I₄ 15). Words depict the mental ability of the charm performer to move from a latent state of mind to active excitement. Both terms refer to the charmer’s mental element and are related to the human mind or soul²⁴. The commanding utterances are influenced by the power of the word and activate the *tietäjä*’s authority connected to the ritual situation. The spontaneous ritual self-portrait is built in relation to both the mundane and the otherworld. The argument demonstrating the competency of the *tietäjä* is modally assertive and affects the listener by its assertiveness.

2. THE ELEMENTS OF AUTHORITY IN CHARMS

Authority is a descriptive element of power and command. In religions, it is a constant and pervasive element. The question of traditional authority is based on religious claims²⁵. According to a sociological view, authority is a quality of communication by virtue of which it is accepted, and has a

²¹ Bauman 1992, 183.

²² Tindale 2004, 92–98.

²³ Arukask 2012.

²⁴ Siikala 2002, 204, 250–260.

²⁵ *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, MacMillan, 1987), 1, 2.

charismatic dimension²⁶. The *tietäjä* has an authoritative role of ritual specialist. Theodore Kemper examines status and power in the field of ritual behavior in the community, where authority is related to power-backed status. According to him, authority is a status granted to a person in the community, which enables the use of power in a well-defined context among those who grant the right. In social dealings, authority can be challenged, lost and reestablished. Authority must be confirmed from time to time, and if necessary, the continuance of power must be reviewed. The agent of power or his challenger can seek legitimacy by various means, even appealing to divine confirmation²⁷. In the charm tradition appeals are also made to otherworld figures.

Authority can be established with moral conditions; normally it is confirmed by legitimacy, but exceptionally it justifies the use of force²⁸. Violent verbal images in charms seem to refer to arbitrary authority. For example, a curse against supposed envy, “a bloody cloth on your ears, a fiery plug down your throat” (*veribursti korvillabe, tulitulppa kulkkutorveh*. VII, 3216), speaks of the ability of an authoritative *tietäjä* to punish someone with the distressing image of a bloody cloth on his ears and a fiery plug in his throat. Such violent punishment motives do not describe the moral code of the community or the *tietäjä*’s authoritative preferences, but as threats they are influential motifs in the projection of the otherworld.

In a traditional community, the authority of the performer is demonstrated and evaluated in connection with each oral presentation. Authority is then based on a situation-specific, communally defined ability to communicate intelligibly and skillfully²⁹. For instance, during a situation of storytelling the speaker’s authority may be derived from the collective authority of the elders of the society³⁰. Even the *tietäjä* is responsible to his community when he acts on the basis of the assumptions and beliefs he has adopted, of which he has special knowledge. It is on this that his authority is based, and it is activated and, on the other hand, tested in every charm performance. He must prove his verbal ability to heal, to curse, or to solve some other problem. In the verbalization of the rite, the facts of mundane reality like disease or injury are dejected, but the arguments used and their background assumptions must be accepted by the community. Incompe-

²⁶ *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, MacMillan, 1991), 1-2, 473.

²⁷ Kemper 2011, 22-24.

²⁸ Kemper 2011, 19-25, 182-189.

²⁹ Bauman 1992, 182-183.

³⁰ Briggs 1987, 118-119.

tent expressions would put the *tietäjä*'s authority into question³¹. The long chains of charm motifs speak of the effort to secure his authority.

The postulated supernatural *listener* of the charm is a personalized negative concept when the objective is the elimination or creation of trouble – be it illness, a curse, envy, or absence of love. In the charm situation, the *tietäjä* contends with supernatural opponents. He uses the power of the word to subdue the listener by addressing him. If the sender of the evil to be expelled is conceived to be a person skilled in magic, the addressee is in the mundane world. However, in the *tietäjä* mindset, the trial of mental strength is situated in the otherworld. A *tietäjä* who contests the *väki* of an opponent and raises up his *luonto* is manipulating power. Then what kind of arguments are credible enough? In addition to the lines describing the charm performer, an answer must be sought in the underlying assumptions concerning the premises for his activities.

3. THE ROLE OF THE “TIETÄJÄ” AS AN AGENT OF POWER

The beginning of the charm is marked by verses depicting the ritual ego of the *tietäjä*:

Rise, my nature, from the notch,
 from underneath the branch my *baltija*,
 to make charms beside me,
 to rouse envy with me!
 Rise, just as you rose before
 when I invoked you.
 Then the mountains melted like butter,
 the hills flowed like honey,
 the blue backwoods like mead,
 my own fields like beer.

*Nouse luontoni lovesta,
 havon alta baltijani
 luonani lovehtimahan,
 kanssani kavehtimahan.
 Nouse niin kuin nousit ennen
 minun nostatellessani.
 Silloin vuoret voina vuoti
 kalliot meni metenä,
 simana salot siniset,
 oluena omat pellot. (I₄ 15)*³²

The prerequisite for the efficacy of the *tietäjä*'s ritual ego is the attaining of a state of altered consciousness: he recognizes the resources of mental power that belong to his being and addresses his *luonto* or *baltija*, the spiritual being representing the charm performer's persona³³. This is a mental collaborator

³¹ Kuipers 1993, 91.

³² Alliteration and repetition with slightly varying motifs are essential features of Kalevala-meter used across a wide range of genres. It is the prevailing meter in Eastern Finnish and Karelian charms.

³³ Siikala 2002, 204.

who can cross the border between the mundane world and the otherworld. In his word to evoke his *luonto*, the *tietäjä* recognizes a figure of himself with active powers in the otherworld. After securing the ritual dimension of his personality, the *haltija*-endowed *tietäjä* attains his capability: “Here a sharp man is needed, a quick man is fetched” (*Tässä tarkka tarvitaan, mies noppii nouvvetaan*. VII₃ 38). These characteristics justify his authority: a transformer of elements is needed and fetched to perform a charm rite.

The *tietäjä*’s words form an autocommunication, addressed to the magical potential of his “nature”. The double personality depicts that a dynamic ritual ego “rises” from a notch (*lovi*) that leads into the otherworld in the manner of a man “from under a branch, hat on his head, from under a stone, with mittens on” (*bavon alta battupiäissä, kiven alta kinnaskiäissä*. I₄ 11). *Lovi* and parallel terms are linked to the world of “other side” and the *tietäjä*’s archaic magical site³⁴. The garments are indexes of the *tietäjä*’s mental firmness and mythical resources³⁵. The assertion that “one may not touch without iron mittens” (*ei kärsi käsin ruveta, ilman rautarukkasitta*. XII₂ 5244) emphasizes the danger of evil touch, but the *tietäjä* can seize the evil that needs to be driven out with iron mittens. The lines “I’ll take the claws from an eagle, the talons from a hawk, the meat tongs from a bird. I’ll squeeze the crook, I’ll press the evildoer” (*Otan kokolta koprat, havu-kalta buarottimet, linnulta libanpitimet. Minä konnan kouristelen, painelen pahantekijän*. VI₁ 2980) present the *tietäjä*’s magic activity in a chain of argument that moves the subjugation of opposition onto a symbolic level. The image is rendered credible by a knowledge of the ways of birds of prey. The performative words turn into concrete tools of his spiritual reality, and they subdue the opponent categorically:

Let my words go through the bone,
through the limb,
through hot flesh.

*Mänköön minun sanani
läpi luun, läpi jäsenen,
läpi lämpöisten libain* (VI₁ 2976)

The image of the material ability of the intangible word to permeate the physical being is based on the power of the word under the *tietäjä*’s control, and supports his authority. The *tietäjä*’s power and his opponent’s incapacity are to be inferred from expressed parallels: “The witch will deprive the power from me as much as an axe from a stone, an auger from a rock” (*Sen verran minusta noita, kun kirves kivistä tuosta, napakaari kalliosta*. VII₃ 16). The basis of the statement is the everyday information that a bladed

³⁴ Siikala 2002, 260–263.

³⁵ Siikala 2002, 292.

weapon is no use against stone, and hence neither can a supposed opponent harm the charm practitioner. A charm can establish authoritative prestige also through spiritual family tradition and divine background, when “I get my own words [...] through the family, through God, through the throat of the Almighty” (*Otan mie omat sanani, omat on neuot neuomani läpi suvun, läpi Jumalan, läpi kaulan Kaikkivallan*. VII₃ 28). In connection with charms, the argumentation works on an extrarational level: the opponent is subjected to a demonstration of a reality that contradicts the laws of the everyday world. Fact-based and mythical assertions side by side suit the charm’s expressive logic. As part of auto-communication, the assertions expressed to the image of the ego in a metonymic relation are the *tietäjä*’s arguments, put to himself, justifying his authority.

4. THE “TIETÄJÄ’S” METAPHORS OF READINESS

The charms of the *tietäjä*, conscious of his skill, make his spiritual state, his magical ability and his actions. These expressive chains of argument testify to his undisputed ability of him to control mythical power (*väki*), but other specific elements of *tietäjä*-ship may constitute an underlying assumption behind the statements. The pointed statement “I have not come here without my power, without my control, without my father’s fervour, without my parents’ equipment” (*En ole tänne tullutkaana mahittani, maltittani, ilman innotta isäni, varuksitta vanhempani*) will serve as an introduction to verses that speak of single-minded preparation:

My mother washed me,
my parents poured water
thrice on a summer night,
nine times on an autumn night,
on every road to becoming a *tietäjä*,
on every path to becoming a sage.
Then he girded with a manly belt,
put on a manly buckle,
clad in a manly shirt.

*Pesihän mua emoni,
valatteli vanhempani
kolmasti kesäissä yönä,
yhdeksästi syksyyönä
joka tielle tietäjäksi,
taitajaks joka taholle
Vyötti siitte miehen vyöllä
pani miehen palkimella,
pani päälle miehen pajan.* (VII₃ 15)

The credibility of the lines is supported by the general assumption that charm skills are inherited in the family³⁶. Being washed by night refers to

³⁶ Siikala 2002, 83.

the traditional custom of pouring water on a newborn child (VII₅ 4944, 4949, 4953). Implicit reinforcement is lent by knowledge about the use of water in the healing rite (I₄ 14, 555, 612, 941). Night as the temporal setting of the washing rite and the threefold and ninefold repetition emphasize the magic character. The shirt motif refers to the tradition of wrapping a newborn in its father's shirt (VII₅ 4943). On the basis of mythically interpreted tradition uttered motifs become indexes of magical power. Addressed by the *tietäjä* they are arguments of his authority.

Various arguments demonstrate the *tietäjä*'s authority. The mythical inheritance is depicted as the weapons named in the charm: a stone axe, a rocky bow, and the arrows polished in a *hiisi*. The term has several meanings from Christian hell to a mythical being or woods³⁷. Unreal features of everyday tools establish their magic quality, the expressions are arguments:

Gave a man's weapons,
 gave a stone axe,
 gave a rocky bow,
 carried shafts for the bow,
 prepared bolts,
 took a dozen arrows,
 shafts in his quiver,
 sharpened the arrows in *hiisi*.

*Anto miehen astalotkin,
 anto kirveheen kivisen,
 anto kaaren kallioisen.
 Kanto kaarelle pulikat,
 vasamatkin valmisteli,
 toipa nuolia tusinan,
 pulikoita pussillisen.
 nuolet hijessä hijotti. (VII₃ 15)*

The verses that rouse the *tietäjä*'s consciousness form a mental structure based on the mythical reinterpretation of everyday information. Iron objects appear repeatedly in the charms as a guarantee of the *tietäjä*'s power. Iron is also a key element in the magic tradition, perhaps with an implicit background reminiscence of its cultural significance as metal. The idea is manifested, for example, in the myth of the origin of iron, read out as a charm to stem blood³⁸. The charmer subdues the iron but utilizes its power. There are discussions of dressing up in metal: “We made ourselves strong,

³⁷ Siikala 2002, 162-164.

³⁸ The supposed listener of the mythic poem “Origin of Iron”, used to stem blood, is exceptional. Usually, the objective of the healing charm is to clarify the origin of a disease or pain, but a steel weapon (knife, sickle, axe) is generally supposed to be the cause of the bleeding. Therefore, the ability of the iron to cause the wound is understated, becoming an ability to staunch the flow. The verses are arguments for the ultimate insignificance of iron: “You were not great then, / neither great nor little, / not very fine. / You hung out over the summers in a swamp, / the winters inside the dough / [...] / You were born on the coal hill / you grew on the coal moor / [...] / when it was dredged from the bog / and prepared from the mud of earth” (I₄ 188). Only then does the healer address the flowing blood, ordering it to stop.

we girded ourselves, we put on iron shirts” (*Hyöteleimme vyöteleimme, rautapaitoihin pu’emme, vaan ilman vain varusteleimme*. VII₃ 17) is a metaphor for magic preparation; an iron shirt and a steel belt protect against arrows and knives. Propositions about the properties of a fictional outfit create a chain of argument that presents the magical protection of the ritual ego.

In [metal] plates a man is stronger,
better in iron shirts,
more effective in a steel belt,
so that a witch’s arrows do not stick,
nor a *tietäjä*’s blades,
nor a wizard’s iron knives.

*Lustusissa mies lujempi,
rauta paijassa parempi,
deräs vyöllä tehtoisampi.
Siihen ei pisty noijan nuolet
eikä tietäjän teräket,
eikä velhon veiht rauvat.* (VII₃ 15)

The chain of affirmation of the *tietäjä*’s invulnerability annuls the opponent’s attack as a series of pricks expressed in concrete images:

The points will not pierce me,
the steel will not work effectively
I have a sandy skin,
an iron-crusted hide,
I shall make the blade limp,
I shall twist the tip.

*Ei minua piilit pistä,
terä rauat tie tehuansa.
Mull’ on biekkanen hipiä,
rauan karstanen kamana;
Terän mie vennoksi vetäsen,
kären käänän käppyrähän.* (VII₃ 29)

The verbal affirmation, interpreted mythically and expressed in everyday language, shows that the *tietäjä*’s (mental) skin is invulnerable: the opponent’s knife blades are turned aside. The assertions proclaim that the *tietäjä*, in command of the power of iron, has superiority over his opponent. The iron motifs are arguments for the charm performer’s capability and reliability.

5. OTHERWORLDLY CONTACT

A *tietäjä* preparing for his task must strengthen his personal capability by securing his connection to the otherworld. Knowledge of mythical reality brings resources that must be taken under control over and over again. The *tietäjä*’s supposition concerning his relationship to the power of the word is stable, but by addressing otherworld beings, he actualizes his contact and exploits mythical power. The allocution to the water spirit binds it as a participant in the healing process: “Rise now, girl, from the spring, fine-hemmed from the pool to be a companion to the famous man” (*Niin nouse nyt, neiti, lähteestä, Hienohelma, hetteestä Miehen ainuon avuksi Miehen kuulun kumppaliksi*. VII₃ 57). The argument “I am not speaking

with my own mouth, I am speaking with a pure mouth with the good spirit of the Lord” (*En puhu omalla suulla, puhun suulla puhtahalla, Herran hengellä hyvällä*. I₄ 285) contains implicit Christian reasoning. The metaphor of healing by hand – “I don’t anoint with my own fingers, I anoint with the finger of God” (*En voija omin sormin, voijan sormella Jumalan*. VI₁ 2977) – relies on the supposition of recovery with the help of a Christian figure. This argument demonstrates the patient’s recovery through a touch of God’s finger intermediated by the *tietäjä*. Among the host of the charm performer’s helping beings, figures of Christian and folk beliefs are found alongside each other, nor is there any conflict between them: “I move with the power of Ukko, with the power of God, with the power of old Väinämöinen” (*Mie liikun Ukon väellä, Jumalan väellä, väellä vanhan Väinämöisen*. VII₃ 1). Appealing to various beings does not need to rest on conscious selection³⁹. Regardless of the belief category, the assertion of the efficacy of otherworldly help is connected with the supposition of the ability of the supplicant to access mythical power for himself. Control over a negatively defined figure is represented by the spell:

I banish you there:
 to Rutja’s harsh rapids,
 into the embrace of the swimming fish,
 into the mouth of an iron burbot.
 That will take you into the deep.
 You will not get away from there all your days,
 or ever escape.

*Tuonnepa sinun manoan:
 Rutjan koskeen kovahan,
 kalan uivan kainalohon,
 suuhun rautasen matikan;
 tuo sinun syvälle viepi.
 Tuolt’ et pääse päivinäsi
 selviä sinä ikänä.* (VII₄ 2892)

The concluding argument describes the authority of a *tietäjä* in relation to an opponent: he has the power to prevent the return of evil.

The series of threatening images of the *tietäjä*’s acknowledgement of his power is constructed on the basis of motifs that become more and more frightening line by line: if this punishment does not work, there is worse in reserve.

If you don’t heed that,
 I will banish you
 to a brass mountain,
 into the maw of a screaming bear,
 to a coloured church,
 onto a hundred-plank roof,
 into a dead man’s guts.

*Jos et tuosta vielä huoli,
 tuonne mie sinun manoan
 vuoren vaskisen välihin,
 karhun kaljuan kitahan
 kirkon kirjavan tyköhön,
 sata lauan lappiohon,
 miehen kuolehen kohuhun.* (VII₄ 1634)

³⁹ Tarkka 2013, 113–115.

These messages are directed at abstract listeners, such as illness, envy, curses. The aim of the charm is to subjugate the opponent. Threatening arguments are based on the motives of the otherworld contacts controlled by the *tietäjä*. “I will banish you” is an unchallenged argument.

6. THE “TIETÄJÄ’S” GUARANTEES OF MAGICAL SECURITY

After strengthening his self-confidence, the *tietäjä* turns to the tools needed for him to operate in the otherworld reality. The iron fence, stretching up to heaven and equipped with snakes and lizards, is a recurrent motif of protection against otherworld dangers⁴⁰. It is a motif that is also recognized also in mythic epic. Intergeneric dialogue is common in Kalevala-meter poetry⁴¹:

I will build an iron fence,
 I will set up a steel posts
 from earth right up to heaven,
 from heaven right down to earth;
 I will bind it with lizards,
 I will twist it with black serpents,
 I will turn it with speckled snakes,
 I will leave the tails to wag,
 their middle parts to rock,
 their firm heads to shake.

*Aian rautasen rakennan
 teräseivon seisottelen,
 maasta saatse taivabasen,
 taivabasta maahan saatse.
 Sisiliuskuilla sitelen,
 väännän mustilla maoilla,
 käännän kirjokäärmeillä,
 jätän hännät häilymähän,
 keskipaikat keikkumahan,
 päät vankat vapisemahan.* (VII₃ 44)

The underlying assumption in the chain of verbs in this example is the *tietäjä*’s ability to control the anomalous snake, an animal without wings, feet, pelt, or feathers, a finned “non-fish”, and the lizard that resembles it. In many cultures, the well-known image of a mythical snake is supported by ambivalence⁴². In charms, the snake motif is often an asset associated with the *tietäjä*. It appears in the argumentative couplet, “my fingernails burn like adders, my own hands like snakes” (*Kyinä kynteni palavi, käärme-hinä omat käteni*. I₄ 14), the power of the snake is in the hands of the *tietäjä*, but he can also dress his hands in it like gloves: “Where are my adder mittens, my gloves of earth worms?” (*Missä kyiset kintabani, maan matoiset vantubeni*. VII₄ 1745). Here the *tietäjä*’s authority is expressed metaphorically. The idea can be formulated onwards.

⁴⁰ Siikala 2002, 105, 338.

⁴¹ Tarkka 2013, 96-100.

⁴² Haavio 1967, 414-417; Siikala 2002, 233-234, 293.

The authority of a *tietäjä* in relation to the otherworldly equivalent of the snake, a source of both veneration and disgust in the mundane world, is seen in the threatening lines “I yoked a dozen adders, I saddled a hundred worms” (*Kytkin kytitä kymmenkunnan, satuloin sata matoista*. VII₄ 1955). The effectiveness of the assertion is based on a shift to the absurd imagery of animal husbandry: the otherworld reptiles are yoked like cattle to a stall in a barn and are saddled like horses. The mythical interpretation of everyday concepts serves as a metaphor for the *tietäjä*’s ability and as an argument for his authority, even over the snake.

The motifs of the control over fire also establish the *tietäjä*’s authority. A magically modified resource is depicted as the *tietäjä*’s fiery garments, and sweat acts as a graphic representation of his mental power:

Dreadful sweat would pour
on my fiery coat,
on my blazing shirt.
So my ‘nature’ will be firmer,
better in blazing in shirts.

*Hiki birmuinen tulisi
tulisehen turkkibini
panuisehen paitabani.
Että luontoni lujempi,
panu paijoissa parempi. (I₄ 8)*

The notion that the influence of the fiery clothing charges up the power of the *tietäjä* is based on the assumption that he has the ability to control the fatal force of fire. In the charms, fire is a *tietäjä*’s verbal image: an element associated with fighting fire or frost as well as healing frostbite or burns. Before the words that banish an acute problem, the poem that describes the fire’s mythical origin was spoken⁴³. This is why the *tietäjä* can apply to it the power of the word. He claims to “take fire” onto his clothes and to subdue both cold and burning:

I take coal from the embers,
fire with my gloves,

*Otampa hiilet hiiloksesta
valkiesen vanttubiissä. (I₄ 83)*

In the healing charm for frostbite, the exploitation of the power of fire emphasizes the *tietäjä*’s ability and guarantees an experiential relief of pain. Taking coal into hands suffering from cold is a strong argument of the *tietäjä*’s capacity. The recipient of such a message may be a listener in everyday reality, perhaps a patient, part of whose recovery consists of faith in the *tietäjä*’s ability. However, the last two lines are directed to personified frost, an element of the otherworld. With these words, the *tietäjä* also supports his own mental state.

⁴³ Haavio 1967, 367-381.

7. ARGUMENT, A VERBAL TOOL OF THE CHARMER

Arguments for the *tietäjä*'s authority are derived from verses that describe his person, his position in the rite, and prerequisites to magic activity. At the beginning of the ritual situation, the charm performer comments on his mental state, differing from his mundane ego, his position in the otherworld, and his verbal tools charged with magic. The *tietäjä*'s magical tendency, as well as verbal tools, may be inherited from his family, but the lines with mythical motifs may also be acquired from another skillful charmer. These stereotyped images are regular formulae with minor variations. Arguments that emphasize the *tietäjä*'s ability may be expressed with motifs that characterize magic tools. The representation of magic coordination is repeatedly associated with the hands (a cock's claws, fingernails like adders, iron gloves, the Creator's hands). Recurring closely related motifs produce chains of argument instrumental in supporting the *tietäjä*'s authority.

The truth value of the statements here called arguments is linked to the transrational explanatory model described above. In the mythical world view, conceptualization is based on a logic that is meaningful from a communicative perspective. An interpretation that relies on this creates a credible explanation when bringing together a factual characteristic and its mythical counterpart, and modifying the arguments that put into words the control over a situation. This makes the arguments credible. The aim of a charm is to alter something (make a sick person healthy, secure prey, etc.), so words act as tools regardless of the meaning of the everyday interpretation. Lines of charms present realistic meanings in a ritual context, where the argument presented is true. The mental subjugation of the opponent is part of the verbal solution to a problem. The authority of the *tietäjä* produces acute credibility, which expels a problem (illness, curse, etc.) and restores the ritual balance.

Besides the "ritual self" of the *tietäjä*, a charm's statements are addressed to an otherworld listener. An aggressive or bragging utterance demonstrates the authority of a *tietäjä* in relation to an otherworld figure, a humble appeal (usually to a Christian figure) authorizes the *tietäjä* to mediate the power (*väki*) of the otherworld opponent or helper – depending on the task. At random the argumentative lines that evidence the *tietäjä*'s mental ability act as an argument for his authority to a mundane listener, such as a patient.

Regardless of the form of the predicate of the argument (first-person singular), the expressions are not personal and unmatched. They are not

the private feelings of an individual *tietäjä*, but are part of a traditionally recognized charm paradigm. In an acute situation, he would choose diachronically verified arguments from his repertoire that present his authority. In an authentic situation, the charm presented in each rite would be a unique reproduction, a text personally selected from the verbal reserve of the *tietäjä*, and synchronized according to the objective. In the meeting of the mundane and the otherworldly, as a mediator the *tietäjä* performing a charm produces speech that is both tradition-bound and personally selected as required by the context. A credible performance of a charm requires the successful reproduction of the rite – also from the perspective of the *tietäjä*’s own authority. The *tietäjä*’s command of verbal expression was part of his authority in traditional society. Formulae of the opening lines when starting a magical task are auto-communicative commands and arguments that serve as proof of this authority.

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“THE DREAM OF THE MOTHER OF GOD” AND ITS ORAL-WRITTEN PERFORMANCES, WITH EXAMPLES FROM EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN TRADITION

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-jiga>

ABSTRACT

Coming from the early modern Christian times, *The Dream of the Mother of God* was, and still is, a text with an ambiguous status. As an apocryph, it was discouraged by the official church(es), together with its ritual manipulation for therapeutic, divinatory, apotropaic, and other human purposes that involve supernatural. On the other hand, it was very popular among believers (including clerics), partly for its inner dramatic images and sensitive potential and partly for the very rituals the church condemned it for. Categorized as a charm from an etic point of view and as a prayer from the emic point of view, *The Dream* gets a third dimension once it entered in contemporary magazines' pages and internet circulation, being reshaped in concordance with new conventions and strategies and with postmodern expectations.

Keywords: apocrypha; Mother of God; orality-literacy; power of words; Romanian legends; vernacular religiosity.

In 1897, working on a “history of [what he considered to be] a Russian popular prayer known as *The Dream of the Mother of God*”, the Polish scholar Julian Jaworski from Lemberg (Lvov) asked his colleague, the ethnographer priest Simion Florea Marian, if the text was known among Romanians, too. Jaworski specified that Polish and Russian people believe

that “those who daily say this prayer, or simple keep it written on the paper, will be absolved of any sins and will be rewarded even during this life”¹. Marian’s answers confirmed Jaworski’s suspicions: *The Dream* was well spread as a spoken prayer, and its written form was kept as a helpful sacred object as well. In 1904, when he edited the anthology *The Legends of the Mother of God: A Folkloristic Study*, Marian mentioned *The Dream*, also suggesting its possible correspondences with another Romanian widespread legend known as *Mother of God in Search of Her Son*².

The encyclopedic philologist Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu already compared different (Romanian, Russian, Ruthenian, Georgian, Hungarian, Serbian, Polish, Italian, Portuguese, and Provençal) manuscripts of *The Dream* in 1878. Hasdeu agreed with Vesselovski’s hypothesis concerning the Western origin of this text, which then gained high circulation among southeast European Christians (except the Greeks, who used it relatively late in comparison with other cultures, namely, at the beginning of the twentieth century in printed editions). Almost one hundred years later, W. Ryan considered *The Dream* “probably a cultural import [in the Russian space] from Polish popular Catholicism”³, while other scholars assigned direct or indirect Byzantine sources to this text⁴. It is not my purpose here to expose the origin, the history, and the dynamics of *The Dream* during its manuscript circulation among different cultures and languages, but to ethnologically approach its performative potential. Still, in order to do this, there has to be mentioned that the earlier known written version, together with iconographic representations of the Virgin Mary’s prophetic dream, comes from the fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Italian culture⁵. The first-known Romanian manuscript was written (translated? copied?) around 300 years later, in 1772, by a monk⁶. Nowadays, according to Emanuela Timotin, who dedicated three studies to the Romanian versions of this text, including a rich monograph published in 2011, the Romanian Academy Library manuscripts fund stores fifty-four versions of

¹ Marian 1991, 173.

² In this legend, Jesus’s torments and crucifying are revealed to the Mother of God by different characters she meets on her way. In Romanian folklore, the theme of an old mother in search of her son, who, in fact, has already been murdered, also occurs in the *Miorita* epic song (here the son is a young shepherd). See Marian 2003, 110.

³ Ryan 2005, 121.

⁴ For a review of the theories concerning the origins and diffusion of this apocripha, see Timotin 2011, 211–112, 236–238.

⁵ Timotin 2016, 247.

⁶ Timotin 2011, 218.

The Dream, mostly written between the middle of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century⁷. This number doesn't reflect the real presence of the text among Romanians, considering that many versions, which have been copied within rural milieus before and after the period mentioned above, remained unknown.

In 1883 Moses Gaster published the concentrated study *The Dream of the Mother of God* in which he underlined the existence, in the Romanian language, of a short and a long version, the latest being considered by Gaster a local development, which circulated from the beginning of the eighteenth century. During times of war in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the popularity of *The Dream* dramatically increased; starting with 1846 it was printed in small-size booklets with an extremely high number of copies (Hasdeu counted 300,000 printed pieces). During World War I, the many publishing houses specializing in popular (cheap) books delivered yearly a new edition of *The Dream*⁸, which was very popular among soldiers. Printed editions have been hand-copied in turn. In these editions, entitled *Talisman* or *The Epistole* (Ro. *Epistolii*), *The Dream* was bound with other apocrypha that were in turn deeply involved in devotional popular practices, namely *The Mother of God's Journey to the Hell / The Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*, *The Legend of the Sunday* (also known as *The Epistle of Jesus Christ / The Epistle Fallen Down from the Heaven*) and, a little bit later, *The Names of Christ*.

The manuscript published by Moser Gaster was written in 1784. Here is the English translation of this edition:

The Dream of the pure God birthgiver, when the Virgin felt asleep in the Mountain of Olives, she dreamt a dream through her sleep; **and**⁹ there really, meaning visible, there came Lord Is.Hs **and** said to her: "Oh, my dearest mother, are you sleeping, **and** couldn't hear through the sleep?" **And** when the holy one woke up she answered to Is.Hs **and** said: "I felt asleep, **and** then woke up **and** then dreamt of you caught **and** tied to the post **and** crucified to the cross **and** the blood flowing from your holy head turned in a river, **and** I saw your holy body as a debarked wood. Js. Hr replayed **and** said: "O, my dear mother, the dream you has dreamt I really will undergo on behalf of the human race." **And** those who writes this holly book **and** carries it with them, will receive mercy from God and from everyone, **and** in the hour of their death, I will show myself **and** will pray together with all the angels in

⁷ Timotin 2011, 215.

⁸ Bichigean 1919, 248.

⁹ The highlighting of the "and" conjunction belongs to me.

nel testo originale in rumeno e relativa traduzione inglese le virgolette non ci sono proprio (vedi nota 10), l'autrice preferisce che si lasci SENZA le virgolette dei dialoghi

front of my Son for that soul, **and** those who will copy and read it aloud for other people, **and** will keep this holly book by themselves, I will carry to the Kingdom of heaven. Amen!"¹⁰

Further versions enrich the list of promises and effects assigned to *The Dream* usage. They also enrich the prescriptions of how to activate its power, from reading it at least once a day to more complicated time sequencing: "O, My Lord, my Son, / Who will say these holly words, / Three times during the day / and two times during the night, / Neither the fire will burn him, / Nor the Tartars will enslave him / Nor will die of plague" (from an oral variant recorded at the beginning of the twentieth century)¹¹.

We deal with a unit that simultaneously is a literary text, an oral folk prayer, an incantation, and a ritual object whose power is activated through its performance. My effort here is to articulate the question of the text's contiguity with its para-textual manipulations, explicitly expressed either by the ending formulas or by local developments of them.

Turning to the oneiric arena, Mary was the first person who had access to Jesus's crucifixion event. In terms of Christianity, the legend might be considered a mythical narrative of origins (the foundation of a new era through Jesus Christ's sacrifice and resurrection) that creates a link between "past and performative present"¹², and whose performance represents a "transmission of power from a mythic realm articulated in narrative, to the human present"¹³. In other words, each performance of *The Dream* reiterates and actuates the sacred events of the past and creates effects in the present. Furthermore, speaking about a prophetic dream, each performance connects the present with the future, too.

¹⁰ The Romanian original states: "Visul preacuratei născătoare de Dumnezeu când au adormit ficioara în muntele Măslinilor, au visat prin somnu un vis; și veni către dânsa aeve adică în vedere domnul Is.Hr și iau zăs: O! Maima mea iubită! Au dormi și nu auzi prin somnu? Apoi dacă s'au dișteptat sfânta, au și răspuns lui Is.Hr și au zăs: adormu, fiul meu iubit, și iar m'am dișteptat și t'am visat, prinsu și la stâlp legat, și pre cruce răstignit și despre sfântul tău cap curge sângele și părău făcând și pre sfântul tău trup l'am văzut unu lemnu di coaji juchit. Răspuns Is.Hr și zăsă: O! maica me iubită! Visul ce l'ai visat eu voiu să'l paț pentru norodul ominesc. Și cine o va scriea aciașă sfântă carte și o va purta la dânsul, aciala om va ave milă de la Dumnezeu și priimit de la toți oamenii, și la ciasul morții lui, mă voiu arăta sângură și mă voi ruga cu toți îngerii către fiul meu, pentru sufletulacelui om, ci o va scriea și o va citi și altora. Și să o poarti la dânsul aciașă sfântă carte și'l voiu duce într'un împărăția ceriului. Amin!". See Gaster 1883, 369-370.

¹¹ Pamfile 1914, 108.

¹² Passalis 2011, 48.

¹³ Frankfurter 1995, 464, quoted by Passalis 2011, 48.

It is not the simple Gospel plot – here doubled by an uncanonical reiteration – that was supposed to be delivered, but the very structure of an encounter narrative composed of (1) a frame story exposed in dialogic form, and (2) a final part that consists in formalized demands for the delivery of the prayer, instructions on how to do this, and the benefits that come after the demands have been properly complied. In other words, the final part of the text predisposes a functional lecture of the entire story. As part of the prayer's body, from the perspective of the people who *trust* the legend and *use* the text, both the quality of having premonitory dreams and the conditions of ritual performances that involve *The Dream* are placed under the authority of the Mother of God, the sacred person, the one who once had a prophetic dream. Their incumbent observance marks "the fluid space between the narrative and the performative context"; following the ideas of Haralampos Passalis, we speak about a junctional passage connecting the text with the processes of its reiterations and actuation¹⁴.

Concurrently, through the verbalization of the performance event (how to read or to say it) and of its effects (why to do it), the very final formulas increase the charming efficiencies of the text: to *say* or to *write* that *The Dream's* scribe/reader/keeper will be defended and will enter heaven anticipates a future situation of protection and salvation reflected on the scribe/reader itself. This is a reality installed through the supernatural power of the written-oral act, which in turn is incorporated within a ritual complex of gestures. In this regard, the text not only promises rewards, but already materializes them during its very performance and brings the future into the present as well. Secondly, at a cognitive level, anticipation works as a *similia similibus* mechanism, whose term of reference is implicit: even if *The Dream* doesn't mention the final episode of the story (Jesus's resurrection and the promise of eternal life), the text's users mentally restore its integrality, thus attracting Christ's salvation upon themselves or, on the contrary, causing enemies' punishment. This is depicted in the versified oral variant¹⁵ below, which circulated among Romanians at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Stone over stone / Mother of God / Was sitting on a stone. / There came Lord Christ.

- Oh, Our mercy Mother, / Are you either sleeping / Or resting?
- Oh, Lord, my Son, / I neither sleep / or rest. / I had a short sleep / And dreamt a great dream: / in which you have been caught by the cruel Jews. /

¹⁴ Passalis 2011, 49.

¹⁵ For the phenomenon of versificated manuscripts of *The Dream*, see Timotin 2018.

- In *Udeia*¹⁶ / They have tormented you / They tortured you, / With vinegar and gall they fed you; / They dressed you with nettle shirt, / They encircled you with a thorny girdle / And they put / A crown of thorns on your head.
- Oh, Lord, our Mother, / As will they beat me with their hands / Over the face of my chest, / As will I dart them with the fire whip [...], too.
 - Of, Lord, / My Son / Whoever will say / These holy words, / Each day for seven times / And during the night for two times, / Neither the fire will burn, / Or the Tartars will enslave, / Nor will die of the plague.¹⁷

The threats addressed to those who provoke Jesus's sufferings are aimed, in fact, at any potential evil agents.

1. PERFORMING "THE DREAM"

1.1. *Writing and saying*

The shepherds carry a small prayer book in their wallet. We say prayers before eating: the Heavenly Lord, the Creed, the Mother of God Epistle.¹⁸

In eastern Europe, at least up to the end of the nineteenth century, to write represented a special event that required various material supports (paper, leather, tree bark, etc.), utensils and their acquisition, particular conditions of time and space, a certain body posture, and a context of solitude or, on

¹⁶ Judaea.

¹⁷ Pamfile 1914, 33-34. The variant was recorded in the Muscel region, South Romania. Here is the Romanian original: Piatră peste piatră / Maica Domnului / Jos pe piatră ședea / Domnul Hristos / Pe altă parte venea.

- O, Maica Noastră ce iubești, / Ori dormi / Ori odinești?
- O, Doamne, Fiul meu / Nici dorm, nici odinesc. / Puținel somn în somn / Și mare vis că visai: / Unde te prinsese câinii de Jidovi, / În *Udeia* / Te căsnia / Te chinuia, / Cu oțet și fiere te-adăpa; / Te-mbrăcase cu cămașă de urzici, / Te-ncinsese cu brâu de mărăcină / Și-ți pusese / Coroană de spini pe cap.
- O, Doamne, Maica noastră, / Cum mă vrea bate cu palmele [sic] / Peste fața obrazului, / Cu biciu de foc din cer / L-oiu săgeta. [...]
- O, Doamne, / Fiu meu / Cine va prea zice / Aste cuvinte sfinte, / Ziua de trei ori / Și noaptea de două ori, / Nici focu nu-l va arde, / Nici *Tatarii* nu-l va robi, / Nici de ciumă nu va muri.

¹⁸ Personal archive. Field information recorded from C.M., female, seventy-six years old, shepherdess, Orthodox Christian confession. Râu Sadului village, Sibiu County, Romania, July 26, 2017.

the contrary, a social context. To copy a text, all the more a religious one, was assigned devotional meanings¹⁹ that required additional gestures (the sign of the cross) and body preparations that configured a ceremonialized, almost ritualized performance of writing.

The general accepted opinion is that, from the very beginning, *The Dream* was composed in literary form, then copied, translated into different languages, copied again, and memorized. As far as I could find, the practices of transcribing *The Dream* directly from memory or of writing it after dictation are not attested (although they cannot be totally denied as a possibility). Therefore, we don't speak about an oral charm transcription, but about a written item that was transmitted through further written versions, which in turn entered oral circulation. Yet the versions written between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries bear the important mark of oral phraseology represented by the predominance of the copulative coordination of sentences²⁰, which, even if it does not prove an oral origin of the text, points to a semiliterate profile of the scribes, whose ability in writing was at an elementary level and who did not totally internalized the cognitive mechanisms derived from a long practice of literacy (one that is phraseologically reflected by subordinative reports)²¹. On the other hand, the oral variants I recorded in recent years²² contain easily recognizable phrasings originated in written forms of *The Dream* (probably as a consequence of people learning it by heart after repeatedly readings²³) and influenced by the liturgical language dedicated to the Mother of God.

As is well known, oral and interactive performance represents a process in which creation, reception (and perception), and transmission of a formalized (syncretic) structure take place simultaneously, leading to a variant composed on the base of a mental text²⁴ crystalized during previous performances and adjusted to the ongoing performance. *The Dream's*

¹⁹ In this regard, the phraseological formalized contexts in which the scribes inserted their name at the end of the text they copied valorize their writing effort in a similar soteriological registers as those configured by the ending promises of *The Dream* (Jiga Iliescu 2007, 384-396).

²⁰ In the paragraph that translates the Romanian variant published by Moses Gaster I highlighted the conjunction *and* in order to underline this aspect.

²¹ Ong 2002, 36-38.

²² One of them is transcribed and translated below.

²³ To my knowledge, the goal of deliberately learning *The Dream* by heart is not attested.

²⁴ Honko 1998, 94.

reproduction and transmission (through copying and also through reading or reciting it aloud) events do not integrally fit this pattern of communication precisely because their written hypostases effect a static and reversible model, which theoretically can be identically reproduced by subsequent copies. Still, in the case of the handwritten tradition, we can speak about a specific variability derived both from the techniques of copying and from distinct extra-textual configurations (dimension and consistency of the support, layout, figurative insertions, corrections or supplementary information added by other hands, etc.) that reflect a given attitude of freedom towards the model. The end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century have been characterized by efforts to extend alphabetization; thus we may suppose that more and more hand-copied versions of *The Dream* have been produced (and the printed booklets have been hand-copied at their turn). Unfortunately, ethnographers of those times were not highly interested in such expressions of folk culture and therefore did not collect them systematically²⁵. We do not have a substantial corpus of early modern manuscripts of *The Dream* coming from rural and small urban lay milieus, for example, so as to evaluate its presumptive flexibility to insertions of additional narratives (with oral origin?) in the very body of the written artifact, insertions that validate the text's efficiency and power as usually happens in the chain-letters category. This strategy is also attested in the case of *The Legend of the Sunday*²⁶ apocrypha, whose structure shares with *The Dream* final formulas and demands for delivering the text as a promise for protection and salvation. Based on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century printed editions, we can assert that the most elastic part of *The Dream* is represented by its final formulas that, besides textual variability, dominantly consist in the extension of the list of the benefits promised by the very text. This also suggests a certain variability of the ritual structures that will orally activate the sacred potential of *The Dream*.

Thus, the role and the power of the writing event are revealed only in connection with the corollary presence of saying and handling the *text*, and vice versa. Here is a fragment of a dialogue I had in 2017 with a priest from a village in Sibiu County, Cindrel Mountain, that underlines the aural quality of the text:

²⁵ Concerning the pre-modern manuscripts of *The Dream* and the scribes' interventions in the text, see Timotin 2016.

²⁶ In this respect, an example is represented by a manuscript of *The Epistle of Jesus Christ (The Legend of the Sunday)* stored in the Archive of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore (AIEF) in Bucharest; it was written by a soldier in World War I (Jiga Illiescu 2014).

- (I.P.) They have the *Talisman* with them. That small book, aaa, *The Dream of the Mother of God*. And it was of great value for them. And they kept that small book in the pocket of the coat as a protector.
- (L.J.I.) Was it printed or hand-written?
- (I.P.) Before the revolution [1989], people used to write it. Time ago, those who knew to write better, sew few sheets in a notebook. And they read it, and read it until it turned erased. They learned it by heart.
- (L.J.I.) Did they read it in mind or aloud?
- (I.P.) While they are in solitude, they read it aloud. That is how I taught them.
- (L.J.I.) Why?
- (I.P.) I told them: “You may lose the mind. The attention. It may be distracted. So, you must say it a little aloud. Whispering.”²⁷

1.2. Saying “The Dream”

The formalized manners of voicing the text – by reading it in solitude in a low voice, by reading it aloud in front of an audience, or by declaiming it by heart – leads to oral, immaterial hypostases of the written artifact with their own individuality, organic dynamic, and germinative potential. Here is the translated transcription of an oral variant I recorded in 2016 from an old lady; it is based on the so-called long recension of the legend:

- (L.J.I.) Do you remember *The Dream of the Mother of God*?
- (M.G.) Yes!
- (L.J.I.) Would you like to tell it?
- (M.G.) I do! But if I would make a mistake... [she laughs]. There has to be a book here, somewhere, a little book. With *The Dream of Mother of God*. Falling asleep the Holy Virgin in the Eleon Mountain²⁸, when she was in the Bethlehem city, there came our Lord Jesus Christ to her, in the vision, and call her and asked her: “My sweetest and beautiful Mother, are you sleeping?” And the holy answers while she woke up a little: “My sweetest and beautiful son, Jesus Christ, I indeed fell asleep, and, look, I saw a terrible dream for You.” And then Our Lord Jesus Christ said: “My sweetest and beautiful, tell, Mother, the dream you saw!” Then the holy answered and said: “Oh, my sweetest and beautiful son, Jesus Christ, I saw Peter in Rome and

²⁷ Personal archive. Field information recorded from P.I., priest, seventy-four years old. Gura Râului village, Sibiu County, July 24, 2017; recorded and transcribed by the author.

²⁸ Mount of Olives.

Pavel in Dalmatia, and I saw you in the city of...mm, Vi..., Viflaiem, betrayed and beaten, and like a peeled wood and on the cross crucified and with gall they fed you and with vinegar they drunk you, with the reed and with the rod they beat your holy head and on your holy head they put a crown of thorns and they spat on your holy face. And one of the soldiers stabbed you on the ribs with the spear, suddenly blood and water came out. Then the sun turned dark, the moon turned red, the iconostasis of the church split from the top to the bottom and a deep darkness covered the entire earth, from the sixth to the ninth hours. I, being with Nicodemus, saw that he gets you off the cross and wrapped you in a clean pall, he put you in the grave and you descended to the hell, crushed the iron latches and shattered the copper hinges, you took out Adam and Eve from the hell.” And then our Lord Jesus Christ said: “My sweet and beautiful and compassionate Mother, you dreamt a true dream, ’cause I will suffer all of these for the humankind. And if someone will write your dream and will have it in the house and will keep it to her/himself and will read it at least once a day, then the devil can’t get close to that house, and I will expel the unclean spirit. And the angel of God will take his rejoice soul in the kingdom of heaven and I will put him to the right of the Father together with all the virtues who pleased God, from everlasting to everlasting, amen.”

(L.J.I.) Who taught you *The Dream*?

(M.G.) My mother, when I was a child. She used to teach me prayers, *The Dream*, Our Lord... while we were walking to the field, or travelling for various purposes.

(L.J.I.) Have you taught anyone *The Dream*?

(M.G.) No, I didn’t. No one is learning it now.²⁹

²⁹ Personal archive. Fieldwork information recorded from M.G., seventy-one years old, female, Orthodox Christian confession, peasant. Pietriș village, Mureș County, July 2016; recorded and transcribed by author. The original Romanian transcription states:

(L.J.I.) Mai știți Visul Maicii Domnului?

(M.G.) Da!

(L.J.I.) Ni-l ziceți și nouă?

(M.G.) Zic. Dacă l-oi greși... [râde]. Da io trebe să am ș-o carte, o cărtișică undeva. Cu Visu Maicii Domnului. Adormind Preasfânta Fecioară în muntele Eleonului, când a fost în cetatea Viflaemului, a venit Domnu Nost Isus Gristos la dânsa în vedenie, și-o strigă și o întrebă “Maica Mea prea dulce și prea frumoasă, dormi?” Iar sfânta răspunse, dacă se mai deșteptă: “Fiul meu prea dulce și prea frumos, Isus Cristos, adevărat c-am fost adormit, și, iacătă, strașnic vis am văzut pentru Tine”. Ș-atunșa o zâs Domnu Nostu Isus Gristos “Maica mea, prea dulce și prea frumoasă și prea bună, spune, Maică, visu ce-ai văzut!” Atuncea sfânta răspunse și zice: “O, fiul meu, prea dulce și prea frumos, Isus Gristos, am văzut pe Petru în Roma și pe Pavel în

To reproduce *The Dream* by heart requires the double effort of active memory and mental vigilance. During the fieldwork I conducted between 2016 and 2019 in the central (Sibiu, Mureș, and Hunedoara counties), southern (Vâlcea county) and eastern (Neamț county) areas of Romania, I had occasions to notice how cautious my informants were (especially, but not exclusively, women older than sixty years) not to make any mistake while saying *The Dream* by heart. High oral (concerning both reading and reciting) fidelity toward the written model is evaluated as a precondition for a ritual's effects. For example, the demand for a faithful text reproduction suggests the dangerous power of spoken words if they are not put properly. Within a synecdochic mechanism that organically binds the incantation's "body" with the identity of its performer, to damage the text's integrity gives rise to reader's or teller's losing integrity of mind: "If you leave out something while you read and say the *Epistolia*³⁰, then you get mad"³¹.

The gallery of ritual prescriptions related to *The Dream*'s voicing event includes the scenario of activating the power of the written and the spoken words on behalf of a dying person: "For seven evenings, seven girls of 11-12 years old read together *The Dream of the Holy Mother* and genuflect. They read at the table on the moribund's coat. Then the coat is placed in

Dalmația, iară pe tine te-am văzut în cetatea...ă, Vi..., Viflaiemului, vândut și bătut, și ca on lemn cojit în sus, și pe cruce răsticnit și cu hiere te-o hrănit, și cu oțet te-a adăpat, cu trestia și cu toiagu preste sfântul Tău cap te-a bătut și pe sfântul Tău cap cunună de spini au pus și-n sfântul Tău obraz te-o scuipat. Iar unul dintre ostași cu sulița-n costă te-a împuns, de îndată a ieșit sânje ș-apă. Atuncea soarele s-a ntunecat, luna-n roșată s-a schimbat, catapitiasma bisericii de sus și până jos în două s-a despicat și-ntunec mare s-a făcut peste tot pământul, de la al șasălea cias pân la nouălea cias. Io, find și cu Nicodim, mi s-a părut că te pogoară de pe cruce și-n giulgi curat te-a-nfășurat, în mormânt te-a pus și-n iad te-ai pogorât, zăvoarele cele de fer le-ai zdrobit și țâțânele cele de aramă le-ai sfărâmat, pre Adam și pre Eva i-ai scos afară din iad". Ș-atunci a zis Domnul Nostru Isus Cristos: "Maica Mea cea dulce și prea frumoasă, și prea bună, adevărat ghisi ai văzut, c-astea toate am să le pătesc, pentru niamul omnesc. Și de ți-a scrie cineva visul tău și în casa sa îl va avea și la sine-l va purta și-l va ceti batăr o dată pe zi. De aceea casă dracul nu se va putea apropia, pe duhul cel necurat îl voi goni. Iar îngerul lui Dumnezeu va lua sufletu lui ducându-se, veselindu-se întru părăția ceriului și-l voi pune di-a driapta Tatălui cu toț direpții care i-a bineplăcut lui Dumnezeu, din viac până în viac, amin".

(L.J.I.) Ați mai învățat pe cineva?

(M.G.) Nu mai învăț nime amu.

³⁰ Initially, the title *Epistolia* (En. *Epistle*) referred to *The Legend of the Sunday*, also known as *The Epistle Fallen Down from the Heaven* (Ro. *Scrisoarea căzută din cer*).

³¹ Ștefănuță 1937, 313.

the patient's bed and left there"³². Unfortunately, even if the performative event represents an important key for understanding the reasons, reactions, and attitudes of those people who put *The Dream* into action, there is a "lack of context" regarding the "immediate performance situation"³³. In the very case quoted above, the description does not mention if a different girl reads each day, if each girl reads a certain passage, if they read aloud all together at the same time, if the moribund is in the same room with them, if the moribund is sleeping or awake, and so on.

The Dream's reading, in solitude or in a group, in mind or aloud was assigned with psychopomp values: "While I was transcribing on the paper a *Dream of Mother of God*", Vera Mârzac, forty-five years old, said, "It is good to hold this book on your chest and to read it as often as possible; some use to read it at funerals, too"³⁴.

I already mentioned the *Mother of God in Search of Her Son* legend (also known as *The Holy Mother's Prayer*, *The Holy Mother's Story*, *The God's Story*, or *The Counting*). The hypothesis that it had its origin in *The Dream* (as suggested by Simion Florea Marian) was refuted by later scholars³⁵. Yet there are many similarities (including those on the level of motifs and images) between the two narratives that are of great importance for our discussion. This common structure largely consists of a section where Jesus's torments are dialogically described, and a final part where the demands for ritual transmission are embedded in the very text; even if the ending formulas are more complicated here, they still promise rewards in the afterlife. Versified variants of this legend are sung as Christmas ritual carols or are recited as divinatory charms³⁶ used in the same contexts as *The Dream*: "The words of this variant [of the Mother of God's prayer; recorded in western Romania] are recited at the bed of a moribund by someone who knows them by heart. If the reciter stumbles or [makes] mistakes, then it is believed that the patient will die; but if he/she recites fluently, then it is believed that the patient will recover"³⁷. At least in western Romania, reading *The Dream* is part of the same performance arena: "She said the *Counting* at the head of the moribund. [...] And she also

³² Recorded in 1959 in Vaidei, Hunedoara County. Document stored at the AIEF. Informations fund n. 1964.

³³ Wolf-Knuts 2009.

³⁴ Ștefănuță 1934, 313.

³⁵ See Del Conte 2003, 293-294.

³⁶ The topic is very rich and will be investigated in a distinct study.

³⁷ Marian 2003, 259.

read *The Dream of the Mother of God*"³⁸. In both cases the reader/reciter is entrusted as a medium who delivers the sacred message embedded by the spoken structure. Thus, we can consider the performance situation as a divinatory arena by itself, where the "signs" are delivered that should be decoded by the reader's audience; a perform-mancy event authorized by the prophetic character of the very dream that Mother of God had.

There is a subtle connection between the unceasing (and repetitive) reading process and the dreaming activity, both of which might lead to specific states of mind favorable for communication between realms. The reading Mother of God motif (more precisely, being absorbed in her reading!) occurs in different texts of Romanian folklore (charms, funeral songs, Christmas songs). For example, variants of *The Mother of God in Search of Her Son* depict Mary reading in a ritualized setting in order to see her lost Son, who was crucified: "Holy Mother woke up early in the morning / Washed her face, / Combed her yellow hair, / Worshiped God, / Entered the monastery church / Took the book in her hand / And looked for her Son"; "She was sitting / She wasn't only sitting, / But reading / A small book, / A large book, / For the entire long summer day / Untill the evening"³⁹. Both ritualized processes of ceaseless reading, on the one hand, and dreaming, on the other hand, deeply involve *The Dream of the Mother of God*: "Some maidens and women [...] keep *The Dream* under their pillow"⁴⁰ to mediate their oneiric activity, in divinatory terms. The written artifact is invested with the power of inducing oneirical supernatural encounter experiences, such as the encounter with Mother of God in her psychopomp role⁴¹: in the first years of the twentieth century it was attested the belief that one "who will read [*The Dream*] and will keep it on heart with faith and pioussness for the lifetime, will see the Holy Virgin Mary in a dream three days before death"⁴².

The requirement of constant and intense reading of *The Dream* is a condition to preserve its beneficial effects, which are otherwise wasted⁴³: "Peasant Dănilă Petre, 46 years old, owned an *Epistolie* written in Cyrillic letters about which he tells us that 'I gave it to a monastery to be read

³⁸ Hedesan 2015, 108.

³⁹ Marian 2003, 121-124.

⁴⁰ Hasdeu 1983, 389.

⁴¹ Comparing different versions of *The Dream*, we can notice that the psychopomp role is assigned to the Mother of God, the Archangel Michael, or Jesus Christ.

⁴² Bichigean 1919, 251.

⁴³ Maybe it is not meaningless to notice a similarity with the very status of an icon that, according to the Christian Orthodox view, has to be exposed, to be seen, to be active.

there. We can't keep this letter at home, because it has to be permanently read, and we don't know to read"⁴⁴.

1.3. *Having, keeping, touching, "The Dream"*

When the material support of the written *Dream* turns into a ritual object, it is expected to exert apotropaic effects and to mediate liminal situations: to touch the womb of pregnant women in order to deliver without complications⁴⁵; to depose *The Dream*, together with a bottle of holy water (as a mutual enhancement with good sacredness), in the newborn crib for keeping the devil away⁴⁶; to offer *The Dream* (the *Epistle*) as alms⁴⁷, indirectly underlining the belief that its power remains active in the other world; and to keep it the house "in a place of honor", probably the same east wall where the icons are exposed, suggesting its status as a material "image" of the sacred world behind it (a world in which Mary's oneiric vision took place). The force and the importance of *The Dream* as an amulet was narratively expressed by warning legends against not having it, especially in extreme or liminal circumstances: for instance, narratives center on a man on his way back home who meets the devil; later, the man was found far away from his house, almost speechless; a month later he died. "Poor fellow, it was his sin, my father said. This is what happens when you travel without *The Dream of the Mother of God* with you. I have it in my headgear and anything like this happened to me ever!"⁴⁸.

2. NEW LIFE OF "THE DREAM OF THE MOTHER OF GOD"

The circumstances and the reasons assigned to *The Dream* performance events are relevant for understanding users' attitudes toward the very written/reading practices, their fears and needs, their religious expectations and views over the sacredness, and, not least, for the dynamic relationship between "religion as prescribed and religion as practiced"⁴⁹. Over time, they changed.

⁴⁴ Nișcani village, Bessarabia. Ștefănuță 1937, 314.

⁴⁵ Sevastos (1892) 1990, 158.

⁴⁶ Ofrim 2001, 178; Ștefănuță 1991, 192.

⁴⁷ Ofrim 2001, 178.

⁴⁸ Dragoslav (1925) 1994, 134.

⁴⁹ Christian 1981, 178.

Starting with the end of the nineteenth century, and especially in the first decades of the twentieth century (years coincident with war), *The Dream* was copied and read (sometimes on behalf of somebody else) by semiliterate laypeople in printed booklets delivered by lay publishing houses. Among other aspects, this meant that reading the text could be done without priests' mediation and authority. At this time the soteriological ending formulas were replaced by more mundane references against personal enemies, evil spirits, devil attacks, accidents, meteorological hard phenomena, earthquakes, fire, water, and sudden death. At the same time, the formulas guaranteed good luck, curative purposes – e.g., "if it is read to a sick person, he/she will recover all of a sudden"⁵⁰ – safe travels, easy giving of birth, etc.

Some printed editions enlarged the original structure of the legend with a prologue that asserts a prestigious divine origin of the very text: "This prayer was found at the holy grave of the Holy Virgin Mary"⁵¹. We recognize here the narrative framework of another extremely popular apocrypha, namely *The Epistle fallen down from the heaven* (found on Jesus Christ's grave); as the two legends were often bound between the covers of the same booklet or they were even delivered as parts of the same text⁵², sharing similar promises and being involved in similar ritual performances, they influenced each other at the structural level, too. Already at the end of the nineteenth century there appeared counterreactions against the new profile of *The Dream* (but not against the very legend and prayer). For example, the booklet edited in 1888 in Cernăuți by archimandrite Mihai-Miron Călinescu was entitled *The Dream of Mother of God Printed in the Spirit of Real Orthodoxy, Erasing All the Superstitious Addendums*⁵³.

Owing to its uncanonical character and to its paratextual usages, the clergy's attitude towards *The Dream* is not currently homogeneous – nor was it in the past, even if its first scribes were rural priests or monks who probably evaluated it as a prayer. Some of them positively appreciate it in the emic term of deep faith, while others are more circumspect and condemn it, in the etic terms of heresy and superstitions. Indeed, the narrated story stays in concordance with the Christian doctrine of Jesus's

⁵⁰ Bichigean 1919, 250.

⁵¹ Bichigean 1919, 252.

⁵² In July 2016 I photographed a handwritten prayer notebook owned by a fifty-seven-year-old lady from Ibănești Pădure village, southeast Transylvania. She said that she copied the prayers (in her terms) from other notebooks when she was around twenty-five or twenty-six years old.

⁵³ Bichigean 1919, 250.

self-sacrifice and individual salvation, while the very prophetic dream and the promises that stipulate heavenly reward to everyone who simply uses the text, as verbalized in the final part of *The Dream*, are not. Concurrently, some influential contemporary confessors, whose spiritual authority shapes vernacular Christian religiosities in Romania, outrightly reprobate it in their sermons and writings (a review of these voices can be read, in Romanian, on the site *CrestinOrtodox.ro*, <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/credinta/visul-maicii-domnului-97527.html>⁵⁴). As part of the process of negotiating religiosities, *The Talisman* (its modern title that points more to magic than to religion) can still be bought from monasteries' shops or on the pilgrimage's routes, or from online selling sites. It can be read as PowerPoint presentation or listed to on a YouTube channel as well. But the popularity of its older hypostasis is declining.

In the meantime, *The Dream* entered the repertoire of post(post) modern agents of magic who reshaped the text and its previous tradition of performances in concordance with the expectations of a new category of beneficiaries (labeled as clients, instead of believers) and with the new channels of transmission, especially online spiritual magazines, religious and esoteric blogs, social-network pages created and sustained by parapsychologists, and by "witches" or other new-age groups. For example, in Iulia Guțu-Jilinschi's book *The White Art of Magic Addressed to Women*, translated from Russian to Romanian, *The Dream* is understood to have become part of the magic *instrumentarium*: "All sorcerers know that the prayers [plural in original] called *The Dream of Mother of God* work recovering marvels and that [they] are very useful for resolving most complicated situations. This prayer was found at the holy Grave of the Holy One which

⁵⁴ I give one single example: "Beware of *The Dream of the Mother of God*! In the last years there were offered to us different substitutes of faith by the means of small booklets known as apocrypha, which are condemned by the Church. The most known is the little book *The Dream of the Mother of God*, reprinted many times by different publishing houses, but also by some parishes, being even 'high blessed.' [...] There wasn't any need to announce Mother of God in a dream, because she already [...] knew about the Calvary from Lord's words, when He told to His disciples that 'The Son of the Man must suffer and he... must be killed.' [...] In reality, the apocrypha entice weak souls towards a wrong faith, towards superstition. [...] The certitude you will be saved is a hard temptation that comes from vanity, a temptation sent by the evil one in order to remove human from salvation. The right attitude is the Orthodox attitude, namely the hope, not the certitude" (Archimandrite Arsenie Papacian). The sermon of Arsenie Papacian can be read on many sites, one of them being *Gânduri din Ierusalim*, 2022, <https://www.ganduridinierusalim.com/feriti-va-de-visul-maicii-domnului>. The archimandrite inserts a very short rewording of *The Dream*, thus, his sermons become an indirect channel of *The Dream*'s spreading.

give birth to God and who is the forever Virgin Mary. [...] I offer you this prayer in the original form, which has the best results”⁵⁵. What the author claims to be the “original form” starts with the final part of the medieval legend, while the very Mary’s prophetic dream and the dialogue with her Son is shortened and placed in the end; other virtual variants of this new structure dominantly delivered through “of love” sites almost neglect it:

Everyone who reads this prayer faithfully each day once, and will carry it on him/herself, will be protected against all evils, with the Power of the glorified God and with the help of the Holy Mother of God, and won’t be afraid of drowning in rivers or in the sea, nor will die of a terrible disease, and his/her soul will be comforted and recovered. The pregnant woman who reads it, will deliver easy; the oppressed ones will get justice; the one who fight against enemies and against the unknown evil spirit, will be saved, and at the end of the life, three days before death, will see in the dreams the Holy Mother, the one whose prayers to Lord Christ save us, Amen!⁵⁶

In comparison with the previous prerequisites claimed by the text’s ritual involvement, in which the focus was on the wording acts, which induced a collective dimension to the devotional *Dream*’s reading/reciting aloud, the contemporary blogs pay a special attention to the individual experience of writing:

The 77 Dreams [*sic*] of the Virgin. The text of the prayer should be written with a fountain pen; experts advise to add 3 drops of your own blood in the ink. It should be written on white sheet of high quality paper. If you make a mistake, everything is written again. It is a very laborious business, but it perfectly helps to concentrate on your desire.⁵⁷

The prayer texts are to be written on a blank sheet of paper. The color of the paste should only be black, you need to mix saliva or a drop of blood into the ink. If you make a grammatical or spelling error in the process, start over and write the prayer on a new sheet. It should be written in the light of a church candle. The tainted paper is torn into 4 pieces, ignited by the flame of a candle, and the ashes are blown into the wind. Watch his direction. If the ashes flew up, this is a good sign. Ash, falling down, indicates a wrong attitude to life (need to reconsider their views). If particles of ash flew back

⁵⁵ Guțu-Jilinschi 2009, 2015.

⁵⁶ Guțu-Jilinschi 2009, 2015.

⁵⁷ “Visele Fecioarei sunt o rugăciune sau nu. Interpretarea și textul rugăciunii ‘Sleep’ al Fecitășii Fecioare Maria”, *Bazovo* (2021), <https://bazovo.ru/ro/sosudistye-zabolevaniya/sny-bogorodicy-eto-molitva-ili-net-tolkovanie-i-tekst-molitvy-son>.

into the window, perhaps the selected prayer text does not fit, find another one. Prayer “Dream” of the Blessed Virgin Mary, copied in a neat handwriting, must always be with the person. Read it as often as you have time, but not less than forty days, at night, before going to bed. The prayer is made in solitude, in complete silence. Look to the icon, light a candle near it and think diligently about what you ask of the Mother of God. Prayer is uttered in a whisper, but clearly, without hesitation. At the end of the prayer, go to bed: eating, talking to someone or spending time in entertainment (Internet, computer games, TV) is not appropriate.⁵⁸

Even a brief look at the virtual milieu reveals a global (and multilingualistic, since many sites offer the option to shift from a language to another, sometimes with the support of the Google Translate application, as in the paragraph quoted above) hypostases to what we may call *The New Dream*, whose textual strategies, functions, destinations, clients, etc., represents a topic to be explored.

Created and delivered through written means and oral performance as well, *The Dream of the Mother of God* is one of those verbal structures that belong to folklore, literature, and popular practices. Part of early modern Christian vernacular religiosity, it reverberates in our post(post)modern times, reshaping its meanings, status, and channels of transmission in accordance with the new actors who evaluate and use it.

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EUPHEMISMS UPON THE EXAMPLE OF INCANTATIONS

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-koiv>

ABSTRACT

The use of euphemisms is a characteristic of everyday language use today, as meanings are negotiated, attenuated and changed. However, substitute names and euphemisms were widely used in incantations, where euphemism was tightly interwoven with taboos. In incantations, euphemisms are used in various situations: healing the sick, coping with animals and natural phenomena, creating social relationships, coping with central rituals of human life (primarily birth and death), retaliating for theft, murder and infidelity, and promoting one's work. Euphemisms represent an important pole in the use of verbal magic, and they are different from references to dysphemisms, that is, using vituperation, cursing, profanity, or hexing to cut off contact or to achieve one's goal. This article discusses general principles for the use of euphemisms and examines which euphemisms are used in which functions, using examples of certain belief rituals and values (fishing), symbolic animals (the wolf and the raven), and cockroaches. Results demonstrate that the appeal is missing in 11 percent (wolf words), 12 percent (raven) or 52 percent of texts (cockroaches); and the euphemisms are used in 66 percent (wolf), 52 percent (raven) and 43 percent (cockroaches) of the texts; dysphemisms in 20 percent (raven) and 3.7 percent (cockroaches).

Keywords: dysphemism; euphemism; incantation; raven spell; ritual; taboo; wolf spell.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the use of euphemisms has been observed in areas such as media and language, religion and human relationships, politics and medicine, gender and sexuality¹. Kate Burrage, a principal theorist of

¹ For the example of language and social sciences, see Warren 1992; Bowers - Pleydell-Pearce 2011; Rybakova 2009; Casas Gómez 2009; Allan - Burridge 2006; Satlow 2020; Rodriguez - Schönfeld 2012; Gammelin 2019.

euphemism research in linguistics, defines it in terms of broad uses over a long period:

In all societies, since the earliest periods of history, taboos and limitations have been inspired by topics such as “intimate body parts,” bodily functions, sex, incest, lust, concepts of social status, hatred, dishonesty, drinking, madness, illness, death, dangerous animals, fear, and God.²

According to G. Abbott (2010), the introduction of substitute words was necessitated by the need to soften inappropriate or unpleasant information, and the possibility of avoiding details perceived as violations of the rules of speech etiquette.

Marina Ryabova has a similar view, adding the modern requirement to be politically correct, which is an important reason for the wider use of euphemisms both in language and in media. For example, in mass media, euphemisms are used as a framing tool. In order to conceal awkward concepts, events, issues, and certain political aspects, a cushioning framework is created. This framework focuses on the individual event and easily understood root causes, but disregards deeper and more complex reasons³. The readiness of researchers to find euphemisms in essentially every text has led to the criticism that not every figurative statement is a euphemism, and defining requires close monitoring of cultural contexts⁴.

In folklore, euphemisms have been studied based on a type or theme and in certain periods for almost a century and a half⁵. Folk poetry writings reflect past and present language usage in various fields. At present, spell texts are mostly a type of the past, and the share of word-magic practices has also narrowed. At the same time, these types provide us with information regarding the communication tactics and attitudes of previous generations, and their functioning in the local ecosystem, be they deep-rooted euphemisms and fixed expressions⁶ or more flexible forms of linguistic behaviour⁷.

The web-based *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (2021) defines euphemism as “an agreeable or inoffensive word or phrase that is used instead of one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant”. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines the Greek *eu-* as “good, well” and *phēmē* as

² Burrage 2012, 66.

³ See Ryabova 2013, 41.

⁴ Compare Keith - Burridge 2006 and Laugesen 2019.

⁵ Zelenin 2004; Looorits 1931, 1939; Gura 1995, 1997; Kõiva 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Ni Floinn 2018, and others.

⁶ See Permiakov 1970.

⁷ Warren 1992.

“speech, voice, utterance”⁸. The *Dictionary of Foreign Words* is even more specific: a mellowing and embellishing expression used instead of an indecent or unpleasant one. In folklore, words banned in certain situations and at certain times are important. These words facilitate the use of alternative names – substitute words and aliases⁹. These two terms can be viewed as interchangeable, as both help to resolve a crisis situation and are used in a similar manner. Cryptonyms have a similar definition as well. With regard to folklore texts, it can be assumed that alternative names and aliases are necessary to keep the communication within the limits of decency; euphemisms are necessary for a flattering conversation. Religious reports show that aliases are also used in everyday speech, and often the boundaries between an alias and a euphemism are dispersed. In folklore, interaction with other species is important along with the interaction between individuals. Euphemisms are therefore used not only for dangerous animals, but also with many contact animals. Links are made with the sacral world and its inhabitants, who are being influenced in an appropriate direction.

Dysphemisms also play a significant role. A dysphemism is the replacement of a word or expression with one of a less favourable or derogatory connotation (*Merriam-Webster* 2021). Swear words and names and several types of obscenity are closely related to these. In incantations, dysphemisms were primarily used to avoid contact, reduce the effects a disease or creature, or interrupt adverse effects. Casas Gómez draws attention to the connection between euphemisms and dysphemisms¹⁰. According to him, euphemisms or dysphemisms are a cognitive process of conceptualizing a prohibited reality, expressed in discourse using linguistic mechanisms: lexical substitution, phonetic modification, morphological modification, composition or inversion, syntagmatic grouping, and other combinations. It is a verbal or paralinguistic modulation or textual description, which allows the speaker to use a concept frowned upon in a specific pragmatic context, or to weaken or amplify reality. The definition by Gómez encompasses linguistically marked aspects of situations and behaviours, which are compatible with whatever is occurring in folklore. In public language, there is also a trend of using dysphemisms as an exaggeration of the negative qualities of opponents.

This article sheds light on an aspect of human and animal relations, ethnozoology, including ethnoentomology and ethnoornithology. Using

⁸ OED 2021. See also ETY 2012; EKSS 2009.

⁹ Oskar Loorits also uses the Estonian equivalents of pseudonym and cryptonym. See Loorits 1931, 456 jj.

¹⁰ Casas Gómez 2009, 738.

the example of nature incantations, the substitutive names of animals and birds are explored. Names for the cockroach, the wolf, and the raven are observed more closely, as they are addressing by name, using euphemisms and dysphemisms, and the relationship between banned words and symbolic rituals, as in the case of incantations. The selected animals were important in the past, but they are also visible in today's culture. The wolf and the raven are creatures with a rich mythological background, expressed in contemporary professional art and media mythology. Cockroaches are also more widely represented in folkloric beliefs and folk tales. Nowadays, they are used in high fashion, and connected to art, literature, theatre, and films, including Olivier Jean Marie's animated series *Oggy and the Cockroaches* (2013). A system of reciprocal relations between humans and animals along with banned words are universal phenomena, which appear in the same form in other cultures.

2. RELATIONS BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS ON THE EXAMPLE OF WORD MAGIC

Reciprocal contacts with nature extended from the land and the fields to forests and bodies of water, including all of their inhabitants. Fresh and clean drinking water, the fertility of the fields and relations with the forest and its surroundings were all important. Besides rituals and specific practices of stewardship, verbal communication held an important place.

According to phenomenologists, a spontaneous ecological balance was ensured by a mutually respectful pattern of behavior. People operated in a local environment and could not exist outside the intertwined ecosystems, which in turn meant that the interests of both parties were taken into account. The return of some of the fish and game catches to the sea and the forest is believed to have contributed to animal numbers, representing the animal's soul and ensuring their natural regeneration¹¹. As a sign of good intercourse, the first or a few smaller fish were thrown back into the sea¹², the bones of the rabbit were taken over the stump of the forest, or small part of the animal was taken to the wolves – it was not eaten but called the wolf's share¹³. Animals are also believed to understand human speech, and this was the reason for using substitute names. According to

¹¹ Paulson 1958.

¹² Paulson 1971.

¹³ Roots 2011.

Oskar Loorits, substitute names are directly related to the imagination of the name-soul, because the soul of the being is hidden in the name, but the nickname does not contain the soul. He also considers the system of substitute names to be a feature of the animistic worldview¹⁴. The use of alternate names is traceable from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, although not in all areas. The Forselius-Boeckler manuscript conveys the use of word magic in the seventeenth century, when numerous naming conventions were used for, among others, hares, foxes, wolves, bears, mice and rats, snakes, and domestic cats and dogs¹⁵.

As beliefs convey universal rules, we find matches in the use of pseudonyms and their interrelationships closer and far away. Hawaiians, for example,

[...] use the general euphemism holoholo, cruising around, so as not to alert the fish to their plans. They also say that fish can not only hear, but can also choose whether to be caught by a particular lawai'a, based on whether he or she exercises respectful fishing behaviours. Fishermen and fisherwomen respect the species they harvest by letting some go and not wasting their catch. Harvest also comes with the responsibility to share and feed the community.¹⁶

Tim Ingold (1994), an anthropologist who studied relations between humans and animals, raised the question of so-called animality as viewed by different disciplines; he summarized the topic with a generalization that animals and animality are deeply embedded in our own ways of thought. Humans and animals might actually engage in social relations with one another. Ingold has stressed that people behave variously with animal species, considering some of them with more affinity than others. As one significant criterion he mentions the giving of names: large animals were regarded as more deserving of names than small ones; the same applies to lone animals rather than those who belonged to herds or flocks and to domesticated animals rather than wild ones.

A few years ago, Thora Herrmann and his research group (2013) published their results based on their study of a South American ethnic group. They summarized several contradictory tendencies that they had observed: (1) fear toward the animal, (2) the willingness to protect them, (3) a diminished or missing cultural dimension of the animal might provoke less identification with the animal, and (4) the relations can be positive or negative – it depends upon personality. This research highlights an

¹⁴ Loorits 1931, 467.

¹⁵ Forselius - Boeckler (1685) 1854.

¹⁶ Diver *et al.* 2019.

interesting aspect that is tightly interwoven with narratives and culture. Namely, positive value is attributed to known animals, even if they are large meat-eating predators that cause damage and endanger humans. Positive attitudes and compassion are evinced toward them, unlike animals with which there is less contact.

2.1. *Cockroach words*

The so-called German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*), common in Estonia, loves warmth and moisture. The roughly sixteen-millimeter-long mixed-feeding insects are very annoying due to their sheltered lifestyle and endurance. Symbolic and magical control practices were simple: taking three or nine insects to a crossroad, or closing them in a wood block, dispatching them with the deceased, burying them, and leading them out of the house with yarn or cord. These activities also included short spells. According to beliefs, it was necessary to be careful with repelling insects, otherwise they would start breeding instead:

If someone wanted to destroy these insects: “Do not kill ‘russaks’ and other insects, they will eat you.” There were so many cockroaches that the walls of the threshing room were covered with a red copper plate. With good will, however, one could also get rid of them if such a remedy was used... The cockroach itself is copper-red, but among them there are some white ones, and it was with it that others could be destroyed.¹⁷

The procedure for repelling was usually repeated three times, with time and moon phases taken into the account (Thursday, old moon or full moon) and talking and laughing among people prohibited. Endel Mets describes driving cockroaches out of the house when a well-known local “professional” has been called in to help:

A cockroach slayer says, well, let me try, but mind that no one will utter a word or laugh in between. Well, the family promised to keep their mouths shut and promised not to laugh at the cockroach. Brought a rope from home, tied it to the side of the stove, and dragged the other end to the yard. Said a few words and then they started y to come out [...].¹⁸

Actions ranging from spells, short formulas, and counting to dialogues performed to the accompaniment of a small ritual action were used against

¹⁷ RKM II 85, 560/1 (368) < Karja 1959.

¹⁸ ERA II 300, 36/9 (26) < Jõhvi 1942.

cockroaches; there are often several alternate names in the same text. Short-form spells verbalize the purpose of the ritual action. Sending them away with the deceased is projected; sending them away with running water is also important, as well as a symbolic transfer to the moon. Cockroaches were sent back to the place of origin (*where you came from*) or to different corners of the world. The repulsion included knocking on the outside wall of the house with a grave-digging shovel, axe, or other iron object. Within short order, cockroaches were sent away; in individual cases, a requirement was formulated for them not to return, but to disappear once and for all. The direction specified by the commands sendt cockroaches either simply out of the house and away, or, more precisely, into the sea, into the village, or most often to the grave with the deceased. None of these places are of the same high degree of accuracy, but rather represent something general.

Get out / go / to the village / sea / grave!; Go and accompany the deceased! / Where this [deceased] goes, you go, too! / Go this [graveyard] way!

Where you have come from, go there! / Go where you have come without hearing the moon and without seeing the day!; Now go each one of you your own way and don't come back!

The time factor may be emphasized: the cockroaches' time is over they had a *year already, take your bags-flasks and get away!*

Sometimes cockroaches are driven to the "manor," meaning a better place.

There is no appeal in any of the fifty-four texts, whereas the ritual side specifies the requirements for the time of action, and the action of the control attribute: sending away one or a few insects includes, for example, beating with willow branches and sending away with shavings:

Kevadel suure vee ajal pannakse prussakas laastuga kraavi, pekstakse hanipa-judega öeldes: "Kasige meresse!"

In spring, during high water, the cockroach is put in a ditch with chips, beaten with goose wickers saying: "Go to the sea!"¹⁹

2.2.

The species name *cockroach* is used in six texts in formulas based on own-strangers contrast; the cockroach is identified with a person and is called *men* (1), *village men* (1)²⁰, with the exalted name *Misters* (8), and

¹⁹ E, StK 3, 6/7 (4) < Tõstamaa, 1921.

²⁰ "Village men, go away with a country man". See E 59455 (5) < Narva, 1921.

the color associated with the golden one, e.g., *gold camisols* (1), *men in gold shirts* (1). The most common color-related substitute name in the spell is a *man in a red frock*. The names of the ten texts are associated with red: *men in red frock* (4), *men of bloody frocks* (1), *red cottonwool men* (2), *red-legged* (2), *red corpse* (1). Folk etymology and explanatory stories point to the belief that cockroaches spread to Estonia with soldiers wearing red uniforms or, according to another common model, that Russians brought their favorite domestic animal with them. In individual texts, *soejalg* (or warm leg) is still used (1). In the text, warm leg, or the living cockroach, contrasts with the dead, or cold leg²¹, *travellers* (1), *migrants* (1), *strangers* (2), derogatory names such as *beggars* (1)²² and reference to the location, e.g., *stove creature* (1). Beggars are essentially combined with dysphemisms, of which you may also come across a *shameless dog* (1) and *useless animals* (1).

3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OTHER INSECT-RELATED ADDRESSES

Among other residential and human parasitic insects (bedbug, skitter, field-cricket) we find extensive overlaps in rituals and incantations in appeals. Some texts and rituals were carried out against two or three species of parasites at the same time (in the table under the combined name edible). For example, appeals similar to cockroaches are used for bedbugs: *red frock men*, *red coat men*, *red cottonwool men*, *Misters*, *strangers*; and dysphemisms such as *useless animal* or *wall-eater*. Field-crickets are compared to (singing) birds, but appeals are also used, such as *men*, *friends*, *Misters*, and, particularly, *clay Mister* because, according to beliefs, they arose from clay or were brought home with clay. Skitters (pubic lice, *Phthirus pubis*) have many different names²³, but spells mainly use *centipedes*. The word *skitter* has had a wider use in both language and folklore. The *Explanatory Dictionary* glosses skitter as “a relatively weak, modest cursing word to express and emphasize a negative, less often positive, emotion”²⁴.

²¹ Leida Laasma writes about customs in Kodavere in which a cockroach is sent away by a funeral train that has reached the house with a spell: “The cold leg goes, the warm leg goes after.” After that, the cockroaches disappeared from their room. RKM II 174, 269/70 (1) < Kodavere, 1963. The deceased is also called frostbitten in Võnnu parish.

²² At the same time, beggars’ improvisations come from an amateur scribe, which might explain a change of positions. In the text, cockroaches are called beggars and peasantry: “*Misters*, beggars, out, a Mister has come in!” (ERA II 200, 511/3 (49) < Martna, 1939).

²³ See EMS 1994.

²⁴ EKSS 2009.

The so-called room cricket (*Acheta domestica*, the only cricket species living in Estonia), a species threatened with extinction today, shares similarities with other parasitic insects. The bush cricket (*Tettigonia cantans*) and the wart-biter (*Decticus verrucivorus*) are internationally known for their curative discharge, for which a short spell was read upon receipt:

Rohutirtsu kinni püüdes pigistatakse teda, et ta suust vedelikku välja laseks, selle juures sõnatakse: Sirk, sirk, anna salvi, / minu haige haava peale! – See vedelik (salv) parandavat katkised kohad ning haavad.

Catching the grasshopper, it is squeezed to let the liquid out of his mouth, at which it is spoken: Sirk, Sirk, give ointment, on my sick wound! – This liquid (ointment) heals broken places and wounds.²⁵

These spells, in turn, are similar to ladybug words, where ladybugs are addressed with a species name. However, in one subtype of the text there is a threat of beheading or killing if the command is not followed. The grasshopper is also threatened *to be beheaded; be killed; also thrown into the stove*²⁶. As a difference, let us note that the ladybug is allowed to predict future events or is sent on a flight in a certain direction, but healing ointment is desired from the grasshopper. There are no euphemisms or dysphemisms about the grasshopper; the species name is addressed.

Bees (*Apis mellifera*), the only relatively domesticated insects, are in this range mainly for the purpose of creating a reference moment. The genesis of bees places them among God's creatures in many nations²⁷. In Estonia, they were subject to a number of archaic prohibitions of words and actions: beehive trees must not be counted; strangers are not allowed in the apiary and no swearing is allowed there; honey was taken to church for blessing on the Apple Feast of the Saviour; the beekeeper was required to wear clean clothing and not allowed to drink alcohol before going to the beehives. Word and deed prohibitions relating to bees emphasize their tenderness and vulnerability in the face of the evil eye.

Spells were used in beekeeping operations or to cure a bee bite, but bee words were contaminated with plague-wound words. In addition to verse-form spells, apiculture used prayers (our Lord's prayer or its reverse

²⁵ E 47356 (27) < Harju-Jaani, 1910.

²⁶ Ladybug words have been fixed in more than two thousand texts, there are more than seventy names in them alone, and they are even more numerous in the *Estonian Dialect Dictionary* (EMS 1994; VMS 1995). Read more about the names and rhythm models in Krikmann - Sarv 2008. There are no euphemisms in ladybug words, the local name in the dialect is used when addressing.

²⁷ Gura 2003, 101; Gura 1997, 450 jj.

reading) and older internationally known protective formulas such as the Star Formula SATOR. Euphemisms in use are *bird* / *birds* (7) / *honeybee* *bird* (1); and *men* (2).

Due to techniques similar to alliterative songs, we can observe the variation of the appeal in seventeen variants of one bee bite spell type. Appeals are found in four verses of conversion. The variation begins in the second verse and increases with each line. In the last verse, “piglets” is replaced by “friends” in five variations. The appeal to piglets is believed to be equated with protectors, or fairies, who call their creatures by the names of domestic animals (piglet, cattle, horse²⁸). The number of lines in the verse with an appeal is 17-17-15-16.

Linnu isake, linnu emake (17),
 linnu vahvad vennakesed (16) / linnu lendajad vennakesed (1),
 linnu lendajad õekesed (14) / linnu helde õeke (1),
 linnu põue põrsakesed (10) / linnu põrsakesed (1) / linnu põue sõbraksed (5),
 father-bird, mother-bird (17),
 bird-loving brothers (16) / bird-flying brothers (1),
 flyer bird-sisters (14) / generous bird-sister (1),
 bird piglets (10) / bird piglets (1) / bird piglets (5).

Table 1. – Insects

INSECT	WITHOUT ADDRESSEE	SPECIES NAME	EUPHEMISM	DYSPHEMISM
Cricket	6	14	11	–
Flea	2	1	2	–
Fly	–	8	1	–
Bedbug	9	9	30	4
Bee	2	10	63	4
Cockroach	54	6	30	3
Grasshopper	1	7	3	–
Parasite insect (cockroach, cricket, etc.)	6	2	5	–
Centipede	6	1	–	1

²⁸ See Loorits 1939.

4. RAVEN INCANTATIONS: FORMS OF ADDRESS IN RAVEN INCANTATIONS

The raven (*Corvus corax*) is the largest member of the genus *Corvus* in the family Corvidae, characterised by a long lifespan. These birds with their jet-black plumage once populated an exceptionally large area of Northern Europe. Their appearance, behaviour, intelligence, and other special qualities have given them a permanent place in the folklore and mythology of the ethnic groups of this region. The raven is a deity or a helper of a god and a character in epic tales from pre-historic Scandinavia to the Far East. In the native Tlingit and Inuit cultures of North America, the raven is a creator god. In the Christian tradition, a raven teaches Adam how to bury his son²⁹. The raven also has a significant place in contemporary mythology and popular culture. In addition to observations regarding habits, Estonian religious folklore contains omens and apotropaic observances for warding off the birds from households, incantations being a central aspect of this. As a scavenger, a raven was assumed to bring bad luck when it approached a house or a herd.

The formulations of incantations are laconic; a very common structure is the following: take x / bring y; x here / y away (good here/bad away); for me x / for you y. Various types of incantations for warding off ravens from the cattle and the household (*Mine x küla/papi/valla/mõisa karja*, “go to the herd of the x village/priest/parish/manor”) were known in various places all over Estonia (Jüri, Halliste, Paistu, Viljandi, Otepää, Rannu, Karula, and Urvaste).

Addressing the bird is followed by directing it to go elsewhere and a promise of better things in other places. Alternatively, the raven is told or asked to go to the herd of a minister, a manor, or a parish, or advised to fly over someone else’s herd. The main message of an incantation is to fly elsewhere; however, the destination is rarely specified. For example, one incantation is used by a person from Halliste to send the raven to a herd in Karksi³⁰, but this is an exception, not a general rule. In a couple of texts, the bird is told to go to a nonexisting place such as Muidupae manor or *must mõis* (“black manor”)³¹. The “black manor” probably signifies a dwelling of demons or supernatural beings:

Kui rongad aga sinu pea kohal riidlevad, siis ütle nii:
 Head linnukesed, head linnukesed!

²⁹ The same theme is known from Estonian lore (Boganeva - Kõiva 2021). For the list of etiologic themes related to apocrypha, see Hiimäe 1996.

³⁰ H II 48, 25 (7) < Halliste, 1893.

³¹ See Babič - Voolaid 2018.

Minge siit ära!
 Minge Muidupae mõisa.
 Seal on üks punane päitshärg,
 nuga sarvis ja kirves kõrvas!
 Kui sa seda salmikest loed, siis ei sünni sulle midagi paha.
 “When ravens are quarrelling above your head, say the following words:
 Good birds, good birds!
 Leave this place!
 Go to Muidupae manor.
 It has a bridled red ox,
 a knife in its horns and an axe in its ears!
 If you read this charm, no harm will come to you.”³²

The next sample text is framed by a euphemistic address, meaning that the text begins and ends with an address containing a euphemism, framing the pleas to foretell good and protect the herd as well as an offer for a substitution:

Mööda, valge linnuke!
 Ütle hääd, keela kurja.
 kaitse ikka meie karja.
 Siit tuhka, mujalt toorest,
 mööda, valge linnuke!
 “Fly by, white birdie!
 Bring the good, forbid the evil,
 protect our herd as you always do.
 Here is ashes, elsewhere raw meat,
 fly by, white birdie!”³³

The raven texts can contain mythical themes; for example, the raven puts on copper armor, or the raven has been dispatched to attack a mythical gigantic ox. These texts indicate that the number of mythical themes might have been greater in previous periods.

4.1.

The raven is not addressed in seven incantations. These only include a command or a request:

Kas tulid kanapoegi või munasid vargile?
 Või tulid midagi valetama?

³² H I 7, 386 (19a) < Jüri, 1896.

³³ H I 4, 644 (8) < Paistu, 1874.

Kui valetad, siis katsu et minema saad.

Kui tõtt räägid, räägi edasi.

“Did you come to steal chicks or eggs?

Or tell tall tales?

If you lie, make yourself scarce.

If it's the truth, tell more.”³⁴

4.2.

There are three widespread designations for the raven: *ronk*, *kaaren*, and *korp*, of which *ronk* has a Baltic-Finnic root and can be found, for example, in the Saami and Lithuanian languages. *Kaaren* has a Uralic root and is used widely in Estonia; *korp* is a loanword adopted from Swedish into the dialect of Saaremaa and from Finnish into the northeastern coastal dialects³⁵. All three dialect designations can be found among the words for raven.

The name of the species, *kaaren* or *ronk*, is used in an incantation eleven times (with examples from Rannu, Setumaa, Rõuge, Püha, Noa-rootsi, Urvaste, Türi, and Põlva); the diminutive form *kaarnake* was found in one text (Kambja). There are other variants of designations, such as *kronks*, which are derived from the call of the raven. The dictionary of dialects indicates that this was used in the Urvaste, Rõuge, and Seto regions³⁶, and based on the raven incantations, we can also add Põlva and Karula to this list. *Kronk* as the species name can be seen in charms from Urvaste, Viljandi, Palamuse, and Viru-Nigula, and *klunk* in Rõuge.

4.3.

When addressing the raven, the use of the general noun *lind* (“bird”) is very common. The incantations also use the address in plural as *linnud* (“birds”), with examples from Viru-Nigula (1) and Hageri (1); as the diminutive *linnuke* (“birdie”) in seven examples: Haljala (2), Viru-Nigula, Ambla, Pärnu, Palamuse, and Torma; and as *linnukene* (“birdie”) in two instances from Hanila and Ambla. There is also *taevaalused lõnnud* (“birds under the sky”) in an example from Kihnu. The following euphemisms are in use: *head linnud* (“good birds”) in an instance from Hageri, and the diminutive *head linnukesed* (“good birdies”) found in Viljandi and Jüri.

³⁴ RKM II 272, 38 (b) < Krasnoyarsk, 1970.

³⁵ VMS 1995.

³⁶ VMS 1995.

Must (“black”) corresponds to the raven’s black plumage; its opposite color is *valge* (“white”), which is also used for flattery and protection. However, *valgelind* can be seen in incantations in its plural and diminutive forms and is generally the most popular cryptonym of the raven: *valgelind*, with eight examples from Kolga-Jaani, Tarvastu (3), Rõuge, Rannu, Vairava, and Paistu; *valge linnuke* (“white birdie”) with four examples: Tori (2), Haljala, and one origin unknown; and *valged linnud* (“white birds”), three instances from Pärnu-Jaagupi (2) and Tõstamaa. A mention of the actual color of the birds is less common: *mustlind* (“black bird”), mentioned in an example each from Hanila, Põlva, and Halliste; *must linnuke* (“black birdie”) in a case from Rannu. However, *mustlind* in the meaning of the raven is more commonly used in pain-relief incantations (*Varesele valu*; “Pain to the Crow”); in hundreds of texts, the black bird is the one to whom the pain is transferred.

Whereas the previously cited texts used a general designation of the species or a euphemism to address the raven, some incantations use the designation of the species and a euphemism (good bird, white or black bird) as a particular feature in the following manner:

- designation + good bird, 1 example: Viljandi (*Ronk, ronk, hää lind*; “raven, raven, good bird”) ³⁷;
- designation + pretty birdie, white birdie, 1 example: Paistu (*Rink-ronk, ilus linnuke, valge linnuke*; *Rink-ronk* [a rhyming compound meaning ‘the raven’], “pretty birdie, white birdie”) ³⁸;
- designation + white bird, 7 examples: Viljandi (3), Otepää, Karksi (2);
- black bird + designation, 1 example: Rõngu;
- designation + black bird, 2 examples: Helme, Tarvastu.

4.4.

When used as a form of address, dysphemisms are used either (1) in two parallel verses, or (2) to form a list. Outright terms of abuse are used in a few instances in addressing the bird. *Sitakene* (“little shit” in the meaning of “a small pitiful creature”) is used only once in a verse addressing the bird: *Oh sa vana sitakene* (“Oh, you old little shit”) ³⁹. It is followed by a request to not harm the herd and an offer of a substitute: *for you x, for*

³⁷ H III 14, 413 (8) < Viljandi, 1893.

³⁸ ERA II 34, 360 (1) < Paistu, 1927.

³⁹ E 63674 (4) < Tartu I., 1929.

me y. Another expression in use, *Viru batt* ("Viru bitch"), is part of an incantation that begins with spitting, which is a centuries-old practice for deflecting evil, followed by dysphemisms: *Tpvui, tpvui, tpvui! Viru batt, tõrvapütt, tulitungel, tubkbaud* ("Ptui, ptui, ptui! A Viru bitch, a tub of tar, a torch, an ashen grave"; *Ptui* is an onomatopoeic word for spitting)⁴⁰. The list of dysphemisms also includes *Viisrajak* (one of the euphemisms for the devil), one of the most enduring dysphemisms in raven incantations. Dysphemisms are the old items used in farming; sooty, black, torn, and lousy items. The entire list of dysphemisms contains: *ruunanahk* ("leather or skin of a gelding"), *vana hiiuballi (balli hobuse) nahk* ("leather or skin of an old grey [mouse-grey] horse"); *tulitukk/tuletukk* ("firebrand"), *tuletungal* ("torch"), *pastlapaik* ("shoe patch"), *abjuots* ("end of a furnace"), *pajatuust* ("pot wisp"), *aiaalune* (literally, "one under a garden or a fence"; figuratively, "a viper"), *abjubark* ("oven fork"), *abjuroop* ("fire iron"), *tõrvapütt* ("tub of tar"), *tubkbaud* ("ashen grave"), *viisrajak* ("the devil").

The order of dysphemisms in a list seems to be casual: *Oh sa abjuruup ja luvvakonds* ("Oh, you fire iron and stump of a broom"), etc., or *Oh sina viisraak, pastlapaik, tulitukk, abjuots, paatuust, aiaalune* ("Oh, you the devil, shoe patch, firebrand, end of a furnace, pot wisp, the one under a fence")⁴¹. Designation plus a list of dysphemisms can be found in two texts (*Ronk, ronk, tuletukk, pastlapaik, abjuruup*; "raven, raven, firebrand, patch for a shoe, fire iron")⁴². Designation with euphemism and dysphemisms can be seen in two texts from Tarvastu, *Ronk, ronk, valgelind, viiskravak, pastlapaik* ("raven, raven, white bird, rag for a bast shoe, patch of a shoe")⁴³ and *Ronk, ronk, valgelind, viisrävak, pastlapaik, tulitukk, abjubark* ("Raven, raven, white bird, bast shoe rag, shoe patch, firebrand, oven fork")⁴⁴.

From the point of view of the textual rhythm, it offers an interesting opportunity where the designation, command, verb, and greeting are repeated, or the reduplications are used: *Ronk, ronk valgelind* ("Raven, raven, white bird"); *Rink-ronk ilus linnuke, valge linnuke* ("Raven, pretty birdie, white birdie"); *Räägi head, räägi head* ("Speak of the good, speak of the good"); *Räägi head, linnukene, / räägi head, linnukene* ("Speak of the good, birdie, / speak of the good, birdie"); *Häid sõnumid linnud, häid sõnu-*

⁴⁰ H I 2, 608 (3) < Rõuge, 1889.

⁴¹ H II 25, 258 (221a) < Helme, 1889; E 23826 (2) < Halliste, 1896.

⁴² H III 16, 267 (28) < Karksi, 1890, and ERA II 177, 451 (258) < Viljandi, 1937.

⁴³ E 1224 (74) < Tarvastu, 1893.

⁴⁴ E 8486 (134) < Tarvastu, 1900(?).

mid (“Good messages, birds, good messages”); *Valged linnud, valged linnud* (“White birds, white birds”); *Head, head linnud* (“Good, good birds”); *Head, head, head linnud* (“Good, good, good birds”); *Eemal, eemal, linnuke* (“Yon, yon, birdie”); *Tere, tere, valgelind* (“Hello, hello, white bird”); *Ronk, ronk, bääлинд* (“Raven, raven, good bird”, etc.).

Table 2. – Birds

BIRDS	WITHOUT ADDRESSEE	SPECIES NAME	GENERAL NAME, BIRD	EUPHEMISM	DYSPHEMISM
Geese	3	2	–	–	–
Hen	17	11	–	–	–
Hawk	2	34 + 28 (dysphemism)	–	–	species name < 9 + 34 + 28
White Stork	45	73	13	1	–
Raven	9	15	12	30	16
Crow	9	5	1	–	1

5. WOLF WORDS

A great exception in terms of cryptonyms is the wolf, from whom it was believed one could catch illnesses. If a wolf scares you during pregnancy, the child will be born with wolf disease. Treatment consists of a symbolic transfer wherein the child is whisked with wolf’s skin or the tail of a wolf; the child is chased away and told off like a wolf. *Hunditäht* (literal meaning, “mark of the wolf”) could be gotten by a child if a wolf scared it, prompting a mole to appear on the skin. The wolfsmark is lifelong and cannot be cured. You can lose your voice when a wolf secretly gazes at you. Wolf’s fat was used in the treatment of disease; hands that have turned the tracks of a wolf are healing hands. Candles made of wolf fat enable one to see thieves as well as see and capture nightmares, the devil and other mythical creatures with a devilish background⁴⁵.

Wolves have more substitute names in the Estonian language than any other animal. Wolf researcher Ilmar Rootsi noted that there were, in total, more than 500 cryptonyms and even incantations include 177 unique

⁴⁵ See Rootsi 2011; Gura 2009; Kõiva 2019b.

names collected from 300 written records⁴⁶. A single text will often have several euphemisms and more than one address.

5.1.

Fifty-six texts have no address. These are mostly orders in the imperative: *Sule suu!* (“Close your mouth”) and *Valjasta boost!* (“Bridle the horse”). Such shorter phrases are uttered during rituals or longer wolf incantations in verse form:

Kui susi karja tuleb, viskab karjus kannukesega ja ütleb
 Tulitungõl suuhõ,
 tõrvakand kaala,
 küläkarja minemä.⁴⁷

When the wolf comes, the herdsman throws a pitcher and says:
 Torch to your mouth
 tar to your shoulders
 going to the village livestock.

5.2.

In eighty-three texts, the wolf is addressed by calling it a wolf: *hunt*, *susi*. The diminutive *hundike* (“little wolf”) can be found in four texts. In southern and eastern Slavic folklore, Saint George was known as the herdsman and ruler of wolves⁴⁸, and his name pops up in fifty texts. In most cases, he is asked to keep his pets in line and not let them attack herd animals. Wolves are referred to as his dogs, pups and foals, and the saint is asked to keep an eye on their dogs/pups/foals and lead them away from the herd.

I will now present a complete list used in the batch of texts concerning Saint George. The most common cluster variations are *püha Jüri poisikesed* (“Saint George’s boys”; 9 instances), *püha Jüri pühad sulased* (“Saint George’s holy servants”; 1); *püha Jüri varsakõsõ* (“Saint George’s foals”; 1), *püha Jüri kurjad koerad/penid* (“Saint George’s evil dogs”; 19), *püha Jüri suured koerad* (“Saint George’s big dogs”; 9), *püha Jüri armid koerad* (“Saint

⁴⁶ Roots 2021. This does not take into consideration snippets, prayers, counting-based incantations or the treatment of illnesses caused by a wolf.

⁴⁷ E 15784 (1) < Rõuge, 1895.

⁴⁸ See Mencej 2002 for Slavic parallels.

George's dear dogs"; 1), *püha Jüri koerukesed* ("Saint George's doggies"; 1), *püha Jüri kutsikad* ("Saint George's pups"; 16), *püha Jüri kutsikuke* ("Saint George's doggy"; 5), *püha Jüri rakikesed* ("Saint George's little dogs"; 1), *püha Jüri kenad kutsikad* ("Saint George's lovely pups"; 1).

A replacement name for a wolf can be "dog", including *koer* (5), *koerakesed* (3). Diminutive forms of "dog" and "pup" can also be found: *kutsa* (1), *kutsakene* (1), *kutsikad* (1), *kutsikukese*, *pinikese* (2), and *metsakoer*. A variety of "dog" with an epithet include *kiriva pinikese* ("multicoloured dog"; [1], *halli(d) koera(d)* ("grey dog(s)"; [2], *armas hallikoera* ("dear grey-coloured dog"; 2) or even *ilusa elajakese* ("pretty beast"; 1). The use of the belittling forms pups, calves, foals, or boys (for humans) and the diminutive *kutsikake* ("pupper") is noteworthy. In part, this is an antithesis where a wild animal is substituted for a domestic animal, a predator for prey, or a predator for a human⁴⁹.

The most common structural model for wolf incantations comprises (1) flattering addressing verses with respectful addressing in two to four verses (*Metsa ukku, metsa akku, / metsa kuldane kuningas...* ("Old man of the forest, old woman of the forest, the golden king of the forest...")), (2) followed by a prohibition, redirection or another wish. Some of the names make allusions to wolves' appearance, habitat, lifestyle, or behavior. The wolf is referred to as the head of the family and a king, i.e. they are addressed as social equals of someone further up the social ladder: *isand* ("master"), *kuningas* ("king"), *metsasaks* ("forest squire"), *metsaisand* ("lord of the forest"), *vana kuldjalg* ("old golden legs"), and *bärä* ("mister").

Part of the replacement names is related to color. There are not many in total, but they are quite meaningful as they mostly adhere to the color of a wolf's coat. The most common Estonian replacement name in incantations, language, and literature is *ballivaimes-ballikuumees* ("man in grey coat"). Incantations include a total of twenty-one names based on the color grey, while all other colors come across less frequently: *kirju* ("multicoloured"; 4 instances), *must* ("black"; 5) and *hiireballi haavakarva; valge* ("mouse grey aspen-coloured"; 3). The latter appears with the main word *varss* ("foal") or *vasikas* ("calf") and the cryptonym refers to the identification of a forest fairy with its herd (cf. pike as the protector of fish or also as a member of the fish-protector's shoal, referred to as a barrow, calf).

⁴⁹ Forest fairies and water fairies also have their own herds. Saint George functions, to a certain extent, as a forest fairy; as such, it makes total sense to refer to wolves as his herd animals.

In some cases, color can also function as a generalized cryptonym: *hal-likene* (“grey”), *kirju* (“multicoloured”), *must* (“black”):

[--] *kirju meid ei kisu,*
ega see musta meid ei murra [--] ⁵⁰
 the multi-coloured one won't touch us
 the black one won't kill us

Body parts are referred to in a text originating from Setomaa where *kõrvakõnõ* (“ear”), *nännäkõnõ* (“teat”), and *bännakõnõ* (“tail”) appear in three verses from Setomaa.

The incantation starts with an addressing verse, the first of which uses quasi-words as well as reduplicatives. We also find nonsensical words characteristic of incantations. There is a total of thirty-six variations of these name pairs. The following are less fit for the purposes. Part of the pairing compares wolves to domestic animals (*vissid*, “cows”). The address *Maa esä, maa emä* (“Earth father, Earth mother”) that occurs twice among forest-themed addresses is also uncommon. *Metsa sikku, metsa sokku* (both meaning “buck” ⁵¹) of introductory verses with meaning is present in seventeen verses.

The other popular system is related to the alternation of *uku-aku* (meaning “old man, old woman”), but the word pairs vary quite a lot: *Metsa ukku, metsa akka/akku* (4); *Metsa uku – metsa uku, uku – aiku; akku – ukku*. All other word pairs vary mostly by containing reduplicates and partly nonsense or quasi-words. Most pairs occur only once and the boundaries between them are unclear:

uigud – aigud
uiku – aiku; alpi – ulpi; ulpi – alpi (3)
ulju – alju (3)
elpi – alpi
illu – allu
illi – balli, itti – atti (3)
itti – ätti, and others ⁵²

The words *balli*, *(h)allu*, *(h)alli* (“grey”) can be interpreted as a reduplication, but also as a wolf itself defined through the color grey; *(h)ullu*, *bulli*

⁵⁰ E 4833 (2) < Viljandi, 1893.

⁵¹ See *Murdesõnastik*, EKSS 2009.

⁵² Every verse is of course preceded by the specification *metsa* (forest), *metsa ulli* (forest lumatic), or *metsa alli* (forest grey). For a full list, see <https://www.folklore.ee/pubte/data/mare>.

(“lunatic”) can be interpreted in the same way and this is in turn supported by the alliteration-based pair *bull hunt* (“lunatic wolf”).

The flattering addresses that come after the starting verse vary by quite a margin. The most common of these addresses the wolf as the king of the forest. This is one of the most stable verse lines (second verse) and occurs more than ninety times, even though the descriptive epithet differs based on the specific dialect: *metsa kuldase/kullase/kullassa/kuldese*, *kulda kuningas* (“the golden king of the forest”; 5 instances). In single texts, *kurinde*, *kurdane*, *kulleri kuningas* appear as epithets. In addition to the popular reference “king”, there are also some cases of *bärre* (“mister”) and *isand* (“master”; 8 texts): *metsa ärta herrakene* (“mister of hearts of the forest”, referring to a card deck; 5) and *metsa heldised isandad* (“generous masters of the forest”), *metsa ilusa isanda* (“beautiful masters of the forest”), and *mõtsa ilvetud isandä*, which all occur only once.

In forty-two cases, the lady of the forest is addressed (third verse): *metsa emand* (“lady of the forest”; 21 texts), the most frequent being *metsa heldene emanda* (“generous lady of the forest”; 13), *metsa belmine emand* (“decorated lady of the forest”; 2 texts), while the words *ilvetud*, *ebitud*, *ejarmu*, *ärdane* and simply the phrase *metsa emand* all occur once. There is also one occurrence of *metsa kuldakrooni prouakene* (“lady of the forest with a golden crown”), which represents a different quality and address.

There are twenty-eight virgin verses (third or fourth verse): *metsa neitsikene* (“forest virgin”; 15); *nirki-nerki /nirki neitsikene* (4), *metsas noored neitsikesed / nooride neitsikene* (“young virgins in the forest / young virgin”; 2), *numma / siidineitsikene* (“moorland / silken virgin”; 2), with *metsa kuldatrooni neitsikene* (“forest virgin on a golden throne”), *kriimusilma neitsikene* (“wolf virgin”), *nõmme noori neitsikene* (“young moorland virgin”), *siidisaba neitsikesed* (“virgins with silken tails”), *metsa mamka neitsikene* (“forest mother virgin”) ⁵³ occurring one time.

Texts from southern Estonia also mention *metsa ema ja metsa isa* (“forest mother and forest father”; in this region, fairies are referred to as “mother”, “father”). There are six such addresses, two of them in diminutive form: *mõtsa esa*, *mõtsa ema* (4), *mõtsa esäke*, *mõtsa emäke* (2). Another possibility is represented by verses addressing wolves using substitute names alluding to their appearance: *harvalõuga* (“open jaws”; 24), *pikkalõuga* (“long jaws”; 24), *halliparda* (“grey beard”; 9), *metsa kardane kasukas* (“steely coat of the forest”; 7), with *metsa karvane kasukas* (“hairy

⁵³ For the last example of *metsa mamka neitsikene*, see H IV 9, 18 < Ambla parish, Lehtse rural municipality.

coat of the forest”), *metsa pikka peenilõuga* (“narrow jaws of the forest”), *metsa kaskene koonuke* (“birch snout of the forest”) all represented once. For example, the expression *halliparda* (“grey beard”) is represented in the following forms: *metsa halliparda* (“forest grey beard”; 5), *metsa armsad ballid parrad* (2), and in single texts as *armas ballas pardake*, *hallivati parda*. Similar verses include *metsahalli harva lakaga* (“with a forest-grey mane”; 1) ja *metsa batu halli pärga* (“grey wreath of the bitch of the forest”; 3), the first of which uses a cryptonym based on the color of the wolf’s coat and supplements it with a descriptive testimonial, *harvalakaline hunt*, the second of which uses the word *batu*, likely a denotative of *batt*, and *pärg*, probably just a random alteration.

In conclusion, incantations starting with several addressing verses include examples of almost all of the subtypes specified above: 1) relations with habitat and name (diminutive) combinations, 2) color names based on references to the color grey, as mentioned above, as well as other colors, 3) clothing details referring to a higher status generalized to form substitute name, e.g., in a list, *Oo, hunti, udukübara; siidisukka, kuldakinga*⁵⁴ (“Oh, wolf, fancy hat, silken stocking, golden shoe”), 4) assignment of specific forest-related positions, *metsälaane lambapoissi* (“forest sheep boy”), and 5) references to wolves being in the herd of forest fairies or Saint George who holds a similar position, including references to forest calves or horses, *saare valgedpea vasikad* (“ash tree whitehead calves”; 1), *metsa valgepea vasikas* (“whitehead calf of the forest”; 1), *metsa kimmel* (“brown and grey horse of the forest”; 1). One thing to note is that wolf incantations include very few cases of dysphemisms (20 instances).

6. CONCLUSION

Euphemisms and forbidden/taboo words, enigmatic use of words, and avoidance of direct naming reflect norms of behavior and stereotypes in the past. They also highlight topics that were sanctioned, feared, or avoided in daily speech. Euphemisms and substitute names were very widely used in daily communication, especially in times of crisis and in sensitive situations (eating, fishing-cycle, hunting, and herding periods). Word prohibitions were valid throughout the year and were used as needed, but the repel ritual and spells could also be associated with a specific critical time and

⁵⁴ H II 65, 10 < Rakvere, 1894.

due date. For example, it appears from the wolf folklore that the transfer of talents to wolves took place as needed, but they certainly communicated on St. George's day and the time of All Souls.

There is no direct appeal in 11 percent of wolf words, 10.9 percent of raven words, and 58 percent of cockroach words. By contrast, using the species name (or the general category bird, etc.), 36.5 percent of raven words, 15 percent of wolf words, 6.4 percent of cockroach words are used to address. The use of euphemisms is also different for all species: 66 percent of wolf words, 19.5 percent of raven words and 32.2 percent of cockroach words. Although the number of permanent substitute names and appeals is high (*Golden King of the Forest* – over 90 realizations), *Forest Mistress* (42 realizations) most are still minor or unique realizations.

In substitute names and euphemisms, the main dichotomies come to the fore: younger/older, white/black, rich/poor, settled/migrant, own/stranger, etc. In many species, relationships with supernatural beings and animal protectors also come to the fore: wolves have Saint George in the same position as the forest fairy, which is why wolves are called his dogs, calves, and foals; the same technique is used in bee words. In part, it is an antithesis in which a wild animal is replaced by a domestic animal, a predator by prey, or a predator is replaced by a human.

A person in a socially higher position is addressed for a number of beings. In wolf words, the choice is *Lord*, *King*, *Forest Mister*, *Forest Lord*, *old golden leg*, *sir*, *Queen*; in cockroach words, *Mister*. Remarkable is that the birds never identify with humans in euphemisms. Identification with an ordinary person also occurs in wolf and cockroach words (*man*, *village man*) and in bee words (*little men*, *workmen*); highlighting of kinship occurs in wolf words (*uncle*, *village guy*, *father*, *mother*) and in bee words (*mother*, *brothers*, *sisters*). In addition, in cockroach words *travelers*, *migrants*, and *strangers* are opposed to their own ones.

Substitute names related to color are common in all observed creatures: wolf names have the most grey-based names, but less often also variegated: white; raven white, black. Cockroach and some other insects are designated *golden*, but mostly *red*. *Pars pro toto*, or body part instead of animal, occurs in wolf words; a piece of clothing indicating a higher status, used as a replacement name in wolves, the opposition of living and dead occurs in cockroach words (warm leg/cold leg). In longer alliterative incantations, there are one to four appealing verses. In the first verse of wolf spell, the verse uses both quasi-words and reduplicates, and non-sense words characteristic of incantations, alongside substitute names with meaning. There are also repetitions, reduplicates and quasi-words in the

appeals of raven words; the same is characteristic of some crow words. A part of wolf replacement names refers to appearance, way of life, or place of residence.

The number of dysphemism is modest (absent in crickets, flies, grasshoppers and fleas, and also in ladybug words), there is no direct cursing or swearing, and a few dysphemisms are used in wolf appeals, while in the hawk they are central. There were few ways to influence the hawk other than symbolical offering young animals and repelling with dysphemism. In terms of dysphemisms, identification with human beings (beggars, cripples), demonic beings (for raven, five-tailed raven, for wolf, e.g., forest monster) or with animals (shameless dog, unfit animal for cockroach) are represented. In raven words, the names are associated with old, soot, black-colored, tattered and poor farming objects, black-colored objects.

The results presented are interesting, and appeals, substitute names, euphemisms, and dysphemisms are a reason to look further at the example of reptiles and other animals, as well as diseases and social relations. There is a reason to review both the religious background and other explanations, as well as compare them with the spells of other peoples.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article was supported by research grant of the Estonian Literary Museum EKM 8-2/20/, and by the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (TK 145) through the European Regional Development Fund.

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OLD NORSE POETRY AND THE LANGUAGE OF MAGIC

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-lomb>

ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to point out the relationships between Old Norse poetry and later or contemporary magic texts in two runic objects. On the example of the poetic lists prepared for poets as the *kenning*- and *heiti* catalogues reported by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) in his *Edda* and by his nephew Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284) in the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*, I hypothesize analogue lists of alliterating formulas that magicians and sorcerers would have used in order to compose their charms. The two charms are presented here with the aim of understanding how rhetorical tropes and mythologic figures, typical of Old Norse poetry, appear reworked in late magic texts in runes.

Keywords: magic runes; Old Norse poetry.

This paper aims to point out the relationships between Old Norse poetry and later, or contemporary, magic texts. On the example of the poetic lists prepared for poets as the *kenning*- and *heiti* catalogues reported by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) in his *Edda*¹ and by his nephew Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284) in the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*², I hypothesize analogous lists of alliterating formulas that magicians and sorcerers would have used in order to compose their charms. This phenomenon seems to be especially relevant in Scandinavia, where magic was often performed by the clergy, who were also the copyists of old manuscripts as well as writers of sagas and skaldic poetry. Therefore, I have investigated some charms with the aim of understanding how rhetorical tropes and mythologic figures, typical of Old Norse poetry, appear reworked in some late magic texts in runes.

¹ Faulkes 1998.

² Olsen 1884.

One interesting link between Old Norse poetic sources and some late medieval magic texts is clearly shown by the fact that, although Þórr is the only heathen god to be invoked on runic inscriptions spread in northern Europe in the Viking period, and albeit several invocations to this divinity to bless runes, monuments, and landscape also appear on funerary stones outside of Scandinavia (such as the blessing Þórr in the German Norden-dorf amulet, or an eleventh-century runic charm against blood-poison from Canterbury, where Þórr is called upon to bless the wound causer), Óðinn is more frequently invoked in late medieval charms. This seems to point at the crucial role played by the Old Norse literary sources, where Óðinn is said to be the inventor and master of runes. He is called *galdrsfaðir*, “father of incantations”, in *Baldrs draumar*³ (*Baldr’s dreams*), St. 3, and his skills as a healer are attested in *Hávamál*⁴ (*The Sayings of the High One*), St. 80-90. Another element indicating the close relationships between poetry and magic is the huge quantity of formulas and rhetorical figures loaned from ancient poems.

The charms I am presenting here belong respectively to the “thieves-discovering type” and to the “sickness-banishing type”. The first charm, signed as N-B241⁵, appears on one of Bergen runic sticks, found in the 1950s during the archaeological excavations of Bryggen, the old port district of Bergen in Norway. They go back to a time ranging from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and bear short inscriptions in runes, in many cases interpreted as charms. The one signed N-B241 reads:

Ek særi þik, Óðinn, með heiðindómi, mestr fjánda;
játa því; seg mér nafn þess manns er stal;
fyr kristni; seg mér nú þína ódád.
Eitt níðik, annat (?) níðik: seg mér, Óðinn!
Nú ér særð ok árafár (?) með öllu heiðindómi.
Þú nú öðlisk mér nafn þess er stal. A(men).

I exorcise thee, Odin, with heathendom, greatest of fiends;
assent to this: tell me the name of the man who stole;
for Christendom; tell me now your misdeed.
One I revile, second I revile; tell me, Odin!
Now is conjured up and lots of devils with all heathendom.
Now you shall get for me the name of the one who stole. A(men)⁶

³ Bifröst, “Ljóða Edda Baldrs Draumar”, *Bifröst Library*, 2008, <http://bifrost.it/GERMANI/Fonti/Eddapoetica-30.Baldrsdraumar.html> [May 30, 2021].

⁴ Neckel - Kuhn 1983, 32-43.

⁵ Spurkland 2001, 68.

⁶ MacLeod - Mees 2006, 31.

Although slightly obscure, since the text is fragmentary, in general the language is quite comprehensible. We are in the presence of a “theurgical” ritual: the charm aims at making Óðinn act according to the wish of the theurgist. The text is rhetorically complex, with alliterations and assonances (i.e., *Óð*, *eð*, *ið*, *in*, *in*, *an* of the first line are echoed by the sequence *ið*, *ið*, *Óð*, of the fourth line), rhymes, word repetitions, and variations, with a kind of stylistic framing by the phrase “seg mér nafn þess manns er stal”, “tell me the name of the man who stole”, of the second line repeated in the last verse with the variation of the verb *öðlisk* preceded by *þú* “you”, which emphasizes the threatening tone. The anaphoric sequence of imperatives such as *játa*, “consent, obey”, and *seg*, “say”, dominates the charm, while personal pronouns, in the nominative *ek*, “I” and in the dative *mér*, “to me”, grant the performer a dominant position and contribute to his boasting. By pronouncing and carving the runic charm, he would compel the supernatural entity to reveal the thief’s name. Such formal aspects partly match the founding principles of Old Norse metrics, further meeting popular expectations in terms of formal qualities since texts sounded familiar to magicians’ clients.

Odin is called “mestr fjánda”, “the greatest of fiends”, which – together with “fyr kristni” in the third line and the closing formula “Amen” – shows that the charm is written from a Christian point of view. These formulas were used in the catalogs of spells reported in the Icelandic *Galdrabók* (“Book of Magic”) by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, the discoverer of Codex Regius 2364 4^o (the main code of the poetic Edda) in 1648. Before that date, only a few eddaic lays were known through the prose *Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, who quoted parts of them mainly as examples of metrical forms and rhetorical items. In the bishop’s lists, Óðinn is invoked by twenty-six signs or sigils, among which *Ægishjálmur* is mentioned in *Fáfnismál*, “The Lay of Fáfnir”, one of Sigurðr’s lays. This circumstance further testifies to the close link between eddaic poetry and Scandinavian magic lore.

In *Galdrabók* other divinities are invoked and a ritual action is also requested, as in example n. 33:

In case of theft, you just carve these staves on the bottom of a dish of ash wood, put water in it, and straw millefolium into the water and say [...]: Óðinn, Loki, Frö, Baldur, Njörðr, Týr, Birgur, Freyja, Gefjon, Gusta.⁷

This double strategy made of both words and actions is absent in rune sticks. This is partly due to the lack of space for carving runes. But another

⁷ Flowers 1989, 127.

reason may be that in this kind of object the focus is undoubtedly on words, usually the language of the Bergen sticks in verse while the quoted *Galdrabók* charm is in prose. The language of poetry is so powerful that uttering magical words was enough to obtain what one asked.

The charm on N-B241 starts directly by appealing to the supernatural (Óðinn, together with all other spirits): naming the god is crucial for the human user of the charm, whose tone is quite aggressive through the formula “Ek særi þik”, “I exorcise thee”. The text presents two substantives in the accusative expressing the requested object: *nafn*, “the name” of the thief; three substantives in the dative: *fyr kristni*, “for Christianity”, declaring the powerful religious background in the name of which the enchanter is demanding the thief’s name; and two other *heiðindómi*, “all pagan forces”, repeated twice, referring to Odin’s followers. Then the list of ways to bind the malevolent spirit follows, and finally, the performer’s boasts over the enemy, uttering his curse: “Eitt níðik, annat níðik”, “one time I revile you, a second time I revile you”, bragging about his capacity of manipulating the evil force.

Examining the verb *níðik*, which I interpret as the indicative first person of the verb *níða*, with the enclitic form of the first-person pronoun *ek*, “I”, is of some importance. The verb derives from the term *níð*, which represents a Nordic juridic, magical, and cultural concept. All Scandinavian medieval law codes (the Icelandic *Grágás*, the Norwegian *Gulapingslag* and *Frostapingslag*, the Swedish *Upplandslag* and *Västergötalag*, the Danish *Skånske lov*, etc.) provide for the crime of *níð*, which was punished by the most severe penalty: outlawry, or *skoggangr*, “going to the forest”⁸. The criminal who was guilty of *níð* was condemned to be excluded from human society and to live in the wild as a wolf. Thus, the word has a particularly negative connotation and also plays a central role in Nordic black magic, where it is used for curses while performing special rituals of scorning and humiliation of an adversary. They are often expressed in verse, sometimes with a sexual connotation, occasionally even by using horse-heads as in the well-known *níðdiktning* “revenge poem” in *Egilssaga*, pronounced by the protagonist against his mortal enemy, the King of Norway, Eirík Bloðøx⁹. Despite the fact that no runic inscription uses the term *níð* or *níðingr*, several runic stones use the opposite term: *oníðingr*, with the *o-* prefix to describe a man as being virtuous. This proves the negative magical power of the word that one could not write even in runes. An example can be found on runestone Sm5 in Transjö:

⁸ Almqvist 1965.

⁹ Sigurður Nordal 1979, 33.

A: kotr : sati : sten : þana : eftR : ketil :
 B: sun : sin : han : far
 C: mana : mestr o:niþikR : eR a : eklati : ali : tunþi
 A Gautr satti st *níðingr* in þenna æftir Kætil
 B sun sinn. Hann varR
 C manna mæstr oníðingR, eR a Ænglandi aldri tyndi
 A Gautr placed this stone in memory of Ketill
 B his son he was
 C the most unvillanious of men, who forfeited his life in England ¹⁰

The same alliterative expression, “mana : mestr o:niþikR”, appears on Ög 77 (Oppeby, Östergötaland) ¹¹ and Dr 68 (Denmarks runinskrifter) ¹².

In medieval folktales and ballads, the *Níðing* was a character aided, guided, or coerced by an evil force to do his evil deeds. A *Níðing* had originally been a human being of fiendish nature that had either sought evil deliberately or had been taken into possession by evil forces unwillingly. The *Níðing* used its malicious power to destroy anything owned or made by someone. Envy was regarded as the primary cause of *níð*-curses. The verb *níða* therefore has the meaning of “cursing” or “reviling” an adversary to the point of destroying him. In the above-quoted charm the destruction of Odin and his host is threatened.

The second charm I wish to mention was carved on a copper amulet found in Sigtuna (Sweden) and is signed C10. It can be dated to the eleventh century and belongs to the “sickness-banishing” type. It has been analyzed and examined in an illuminating article by Alaric Hall. The runes were carved to ward off the evil spirit of the disease. Its purpose is healing fever caused by a wound:

Þurs sarriðu, þursa drottinn! Flíu þú nú! Fundinn es(tú).
 Haf þær níu nauðiR, úlfR!
 Haf þær níu nauðiR, úlfR!
 iii isiR þis isiR auki (e)s uniR, ú lfR. Niút lyfia!

Ogre of wound-fever, lord of the giants! Flee now! (You) are found.
 Have for yourself three pangs, wolf!
 Have for yourself nine needs, wolf!

¹⁰ Skaldic Project Academic Body and Brepols, “Sm 5 (Sm5) – Transjö”, *Skaldic Project*, 2022, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=ms&i=15243> [March 20, 2021].

¹¹ “Östergötland Runic Inscription 77”, *Wikipedia*, November 28, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96sterg%C3%B6tland_Runic_Inscription_77 [March 20, 2021].

¹² Marcus Smith, “DR 68”, *Runinskrifter.net*, n.d., <https://www.runinskrifter.net/signum/DR/68> [March 20, 2021].

iii ice (runes). These ice (runes) may grant that you be satisfied (?), wolf. Make good use of the healing-charms!¹³

The enchanter commands the spirit (of the sickness) to run away, appealing to it as a kind of monster by using the Old Norse lexeme *þurs* which means “giant” and contains a connotation of “monstruosity” if compared with other Norse substantives alluding to giants’ other qualities such as wisdom (e.g., *iötun*).

The use of this specific formula *þursa trutin Þursa dróttin*, “Lord of giants”, alliterating with *Þurs*, seems to me to follow the well-known strategy of analogy evident also in comparisons, similes, metaphors, and *históriolae*. Metaphorically, it refers to the illness using personification, recalling the myth of the giant Þrymr, the prince of evildoers, since it appears as a mythological kenning in the Eddaic poem *Þrymskviða*, “The Lay of Þrymr”, in which Þrymr is defeated by Þórr. Later in the text, the sickness is addressed as a wolf, a beast which in Scandinavia has an especially wide range of religious and mythological implications.

Like many other animals (bears, serpents, etc.), wolves have been associated with magic since antiquity. As Versnel has illustrated in his article¹⁴, these species belong to the world of the wild, to all that is outside, to the so-called “Otherness”¹⁵. In Old Norse mythology, wolves are related to Óðinn (Freki and Geri), and during the Ragnarök (the final judgment of heathen gods), Óðinn will be killed by the wolf Fenrir, Loki’s child. Moreover, as mentioned above, in all Scandinavian law codes, outlaws are named *skoggangar*, “those who go through the forest”, and are occasionally called wolves in poetic diction. Returning to *Þursa dróttin* in the first line of the charm, classified in the category of mythological kennings¹⁶, it is interesting to observe that the kenning occurs in six stanzas of *Þrymskviða*: “Þrymr sat á haugi, þursa dróttinn”¹⁷, “Þrymr sat on a mound, the lord of the giants” (stanza 6); “Þrymr hefr þinn hamar, þursa dróttinn”¹⁸, “Þrymr has your hammer, the lord of the giants” (stanza 11); “Þá kvað þat Þrymr,

¹³ MacLeod - Mees 2005, 118.

¹⁴ Versnel 2002, 105-115.

¹⁵ For “Otherness” as a concept, see Straubhaar 2001, 105-123 and Jakobsson 2007, 141-157.

¹⁶ For mythological kennings catalogs and definitions, see Marold 1983; Clunies Ross 1987; Lombardi 2012.

¹⁷ Neckel - Kuhn 1983, 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

þursa dróttinn”¹⁹, “Then Þrymr said, the lord of the giants”²⁰ (stanza 22); “Þá kvat þat Þrymr, þursa dróttinn”²¹, “Then Þrymr said, the lord of the giants” (stanza 25); “Þá kvat þat Þrymr, þursa dróttinn”²², “Then Þrymr said, the lord of the giants” (stanza 29); “Þrym drap hann fyrstan, þursa dróttinn”²³, “He killed Þrymr first, the lord of the giants” (stanza 30). The formula mainly seems to function as a metric unit, meeting the requirements of the alliterating verse. We find a great number of variations of this kenning also in later poetry (in *rímur* and in *folkevísir*). In late medieval poetry, the plural genitive *þursa*, “of giants”, the kenning determinant (BW), is associated with different base words, i.e., *þursa þilja*, “the board of the giants”, in *Friðþjófsrímur* (III, 58, 3)²⁴, showing its adaptability to different contexts. These rather mechanical variations were listed by Snorri Sturluson in the *þulur* in *Skáldskaparmál* and by Sturla Þorðarsson in order to provide poets with fixed formulas to use in their compositions. This enabled traditional formulas, and with them, terms bound to old institutions, to survive. This is the case for the term *dróttin*, “chieftain”, which originally referred to the leader of Viking expeditions and occurs in Old Norse epics and skaldic texts as well as in runic inscriptions indicating kings or gods when commemorating war and trading enterprises. Its presence in the charm recalls a time of wars and adventures, founding values of the early Scandinavian history and – in the case of the eleventh-century amulet – in a time when those values still existed. Snorri’s *þulur* were also aimed at preserving the memory of ancient myths and rhetorical tropes while keeping the native poetic diction alive. As in Greek, Roman, or Egyptian charms, Homer and Virgil were quoted, and in Nordic charms, exempla from Eddaic and skaldic texts were quoted or hinted at. Such knowledge, as well as local beliefs, were possessed by clergy who could use, mix, and elaborate on them according to the purpose of their works. Preserving past traditions was, together with poetry composition, manuscript copying, and writing books of magic, concentrated in the same social class. Therefore, we can conjecture that in some cases, Snorri’s lists based on Old Norse poetic language might have played a role of intertexts for the language of magic. Moreover, this specific kenning could be regarded

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁴ Larsson 1893.

as a sort of *historiola*. In fact, the association with the *Þrymskviða* as an authoritative model happens through a very concentrated and “enigmatic” riddle-kenning²⁵ (suggesting: who is the lord of giants?). By including a typical rhetoric traditional trope, the kenning, the evil protagonist of the *Þrymskviða* is recalled and the comparison made between the elimination of the sickness and that of *Þrymr* by *Þórr*. As Versnel argues, poetic and magic languages share many formal aspects. In particular metaphors and personifications are two aspects of the same process of transforming an abstract concept into a concrete element²⁶.

But at the time of this amulet carving, Codex Regius (containing *Þrymskviða*) had not been written yet, nor was Snorri’s *Edda*. This charm shows that the kenning was already known and circulating as a formula. Probably it belonged to *Þrymskviða* (or to some other poem), when it was still performed orally in front of Viking kings and chieftains.

Analogously another rune stick from Bergen shows a better version of another lay passage. It is interesting that enchanter used themes and expressions as well as ancient poetic formulas and, according to Jonas Liestøl²⁷, sometimes the runic text is even more reliable than the corresponding text in the main Edda Codex. This casts light on the importance of oral tradition in the transmission of poetic formulas and on the manifold channels through which poetry has influenced contemporary and later charms.

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²⁵ Lombardi 2017, 247-248.

²⁶ Versnel 2002, 41-42.

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AN EPISODE FROM THE HISTORY OF PUBLISHING RUSSIAN FOLKLORE CHARMS AND THEIR ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS¹

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-topo>

ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the first collection of Russian charms, published in 1836-1841 by Ivan Sakharov (1807-63) in his compendium *The Tales of the Russian People about the Family Life of Their Ancestors*. Sakharov partly remade texts of charms that he had obtained from other folklore collectors and partly composed them by himself using some formula of authentic texts. Several of Sakharov's charms were translated into English and published by William Ralston (1828-89) in his book *The Songs of the Russian People, as Illustrative of Slavonic Mythology and Russian Social Life* (1872). The aim of the author is to inform foreign researchers about falsifications made by Sakharov and to encourage them to use the texts of authentic Russian charms.

Essay translated by Kirill Toporkov.

Keywords: fake-lore; history of folk studies; Ivan Sakharov; Russian verbal charms.

Among the publications of Russian folklore materials, we meet a number of falsified texts. This tradition, which echoed the production of the *Songs of Ossian* by James MacPherson, found numerous practitioners in Russia². The motivations for falsification could vary: some of them simply made

¹ This work was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (grant number 20-012-00117, "Russian magic folklore from unpublished sources from the 17th to the start of the 20th century; archival searches, preparation of scientific publication, research, and commentary").

² Левин 1980.

literary stylizations of folklore, others sought commercial success, and others set for themselves patriotic and educational aims³.

The main purpose of this article is to warn our foreign colleagues against using falsified texts of Russian verbal charms. The situation here is paradoxical. The fact is that the Russian verbal charms tradition is wide and diversiform. Firstly, it appears in some texts of the ancient Russian period. In the seventeenth century we can already find hundreds of magical texts. If we look at the last annotated bibliography of East Slavic verbal charms, we will see about 16,700 Russian verbal charms, both oral and written, published between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries⁴. In this corpus, the vast majority of texts are authentic and do not cause any doubts. But there are several dozens of falsified texts.

Unfortunately, the Russian verbal charms tradition seems to be almost unknown in the West. Except for the works of Viljo Mansikka, William Ryan, and several articles that have been published during the last few decades, we cannot find any Russian verbal charms translated into European languages⁵. That is the reason why one of the most popular sources of Russian verbal charms used by an English-speaking audience is the work *The Songs of the Russian People, as Illustrative of Slavonic Mythology and Russian Social Life* (1872) by William Ralston. Meanwhile, Ralston did not fail to look into the difficult history of Russian verbal charms⁶. There are several falsifications among the texts he translated. Those falsifications were later included in different works devoted to Russian folklore and to folkloric summaries of different European nations.

First of all, before we begin to talk about concrete materials, let's formulate briefly the differences between authentic verbal charms and falsifications:

1. Authentic verbal charms descend from concrete manuscript sources or have been written down by bearers of traditions. Falsified texts were totally composed by their publisher or represent the result of remaking of the original texts.
2. Genuine charms can usually be met in the corpus of sources and in different publications with little variations. Falsified texts do not differ. They can be republished many times but they always go back to one concrete publication and do not vary or have very little variations.

³ Топорков и др. 2002.

⁴ Агапкина - Топорков 2014, 127.

⁵ Топорков 2012.

⁶ Алексеев - Левин 1994.

3. Verbal charms are the texts of mass-manuscript tradition or oral folklore. That is why they are clichéd and are quite standard in their poetic manner. Falsified texts are the result of individual creation and do not keep within this poetic style. They differ from the original verbal charms in vocabulary, style, structure, and other parameters.

We thus have enough reasons to suspect the text to be falsified if it (1) was published by the person who had compromised himself by forgery and is known as falsifier; (2) does not have parallels in other sources and is not traditional; (3) fundamentally differs from the other texts of the same type in its language and style.

1. FOLKLORE PUBLICATIONS OF IVAN SAKHAROV

Now we can talk about the central personage of our research. His name is Ivan Sakharov (1807-63). Sakharov was a fertile dilettante and publisher. Between 1830 and 1840 he published several works in Saint Petersburg, including folklore, ethnographic, historical, and literary materials: Сказания русского народа о семейной жизни своей предков (*The Tales of Russian People about the Family Life of Their Ancestry*), Песни русского народа (1838-1839; vols. 1-5; *The Songs of Russian People*), Русские народные сказки (1841; vol. 1; *Russian Fairy-Tales*), Путешествия русских людей в чужие земли (1837; vols. 1-2; *The Journeys of Russian People to Alien Countries*), Записки русских людей (1841; *The Sketchbooks of Russian People*), Летопись русской нумизматики (1842; *The Chronicle of Russian Numismatics*), Русские древние памятники (1842; *Ancient Russian Memorials*), Исследование о русском иконописании (1849; vols. 1-2; *The Research of Russian Icon Painting*), etc.

In the period from 1838 to 1849, Sakharov published his books in his own printing house. Print runs were quite large and some books were even published twice. It is very remarkable that Sakharov did not graduate at any humanitarian university. After he graduated from seminary in Tula, he studied at the medical faculty in Moscow University and after that he stayed to practice as a doctor, devoting all his spare time to researching writing and folklore traditions and preparing his books for publishing. Later he considered his choice of profession to be an irreparable mistake.

Sakharov supported the “theory of official nationality”. Following the Minister of National Enlightenment Sergei Uvarov, he proclaimed the unity of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality” and counted his main

aim as protecting his country from foreign influence⁷. Sakharov continually sought ancient legends, fairy-tales, songs, icon-painting, church singing, etc. not only because he wanted to preserve them for new generations, but also because he saw them as opposed to the values of Western civilization⁸.

In the history of Russian humanities Sakharov was an extremely ambiguous person. Folklorists, ethnographers, and historians of literature from the second half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century have spent a lot of energy in order to prove that he was an unscrupulous falsifier. It was established that he had written the fairy-tales himself, setting them up for the folklore. He widely used the narratives of Russian epic from the famous collection of Kirsha Danilov. He corrected texts of the songs and riddles and made insertions using nonexistent manuscripts⁹. In spite of those facts, Sakharov's books are paradoxically republished again and again and Russian and foreign authors still use them to access the material.

The first collection of Russian charms included forty-one texts and was published in the first volume of *The Tales of the Russian People about the Family Life of Their Ancestors*¹⁰. In 1837 this volume was republished and already included fifty-seven charms. After that, Sakharov began to prepare a new expanded edition of the *Tales*, which according to his plan was to include seven volumes in thirty books. However, Sakharov managed to publish only two volumes in eight books. Collection of charms, published in the first volume, included already sixty-four texts¹¹.

2. THE TEXTS OF GRIGORY PARIKHIN IN THE PUBLICATION OF IVAN SAKHAROV

Seven texts included in the edition of 1841 were sent to Sakharov in 1838 by merchant and collector of folklore Grigory Parikhin from the city of Tikhvin¹². Fortunately, those seven texts are preserved in Sakharov's archive. The comparison of the texts published in the *Tales* with their source sent by Parikhin lets us determine what Sakharov did with the materials that he obtained from other collectors. It turns out that Sakharov corrected texts in the manuscripts. First of all, he crossed out some fragments, replaced

⁷ Для биографии И.П. Сахарова 1873, 916.

⁸ Для биографии И.П. Сахарова 1873, 910, 918.

⁹ Топорков 2017.

¹⁰ Сахаров 1836, 1, 55-94.

¹¹ Сахаров 1841, 1, 2, 18-35.

¹² Новиков 1959; Топорков 2014.

some of the words and phrases, and sometimes inserted extra words. In the *Figures 1* and *2* you can see the handwritten texts by Parikhin, with corrections made by Sakharov.

Let us take one of the charms in two versions as an example: on the right, the authentic text from the archive; in the left, the text published by Sakharov¹³. In both texts you can see fragments in italics that distinguish them from each other¹⁴.

We can see that Sakharov reduced the original text by one third. In particular, he removed everything that indicated its link with Christianity. In the beginning he removed the formula “Господи Боже, благослови!” (“God bless”), and in the end “Во имя Отца и Сына и Святаго Духа, во веки веков. Аминь” (“In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; № 61)¹⁵. The expression “раб Божий” (“Servant of God”) has been changed to “раб, такой-то” (“Servant...”).

There are no references to a throne, Virgin, or Jesus Christ, and “дом” (“the house”) appears instead of “Соборная Апостольская церковь” (“Cathedral Apostolic Church”). In Parikhin’s text we see: “... в море Окиане лежит Алатырь камень, на том камне Алатыре стоит Соборная Апостольская церковь; в той Апостольской церкви стоит престол, на том престоле мать сама Пресвятая Богородица, истинной Христос небесный! Попрошу я, раб Божий (имя), от матушки Пресвятой Богородицы, от истинного Христа небесного, рабу Божию (имя того, кому заговаривают) здоровья ...” — “[...] in the Ocean there is an Alatur stone, on that Alatur stone there stands the Cathedral Apostolic Church. In that Cathedral Apostolic Church there stands a throne, on that throne are Mother Virgin and Christ from heaven. I, the servant of God (the name of the person) will ask from Mother Virgin, from true Christ from heaven to give (the name of charmed person) wealth from the illness (the name of the sick person [...])”. But the published version had only: “... в море Окиане лежит Алатырь камень, на том камне Алатыре стоит дом. Попрошу я, раб такой-то, здоровья ...” — “[...] in the Ocean there is an Alatur stone, on that Alatur stone there stands the house I, servant (the name of the person) will ask wealth from (the name of the illness) illness [...]”.

¹³ Parikhin sent the texts to the journalist and publisher Alexander Krayevsky in his letter on 8 July 1838, and Krayevsky gave them to Sakharov (РНБ. Ф. № 678. Ед. хр. 42. Л. 96-96об. [Letter], л. 97-102 [Charms collection]).

¹⁴ Here and later all italic style was used by the author.

¹⁵ Hereinafter references to Sakharov’s charm collection refer to text numbers of publication in the third edition of *The Tales of the Russian People about the Family Life of Their Ancestors* (Сахаров 1841, 1, 2, 18-35, № 1-64).

Соборная Апостольская Церковь; в этой Апостольской
 Церкви стоит престол, какому престолу мать
 Сама Превышшая Богородица и естество имеет ке-
 ский, попроси я раба Божий (имя) от матушки Пр-
 святой Богородицы, от кистицаи Христа кескии,
 раба Божия (имя того, к кому каговаривают) здоро-
 кою такой то болести, от кистицаи имеет, от кистицаи
 от болести, от кистицаи, божество рожа от кистицаи,
 Еригогичку реху кистицаи имеет; потому кистицаи
 имеет идет от кистицаи матер кистицаи; кистицаи вду-
 хом золотое бисерко, серебряно перышко; кистицаи
 Божий (имя того, к кому каговаривают) кистицаи идет
 кистицаи, кистицаи кистицаи кистицаи кистицаи,
 кистицаи от раба Божия. Кистицаи болести, бож-
 ства кистицаи кистицаи духа, в кистицаи кистицаи
 кистицаи кистицаи кистицаи Божий (имя) и кистицаи
 кистицаи кистицаи кистицаи кистицаи, кистицаи!

Заговор кистицу или кистицу.

Между Младенца и Девы.

как мать быстро река течет, (какви река) как кистицаи
 кистицаи кистицаи, как кистицаи кистицаи
 кистицаи, так бы раба Божия (имя кистицаи) кистицаи
 кистицаи Божия (имя кистицаи) кистицаи кистицаи,
 кистицаи кистицаи, кистицаи кистицаи; как в кистицаи Младенца и Девы

Figure 1. – List with a record of charm for hernia (the beginning) with Sakharov's corrections.
 From a letter by Gregory Parikhin on July 8, 1838. РНБ. Ф. № 678. Ед. хр. 42. Л. 98.

кишитъ, кибиѣтъ, ки нитъ, ки нѣтъ; ки кауфрѣковъ
Зори ки каверѣковъ; какъ рыба безъ воды, какъ медведица
безъ матери безъ материка молока, безъ материка
крева, неможеетъ жити, таагъ въ рабѣ Божий (или) безъ
рабы божьей (или) неможеетъ жити кибѣтъ, ки нитъ
кибѣтъ, ки кауфрѣковъ зори ки каверѣковъ кѣвъ обидѣтъ
кѣвъ поидѣтъ, ^{на} кепригаѣтъ звѣздамъ кеприбуѣтъ въ вѣраѣ,
кибѣтъ прииоикѣтъ, кибѣтъ при мѣсяцѣ, въ пиваѣя таагъ
въ вайѣя таагъ въ грудѣ, въ сардѣ, въ вѣвѣ живѣтъ, рабу
Божьей (или) разроѣтъ и разбѣтъ повѣѣтъ дѣлаѣтъ,
повѣѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ но етой и сурѣтой пораѣтъ Божьей
(или) Аминь, —

примечаніе.: когда заговор произойдетъ триѣ
" или тогда у камикаѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ
" или, а или дѣлаѣтъ, кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ
" вайѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ заговор произойдетъ, кѣтъ
" вѣвѣтъ, кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ
" кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ

Заговоръ отъ Грѣхи

Богородице Божьей Благовѣстѣ, Стану я раба (или раба)
Божий (свое или кто произойдетъ заговоръ) Благовѣстѣ,
пойду перекрѣтъ, изъ двѣрей въ двѣри, изъ воротъ
въ ворота, изъ воротъ въ вѣвѣтъ кѣтъ, въ кѣтъ кѣтъ
сторону, кѣтъ кѣтъ кѣтъ, въ вѣвѣтъ кѣтъ, кѣтъ кѣтъ
Аминь кѣтъ, кѣтъ кѣтъ Аминь, Стану я

Figure 2. – List with a record of charm for hernia (the end) with Sakbarov's corrections.
From a letter by Gregory Parihin on July 8, 1838. РНБ. Ф. № 678. Ед. хр. 42. Л. 98 об.

Сахаров 1841,1,2:33, № 63	РНБ, ф. № 678, ед. хр. 42, л. 98-98 об.
Заговор от грыжи Charm from hernia	Заговор от грыжи Charm from hernia
<p>Стану я раб, <i>такой-то</i>, благословясь, пойду, перекрестясь, из дверей в двери, из ворот в ворота, в чисто поле, в подвосточную сторону, к морю к <i>Окиану</i>, в море <i>Окиане</i> лежит Алатырь камень, на том камне Алатыре стоит дом. Попрошу я, раб <i>такой-то</i>, здоровья, об такой-то болезни, об наличном мясе, от грызоты, от болеты, от ломоты. Бежит река огненная, чрез <i>огненную</i> реку калиновой мост, по тому калинову мосту идет стар матер человек; несет в руках золотое блюдечко, серебрено перышко, мажет у рабе, <i>такой-то</i>, семдесят жил, семдесят костей, семдесят суставов; збавляет с раба, такого-то, семдесят болезней. Не боли, и не ломи, и не отрыгай, и не откидывай, и <i>ни на конце, ни на ветке</i> никогда.</p> <p>I, the servant (the name of the person), will stand up with a blessing, I will go out with a sign of the cross from one door to another, from one gate to another, to the open field to Eastern direction, to the Sea, to the Ocean, in the Ocean there is an Alatyrr stone, on that Alatyrr stone there stands a house. I, servant (the name of the person) will ask wealth from (the name of the sick person) illness <...>. There runs a river made of fire, across that river there is a viburnum bridge, along that viburnum bridge there goes an old man. He carries the gold saucer and a silver feather in his hands, smears to the servant of God (the name of the person) 70 veins, 70 bones, 70 joints, saves the servant of God (the name of the person) 70 illnesses. And no illness remains.</p>	<p><i>Господи Боже, благослови</i>; стану я, раб (или раба) <i>Божий</i> (свое имя, кто произносит заговор), благословясь, пойду перекрестясь, из дверей в двери, из ворот в ворота, в чисто поле, в подвосточную сторону, к морю к <i>Океану</i>, в море <i>Океане</i> лежит <u>Алатырь</u> камень, на том камне Алатыре стоит // (л. 98об.) <i>Соборная Апостольская церковь</i>; в той Апостольской церкви стоит престол, на том престоле мать сама Пресвятая Богородица, истинной Христос небесный! Попрошу я, раб Божий (имя), от матушки Пресвятой Богородицы, от истинного Христа небесного, рабу Божию (имя того, кому наговаривают) здоровья, об такой-то болезни, об наличном мясе, от грызоты, от болеты, от ломоты; бежит река огненная, чрез огненну реку калиновой мост, по тому калинову мосту идет стар матер человек; несет в руках золотое блюдечко, серебрянно перышко, мажет рабе Божию (имя того, кому наговаривают) семдесят жил, семдесят костей, семдесят суставов; збавляет с раба Божия семдесят болезней; во имя Отца и Сына и Святаго Духа, во веки веков. Аминь. Не боли и не ломи у раба Божия (имя), и не отрыгай, и не откидывай, <i>ни на новце, ни на ветхе</i>, никогда.</p> <p><i>God, Bless Me, Father.</i> I, the servant of God (the name of the person), will stand up with a blessing, I will go out with a sign of the cross from one door to another, from one gate to another, to the open field to Eastern direction, to the Sea, to the Ocean, in the Ocean there is an Alatyrr stone, on that Alatyrr stone there stands the Cathedral Apostolic Church. In that Cathedral Apostolic Church there stands a throne, on that throne there are Mother Virgin and Christ from heaven. I, the servant of God (the name of the person) will ask from Mother Virgin, from true Christ from heaven to give (the name of charmed person) wealth from the illness (the name of the sick person) <...>. There runs a river made of fire, across that river there is a viburnum bridge, along that viburnum bridge there goes an old man. He carries the gold saucer and a silver feather in his hands, smears to the servant of God (the name of the person) 70 veins, 70 bones, 70 joints, saves the servant of God (the name of the person) 70 illnesses. And no illness remains. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.</p>

Actually, Sakharov turned half-Christian texts into non-Christian texts practically without any traces of Christian influence. We can assume that this direction of correction was due to censorship conditions. Religious censorship could hardly prevent all attempts to publish any literary work where sacred names could appear in an inappropriate context. Knowing about this in advance, Sakharov could use self-censorship and pre-align the texts in the form, so that later they did not cause any objections from the censor.

However, another interpretation of these reductions is possible. Sakharov's work can be understood as an attempt of remythologization or repaganization of the texts. We have suspicions that Sakharov would have made the same changes even if he had not suffered censorship. It is hard to say how deliberate these actions were, but it is revealing that the famous mythologist Alexander Afanasyev (1826-71) in the 1850s and 1860s built a scheme of Slavic paganism largely relying on the charms falsified by Sakharov.

The case with Parikhin's charms has a partly unique character, as Sakharov published texts received from a real person, whose name he pointed out in his book. In most cases we cannot find any information about the sources of the texts in the *Tales*. It is very likely that Sakharov composed himself some texts, though he used some elements from real charms.

3. HOW DID SAKHAROV PROCESS AND/OR COMPOSE THE TEXTS OF VERBAL CHARMS?

Let us analyze a group of verbal charms against enemy weapons as an example. They are given in two groups in Sakharov's collection: first, a collection of four texts (№ 18-21), and then another set of seven (№ 29-35). In the first group at least two texts almost entirely correspond to traditional military charms (№ 18-21). In the second group all texts are distantly related to the true tradition and probably were composed by Sakharov himself. Perhaps in the first case Sakharov took the actual texts as a basis and modified them, and in the second, wrote his own works, including individual authentic formulas.

It is obvious that Sakharov had some collection of military charms at his disposal. It is likely that there were even several collections. At the same time, it was absolutely impossible to publish them in their original

form in the period of the 1830s and 1840s. It would be quite enough to mention that those charms describe how the Virgin protects somebody using pans, and enemy's arrow passes "through the living God"¹⁶.

It is doubtless that the initial motivation for the processing of the charms was a quite natural desire to bring them into a form that could permit their publication. Sakharov at first probably selected texts that in principle could pass through censorship and separated them from those that could not be published at the time under any circumstances. In the second phase, Sakharov apparently took everything that made charms look like Christian prayers. Firstly, he struck initial- and final-prayer formula out of the manuscripts: "Господи, благослови, отче", "Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа", "Отныне и присно и во веки веков", "Аминь" ("God bless, Father", "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", "Now and ever and ever and ever", "Amen") and others. Secondly, he withdrew the names of the Virgin, Christ, St. John the Baptist, of angels and archangels, evangelists, saints, biblical kings and prophets, the names of religious holidays, as well as the religious vocabulary: the words "Боже", "Божий", "святой", "Господи", "крест" ("God", "Gods", "Saint", "Lord", "Cross") and others.

Thirdly, Sakharov interpolated fragments of folklore into charms. For example, in one of the charms it is said that the black raven "made his nest on seven oaks" (№ 31). In another text twelve warriors killed a terrible twelve-headed snake under the twelfth Murom oaks (№ 35). Those mythological motifs were to make charms more attractive for lovers of antiquities and people interested in the pagan beliefs of the Slavs.

We can find the spectacular mythological story in Sakharov's "Charm from Martial Weapons":

Летел орел из-за Хвалынского моря, разбросал кремни и кремницы по крутым берегам, кинул громовую стрелу во сыру землю. И как отродилась от кремня и кремницы искра, от громовой стрелы полымя, и как выходила грозная туча, и как проливал сильный дождь, что им покорилась и поклонилась селитра-порох, смирным-смирнехонько. (№ 19)

The eagle was flying from the Hvalynski sea. He scattered flints on steep banks, threw the thunderbolt in the damp earth. And as the spark was born from the he-flint and she-flint and the fire from thunderbolt, and as a menacing cloud came, and as the heavy rain spilled, nitrate, gunpowder obeyed and bowed to them quietly. (№ 19)

¹⁶ Топорков - Турилов 2002, 192.

Afanasyev felt the mythological character of the text and quoted it, mentioning the symbolic significance of the eagle as the thunderbird:

Финнская Калевала изображает мифического орла с огненным клювом и сверкающими очами; он так громаден, что зев его подобен шести водопадам; одним крылом разделяет он морские волны, а другим небесные тучи; в другой песне говорится об орле, перья которого пышут пламенем. Согласно с этими данными, отождествляющими орла с богом-бросателем молний и проливателем дождей, свидетельствует и один из наших заговоров...¹⁷

Finnish Kalevala depicts a mythical eagle with a fire bill and sparkling eyes; he is so enormous that his jaws is similar to six waterfalls; he shares the sea waves with one wing and celestial clouds with another; in another song it's talked about eagle whose feathers blaze with flame. According to these data, *where an Eagle is equated with god of lightning and rain, we can find one of our charms. [...]*

In Sakharov's "Charm from Bullets of Lead, Copper, Stone", a beautiful maiden is described as a kind of goddess of war with rightful attributes:

В высоком терему, в понизовском, за рекою Волгою, стоит красная девица, стоит, покрашается, добрым людям похваляется, ратным делом красуется. Во правой руке держит пули свинцовыя, во левой медныя, а в ногах каменные. Ты, красная девица, отбери ружья: Турецкия, Татарския, Немецкия, Черкасския, Русския, Мордовския, всяких языков и супостатов: заколоти ты своею невидимою силою ружья вражия. (№ 20)

In the high tower, in the lower reaches of the river, on the opposite bank of the river Volga, there stands *a beautiful maiden, she stands, praising herself to good people and showing off by her feat of arms. In her right hand she carries lead bullets, in the left one the copper bullets, on the legs the stone bullets.* You, the beautiful maiden, take away the guns: Turkish, Tatar, German, Cherkassy, Russian, Mordovian, of all languages and adversaries, nail up enemies' guns with your invisible power. (№ 20)

Besides that, Sakharov introduced episodes depicting the family manners and personal relationships of our ancestors to the charms. For example, the warrior promises to the girl: "А буде я ворочусь поживу и поздорову, ино буду, красна девица, тобою похвалятися, своею молодеческою поступью выказыватися" ("If I come back safe and healthy, I will boast of you, the beautiful maiden, and will walk with the proud gait"; № 29). A mother charming her son gives him a covenant on how to live: "...а будь ты: в доме добрым отцом, во поле молодцом, во рати удалцом,

¹⁷ Афанасьев 1865, 1, 493.

в миру на любованье, во девичьем терему на покрашение, на брачном пиру без малого ухищренья, с отцом с матерью во миру, с женою во ладу, с детьми во согласии” (“[...] be a good father of a family, a brave warrior in the battle, a handsome man in the community, a favorite person in the maiden’s house, an honest man on the marriage ritual, be in peace with your father and mother, and a wife, and the children”; № 30). The character, who enters the army, complains about his fate, describing a very real situation: “Выдают меня родные братья во княжую рать, одинокого, неженатого, а во княжей рати мне подобиру не жити” (“I am sent to the army by my brothers, and I’m alone, unmarried and it will be hard in the army of Prince”; № 33). We emphasize that all of the above fragments of folklore, mythology, and manner describing the characters occur only in Sakharov’s charms and are absent in authentic materials.

We can make a certain algorithm that describes the stages that Sakharov passed through while working with the texts of charms. When Sakharov was dealing with the authentic texts given to him by other collectors or found in some manuscript sources, he probably conducted the following steps:

1. selection of texts from various sources (mainly manuscripts);
2. choice of text (in particular sifting out the material that clearly could not pass through the censorship);
3. exclusion references to the source from which the charm had been extracted (previously published, written or oral) from the text as a kind of “negative reception”;
4. removal of references to the place and time of recording, the method of text performance or magical manipulation of the manuscript, if such references had been included in the source;
5. editing of the authentic texts for the purpose of their de-Christianization: removal of religious vocabulary, deleting prayer opening and closing sentences, substitution of folk character in the place of the Christian;
6. appending, lexical and stylistic remaking of authentic texts (including archaic or pseudo-archaic vocabulary, replacing the dialect words with the words of the literary language, composing phrases with adjectives appearing after the main word, etc.);
7. including additional fragments of folklore and mythological character into the texts, as well as fragments concerned with a trend of making the text more psychological and closer to the theme of family relationships;
8. in addition to the realized changes there were also inadvertent distortions of texts related to the omission of individual words, clerical errors, misreading of manuscript originals, etc.

As we have already noted, Sakharov's work could use a different scenario when he wrote the original texts instead of remaking real charms. In general terms, such work was supposed to go through the following steps:

1. the development of a certain algorithm of actions and their ideological cover (in other words, Sakharov had to decide that he would falsify texts);
2. developing literary style suitable for composing pseudo-charms;
3. composing fakelore texts using separate authentic formulas.

In the final stage the texts, which are the result of remaking the original charms and texts totally composed by Sakharov, were arranged in a certain order, received their titles, and were put together in a single collection.

Those activities as a whole involve some cover story about the publisher's travels from village to village and eavesdropping on "family talks", references to non-existent manuscripts, "scientific" prefaces and appeals to future readers, bibliographic reviews, accusations against unscrupulous precursor publishers, and the glorification of the Motherland and virtues of our ancestors.

Sakharov was not an altruist and he was not against earning through his activities. He published the *Tales* in his own printing-house and distributed them under the order of the Ministry of Education. If we consider Sakharov's publication of charms as a commercial and ideological project, we have to admit the result is very successful. Sakharov's books were published and continued to be published with huge print runs. Sakharov's charms were reprinted in other publications, which in turn were published again and again with even bigger print runs than Sakharov's originals. Now the works of Sakharov are available online, and anyone can download them. Sakharov's project was intended to be available for many decades and even centuries. He gave readers and lovers of antiquities what they wanted to find: an imitation of an ancient pagan tradition, hidden mythological allusions, fascinating folklore images and sentimental feelings of the characters. The reader of authentic charms can find nothing of this, of course, and this explains the relevance of Sakharov's fakes up to our days.

For about thirty years before the publication of the first scientific collection of Russian charms¹⁸, Sakharov's collection was the main source of Russian charms. These texts are one of the main basis of the research made by Sakharov's younger contemporaries, the famous mythologists Fjodor Buslaev and Aleksandr Afanasyev, who thought charms to be pagan

¹⁸ Майков 1869.

prayers and largely built on their basis their quasi-scientific reconstruction of Slavic paganism. However, after the emergence of the rich collections of charms by Leonid Maikov and Petr Efimenko, and the emergence of critical reviews about Sakharov by Apollon Grigoriev, Peter Bessonov, Alexander Pypin, etc., philologists have practically ceased to use his charms as well as other materials published by him. Nevertheless, there was not any special scientific work devoted to investigate the collection of charms made by Sakharov and to evaluate it. In the early twentieth century the *Tales* attracted the attention of the modernists, in particular Alexander Blok, who widely quoted Sakharov's charms in his article "Поэзия заговоров и заклинаний" ("The Poetry of Charms and Spells", 1908).

4. ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF SAKHAROV'S VERBAL CHARMS

In 1872, several charms from Sakharov's collection were translated into English. They were published by the first English researcher of Russian magical tradition, William Ralston (1828-89), in his book *The Songs of the Russian People, as Illustrative of Slavonic Mythology and Russian Social Life* (1872). Several texts translated by Ralston, of course, are falsified: "Заговор от тоски родимой матушки в разлуке с милым дитяткою"¹⁹ ("Charm from Darling Mother's Depression in Her Separation from Dear Little Child"); "Заговор ратного человека, идущего на войну"²⁰ ("Charms of the Warrior Going to War"); and "Заговор от запоя"²¹ ("Charm from Hard Drinking"). Unfortunately, these texts continue to be cited by foreign researchers; in particular, they are referenced in the book by William Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (1999), which has been recently translated from English into Russian²².

"The Werewolf Charm", published by Sakharov²³, was actually composed by Russian and Ukrainian writer and journalist Orest Somov (1793-1833) and incorporated in his novel *The Werewolf* (1829), from which it was undoubtedly borrowed by Sakharov. This charm is based on folk

¹⁹ Сахаров 1841, 1, 2: 18-19, № 3; Ralston 1872, 372-374.

²⁰ Сахаров 1841, 1, 2: 25, № 30; Ralston 1872, 371-372.

²¹ Сахаров 1841, 1, 2: 24, № 24; Ralston 1872, 362.

²² Райан 2006, 125, 262-263.

²³ Сахаров 1841, 1, 2: 28, № 40; Ralston 1872, 406.

motives, but it is not a fixing of authentic tradition in any way. As Sakharov did not mention the source from which he took "The Werewolf Charm", later it was concluded that he had fixed it himself. This charm was interpreted by Fjodor Buslaev and Alexander Afanasyev in their works and after them by many other researchers of Slavic mythology up to our time²⁴. It was also used by English-speaking scholars²⁵.

It should be emphasized that Sakharov's charms do not become folklore, even in cases when they moved to the manuscript tradition and were fixed again by gatherers already as part of an anonymous tradition. The fact is that in content and style they are very much different from authentic charms. Therefore, with some experience, you can identify Sakharov's texts even if you find them in a publication of authentic charms. We will consider our mission accomplished if, after getting acquainted with this article, foreign researchers stop quoting Sakharov's charms and turn to the authentic texts of Russian magical tradition.

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РНБ

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URINE FOR A TREAT! OR, HOW TO CURE URINARY DISEASE IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-tuom>

ABSTRACT

Illness and disease have always been part of human life. They shake our everyday existence, our sense of security and what we consider as normal. Illness is always a crisis which requires action and measures to be taken. These measures, due to the crisis nature of the situation, might be non-standard or considered unusual. However, these operations also reveal something about how and what we think and what we believe in. The article will consider an example of how the medieval Irish mind tackled the crises of illness by means of charms. Special attention is paid to the choice of expressions in the incantations as well as the rituals used. It is argued that in order to understand the mental landscape of illness and healing, attention should be paid to finding out what was thought to be the reason behind the disease. The investigation will focus on two early Irish charms against urinary disease in order to understand some of the ways in which this still very common ailment was overcome in medieval Ireland.

Keywords: healing practices; medieval Irish charms; medieval manuscripts; St. Gall incantations; Stowe Missal charms.

Illness and disease have always been part of human life. As we have so accurately learned in recent times, illness and disease shake our everyday existence, our sense of security, and what we consider as normal. Whether a global pandemic or an isolated case in an individual's life, illness is always a crisis that requires action and measures to be taken. These measures, due to the crisis nature of the situation, might be non-standard or considered unusual. However, these operations also reveal something about how and what we think and what we believe in.

Using powerful words as part of healing acts has been known throughout history. The following chapter will consider an example of how the medieval Irish mind tackled the crises of illness by means of charms¹. Can the surviving texts elucidate what was thought to be the reason behind illness and disease? Why were certain textual images included in the incantations? What meaning did the rituals described in the texts have? Is it possible to gain an insight into what early Irish people thought and believed through the study of charms?

There are eight well-known magical texts surviving in Old Irish manuscripts². First, there are the four known as the St. Gall incantations; second, the three known as the Stowe Missal charms, and, finally, the incantation in the Reichenau Primer³. Seven of these texts can be labelled as healing charms. Out of these seven, two have titles that indicate that they were used against urinary disease. This investigation will focus on these two early texts in order to understand some of the ways in which this still very common ailment was overcome in medieval Ireland.

¹ Some sections of this article were first presented at *The Language of Magic*, the 12th International Interdisciplinary Conference organized by the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming (University of Chieti-Pescara, May 22-24, 2019). I would like to thank the participants of the conference for the lively discussion after my paper. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous readers for offering thoughtful remarks and important corrections on various aspects of this article. Their comments have greatly helped me to shape my discussion. As always, I am deeply grateful to Professor John Carey for his insights and encouragement. Any remaining errors or shortcomings are my own.

² This is, of course, not the full total of charms surviving in early Irish manuscripts. New studies continue to make more of this fascinating material available to a larger audience. See, for example, Stifter 2020, 290-291.

³ For the manuscript witnesses, see Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex Sangallensis 1395, 419, <https://e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/csg/1395>, for the St. Gall incantations; Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS. D ii 3 (cat. no. 1238), fol. 67v, https://www.isos.dias.ie/master.html?http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_D_ii_3/english/catalogue.html, for the Stowe Missal charms; and Cod. Sti Pauli sec. xxv. d. 86, fol. 1b, https://hildegard.tristram.de/schulheft/pics/Reichenauer_Schulheft_1verso_2recto_kl1.jpg, for the incantation in the Reichenau Primer. All of these eight charms were edited and translated by two early eminent scholars in Celtic studies, namely Whitley Stokes and John Strachan. This is most probably one of the reasons why the charms in question have been the interest of many a Celticist. See Stokes - Strachan 1903, 248-49 for the St. Gall incantations, p. 250 for the Stowe Missal charms, and p. 293 for the text in the Reichenau Primer. Some of the early editions are listed in Jacqueline Borsje's article of 2019, 9-11.

1. LET IT FLOW LIKE A CAMEL LETS IT FLOW!

Let us begin by introducing the two texts dealing with the topic in question. The Stowe Missal is an Irish sacramentary of the late eighth or early ninth century. The charm against urinary disease can be found alongside two other healing charms on the final page of the volume. The St. Gall incantation, on the other hand, is one of a group of four healing charms, found on a single leaf of Insular vellum. The leaf, today forming a part of the composite volume 1395 put together by the librarian Ildefons von Arx in 1822, has been preserved in the Stiftsbibliothek of St. Gall in Switzerland. On the other side of the leaf there is a portrait of Saint Matthew, and because of this, it has been suggested that the leaf would have originally been a page from a pocket Gospel book⁴. The text, written in Insular majuscule, has been assigned to the ninth century⁵.

For both texts, I refer to the latest studies by two eminent scholars in the field of Celtology. For the Stowe Missal charm, I use a normalized edition and translation by Professor David Stifter that he presented in a talk of 2021⁶. For the St. Gall incantation, I refer to the work done by

⁴ See, for example, Sims-Williams 1990, 90-91, and Carey 2019, 4.

⁵ For a more detailed study of the various aspects of the manuscript, and especially of the four charms it contains, see Tuomi 2013, 60-85.

⁶ Stifter 2021. Professor Stifter's translation has not yet been published; I am extremely grateful to him for allowing me to print it here. We await a new edition of the Stowe Missal charms by Stifter (2020, 292). For alternative editions and translations, see, for example, Stokes - Strachan 1903, 250, and Borsje 2013, 13-14. The edition by Stokes and Strachan, despite still being used as the standard edition of the text, only introduces the final two sentences of the charm in translation. Borsje (2013, 13) rightly comments that the "references to dripping, flowing and streaming liquid or bodily fluids may reflect the problems connected with urinary diseases, because of which too little flows". Her edition and translation are as follows:

<i>Ar galar fuel</i>	Against urinary disease
<i>Suil suiles camull</i>	Let flow/drip how/like a camel lets flow/drip.
<i>lind lindas gaine</i>	Give/yield milk/liquid like a <i>gaine</i> (?) gives/yields milk/liquid [i.e. let flow how/like a <i>gaine</i> lets flow]
<i>reth rethe srothe</i>	Run how/like streams run
<i>telc tuisc</i>	Let your water go (?)
<i>lotar teora mucca inanáis (?)</i>	Three pigs went/came into their age [i.e. grew older] (?)
<i>bethade nethar</i>	...
<i>suil naro suil</i>	Let flow what has not let flow [before].
<i>taber do fual inai</i>	Make your urine (i.e. urinate) in a (the?) place (?)
<i>tonert 7 toslane</i>	(of) your strength(s) and (of) your health
<i>roticca ic slane.</i>	May the cure of health heal you.

Professor John Carey in 2000⁷. The Stowe Missal charm against urinary disease is as follows:

<i>Ar galar fúel</i>	Against urinary disease
<i>Suil suiles camull,</i>	Let it flow like a camel lets it flow,
<i>lind lindas Gaine,</i>	Give a liquid like [the river] Gaine gives liquid,
<i>reth rethte srotbe.</i>	run like streams run.
<i>Telc tuísc't'uisce[.]</i>	Let forth a gush (<i>tóesc?</i>)/your water (<i>t'uisce?</i>).
<i>Lotar téora mucca ina n-aí.</i>	Three pigs went into their <i>aí</i> ⁸ .
<i>Beth-ade n-ethar.</i>	It should be there where one goes (?).
<i>Suil náro-suil.</i>	Let it flow what has not flowed.
<i>Taber do fual i n-aí.</i>	Give your urine into an <i>aí</i> .
<i>To nert 7 to sláne.</i>	Your strength and your health.
<i>Rot-icca íc sláne.</i>	May a healing of salvation heal you.

The St. Gall incantation against urinary disease:

<i>Ar galar fúail</i>	Against urinary disease ⁹
<i>Dum-esurc-sa din galar fúail-se,</i>	I rescue myself from this disease of the urine,
<i>dun-esairc éu ét,</i>	a cattle-goad saves us,
<i>dun-esairc énlaiti admai ibdach.</i>	skilful bird-flocks of witches save us. ¹⁰

⁷ Carey's article was published in Irish as "Téacsanna Draíochta in Éirinn sa Mheánaois Luath," transl. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 30 (2000), 98-117. The article is now available in English and the reference can be found in Carey 2019, 19.

⁸ In his treatment of the text, Stifter left the word *ai* untranslated. According to him, there are "a number of words of that shape in Early Irish, but none of the semantics fit our context". He further speculated that the meaning would be something like "latrine." Professor Stifter kindly provided me with a copy of this earlier paper on the topic. See Stifter 2012. See also Stifter 2020, 293, as well as Borsje 2013, 14.

⁹ Reconstruction and translation of the title, the directions following the charm, as well as the line with garbled Greek are mine, for these were not included in Carey's study.

¹⁰ Carey's interpretation follows, for the most part, the earlier editions and translations; see Windisch 1890, 98-100, and Stokes - Strachan 1903, 248. A very different suggestion on how to approach the text was provided by Stifter in his aforementioned talk of 2012:

<i>dum-esurc-sa din galar fúail-se</i>	I save myself from this urinary disease
<i>dun-esairc éu ét</i>	how <i>éu</i> (salmon?, brooch/point?, stem/yew?) saves <i>ét</i> (jealousy?)
<i>dun-esarcát éuin énlaiti</i>	how birds save flocks of birds
<i>admai ibdach</i>	???

Following his analysis of the Stowe Missal charm, Stifter suggested that a similar structure would explain the St. Gall charm. Thus, the "speaker of the charm states that he is saving himself by comparing his own rescue to that exacted by other entities". Based on his analysis of the preceding verb, Stifter commented only that the idea of the line seems to

Fo-certar inso do grés i maigin bi tabair th'úal.

This is always put in the place in which you make your urine.

PreCHNYTfCAHwMNYBVC KNAATYONIBVS. Finit.¹¹

Despite their apparent differences in content, the two – roughly contemporary – charms share more similarities than might be evident at a first glance. First, each is part of a small collection found in a religious context. The Stowe Missal is mainly written in Latin and contains extracts from the Gospel of John, the order of Mass and some special Masses (f. 12), the Order of Baptism and of Communion for the newly baptized (f. 46v), and the Order for the Visitation of the Sick and Last Rites (f. 60). The last three folios of the manuscript are in Old Irish and contain a short treatise on the Mass and the Stowe Missal charms¹².

Because the St. Gall leaf is no longer in its original context, of which indeed nothing is known, it is impossible to confirm the supposition that it used to be a page from a Gospel book. Because of the quality of the vellum, however, I would certainly speculate that this is the case¹³. Both manuscripts were portable (the Stowe Missal measures 15 cm × 12 cm and the St. Gall leaf roughly 25 cm × 19 cm). This means that the healing charms were also portable, and could be brought along on visits to the sick.

Both texts are found together with a small number of other healing charms, not in large collections or as marginal notes. In the Stowe Missal there are three charms on the page, all with titles: the first against ailment of a red eye (*Arond derciúil*), the second against a thorn (*Ar delc*) and the third against a urinary disease (*Ar galar fíel*)¹⁴. On the St. Gall leaf, there are four incantations: the first one (beginning on the first line with the words *Ni artu ní nim*) against thorns, the second one against a urinary

be that “like saves like”. He further noted that “whatever *éu* and *ét* exactly refer to, words are certainly very much alike in form”. Stifter did not comment extensively on the words *admai ibdach*, saying only that “*admai* looks like a form of *ad·daim*, ‘to acknowledge, admit, concede, grant, allow,’ *ibdach* is spell-worker”.

¹¹ The paleography does not indicate for certain that the line belongs to the charm against urinary disease. The words are found on a line of their own suggesting perhaps that the line works as a charm in its own right. However, the scribe of the first three charms uses distinct capital letters at the beginning of each charm. This line does not have that distinct capital, and therefore I take it to be a part of the charm against urinary disease.

¹² See, for example, O'Neill 2014, 18, and Warner 1906, viii-ix.

¹³ Despite not being an expert on the various types of vellum, I can state that the St. Gall leaf is by far the finest example that I have studied. It is very thin, supple, and soft and has suffered very little damage throughout the centuries.

¹⁴ Stifter 2021.

disease (*Ar galar fúail*), the third against headaches (known as the *Caput Christi*, written in Latin followed by an instruction in Old Irish), and the fourth one (written by a different scribe and beginning with the words *Tes-surc marb-bíu*) a multifunctional charm against wounds, fire, and tumors¹⁵.

The second feature that the two charms have in common is the heading. This similarity is all the more striking in that none of the other charms in the St. Gall leaf has a title. As is known, the headings of charms serve two purposes: they indicate the beginning of the text, and they state what the charm is for. In bigger collections, and especially if written as marginal notes, they also serve as a visual aid in locating the charm¹⁶. In the Stowe Missal the heading for the urinary disease does not stand out, as all of the charms are titled. But why does the St. Gall incantation include a title? In this case, it is easy to see where the charm against urinary disease begins, because the first word is marked by a capital letter. It is also evident from the first line of the charm that the aim is to heal a urinary disease of some sort.

Finally, neither of the charms against urinary disease include *materia medica*, that is, remedial substances used in the practice of medicine. This is interesting, as for instance later examples of recipes that were used for ailments of the male reproductive organs call for different kinds of herbal and animal ingredients¹⁷. That both early Irish charm collections include a charm against urinary disease can be taken to indicate that urinary diseases were a common problem at the time. That this should be the case is supported by the fact that there are also examples from Anglo-Saxon England for this particular ailment, such as a remedy to cure bladder pain and/or infection¹⁸. What separates the Old English examples from our two

¹⁵ Interestingly, the hand of the scribe who has written the first three of the St. Gall charms is rather similar to that of one of the scribes of the Stowe Missal. I would like to thank Timothy O'Neill for his expertise relating to the paleography of the St. Gall charms (personal communication, 31 May 2017). Nevertheless, the charms in the Stowe Missal are not the work of the scribe whose hand resembles that of the scribe responsible for the first three St. Gall charms. For more information on the *Caput Christi* charm, see Tuomi 2019, 51–64.

¹⁶ See, for example, Alonso-Almeida 2008, 22, and Olsan 2004, 59–62.

¹⁷ Hayden 2021, 248.

¹⁸ Apparently, carrots were prepared, and in the Old English Herbarium, brookmint is also used for this purpose (Pollington 2000, 103, 106). M.L. Cameron, in talking about the rational medicine of the Anglo-Saxons, has mentioned that “in a remedy for bladder complaint, garlic mustard, which also has diuretic properties was added to a decoction in ale of parsley, whose diuretic properties made it a standard ingredient in medicines for ailments of the bladder”. See Cameron 1993, 127.

charms is their extensive use of *materia medica*. Diana Luft has pointed out that not only were urinary problems common at the time, but also uncomfortable, even painful. She has further noted that these kinds of long-lasting, chronic, and painful conditions take up a great deal of space in remedy collections¹⁹. Finally, she makes an excellent point in noting that urinary diseases were very *visible* illnesses: “in a time before indoor toilets, friends and neighbours might be well aware if an individual was having trouble urinating, or holding their urine”²⁰.

2. THE SKILLFUL BIRD-FLOCKS OF WITCHES?

Neither of these two early medieval Irish charms define what kind of urinary disease we are dealing with. In the Stowe Missal, most likely the problem is obstructed urination, but in the St. Gall charm it can be either obstructed or excessive urination, or possibly even urinating blood. Stokes, an earlier editor of the St. Gall incantations, thought that the perceived medical problem was “strangury” or “gravel”, however, Stifter has pointed out that also an inflammation could be cause of pain²¹. Stifter also draws attention to damage from the outside that would explain the problem. Here he refers to the famous *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*, or *Tales of Mac Da Thó’s Pig*. In the story, an Ulster warrior named Celtchar is injured with a spear by the Connacht warrior Cet mac Mágach. The spear goes through Celtchar’s thigh and through the upper part of his testicles, and as a result Cet declares, “You are with a urinary disease since, [and] neither son nor daughter has been born to you”²².

It might be useful to approach the diagnosis from a different angle. Modern medicine finds causes for illnesses and disease often from within the human body, whereas many traditional societies thought that illness comes from outside, although the reason might differ: disease could be

¹⁹ As other examples Luft 2018 mentions toothache, gout, arthritis, and headache.

²⁰ Luft 2018.

²¹ Stokes 1883, 513; Stifter 2012. Strangury refers to a condition characterized by painful urination in which the urine is emitted drop by drop owing to muscle spasms of the urethra or urinary bladder. Gravel, on the other hand, means aggregations of crystals formed in the urinary tract.

²² “Ataí co ngalur fhúail ónd úair-sin, nicon rucad mac na ingen duit” (Thurneysen 1935, 13, § 13). It would seem that urinary disease and impotence are synonymous in this text.

caused by malevolent people, the dead, spirits, certain places and powerful locations, the evil eye, or the elements – fire, air, earth, or water. This is why verbal magic had a crucial role in healing rituals. Before modern science, charms were a central means of controlling reality. On occasion, more important than making a proper diagnosis of the actual illness (whether strangury or gravel, for instance) was to find out its cause. It was only then that the banishing of the illness could begin followed by the healing process²³. The healing restored the balance of life which was being shaken and sabotaged by the illness.

Therefore, instead of trying to diagnose the disease, we should focus on what is causing it. If we can figure out the purported cause, we can speculate how it was approached by the medieval Irish and learn about their ways of dealing with the crises of illness and disease. This is an aspect which has not received much attention in Celtic Studies, but one that we could consider here in more detail. One who has touched upon this topic is Carey²⁴. In his article, Carey noted that the St. Gall charm seems to “pray to, not against, ‘skilful bird-flocks of witches’”. He refers to the story *Cath Maige Tuired, The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, in which “it is the sorcerers [...] who undertake to enchant the enemy so that they will be unable to urinate”²⁵. In the story, the mythological people known as Tuatha Dé Danann are fighting against their enemy, the Fomorians. Anticipating the battle, the druid of the Tuatha Dé boasts:

Three showers of fire will be rained upon the faces of the Fomorian host, and I will take out of them two-thirds of their courage and their skill at arms and their strength, and *I will bind their urine in their own bodies and in the bodies of their horses*.²⁶

I propose accordingly that the causes for the afflictions mentioned in the Stowe Missal and the St. Gall charms are supernatural ones, perhaps some-

²³ Ilomäki 2014, 126. Many of my suggestions are supported by the authority of the Finnish folklorist Henni Ilomäki, who has worked extensively on charms. While her work is based on the Finnish tradition, I find a comparative approach very fruitful in understanding the logic of charms in medieval Ireland as well.

²⁴ Concerning this, Jacqueline Borsje has made an extremely valuable remark in her article of 2013 in which she suggested that the second charm in the Stowe Missal could have been used not only for literal thorns piercing the skin but also against “thorns used in [...] destructive supernatural rituals, performed from a distance” (Borsje 2013, 19).

²⁵ Carey 2019, 5.

²⁶ In the original, “arnenas a fúal ina corpoib fodesim 7 a corpaib a n-ech”. See Gray 1982, 44-45.

thing like a curse²⁷. Carey also mentions the saga *Serglige Con Culainn, The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn*, “in which fairy women who appear initially in the forms of birds first cause [the hero of the story] Cú Chulainn to fall sick, then help him to recover”²⁸. Before the actual healing, the women beat Cú Chulainn with horsewhips:

Cú Chulainn went then and put his back against a pillar stone, and he was downcast [lit.: his mind was bad], and a sleep fell upon him. He saw two women come towards him. One wore a green mantle; the other a purple mantle in five folds. The woman in the green mantle came to him and laughed at him, and struck him with her horse-whip. The other came to him, too, and laughed at him, and struck him in the same way. And they continued for a long time, each of them in turn coming still to beat him, so that he was almost dead. Then they went from him.²⁹

The agents mentioned in the charms are not unequivocally good, despite the fact that help is asked from them. Nor are they unequivocally bad. Like the fairy women in the Cú Chulainn story, the agents evoked in the

²⁷ That curses cause illness and disease would have been a familiar concept, for example, from the Bible to the early Irish. Also, it seems that especially binding urine was done via supernatural means and thus we can speculate that the problem in the St. Gall incantation was also obstructed urination.

²⁸ Carey 2019, 5.

²⁹ Dillon 1953b, 50. In the original, “Dotháet Cú Chulaind iar sin co tard a druim frisín liic, 7 ba h-olc a menma leis, 7 dofuít cotlud fair. Co n-accai in dá mnaí cucai. Indala n-aí brat úaine impe. Alaili brat corcra cóicdiábail im súde. Dolluid in ben cosin brot úane chucai, 7 tibid gen fris, & dobert béim dind echfhleisc dó. Dotháet alaili cucai dano, 7 tibid fris, & nod slaid fón alt chétna. Ocus bátar fri ciana móir oca sin .i. cehtar dé imma sech cucai béus dia búalad combo marb acht bec. Lotir úad iarom”. See Dillon 1953a, 3. While Carey mainly follows Stokes and Strachan in his translation of the St. Gall incantation against urinary disease, he suggests the words *éu ét* to be translated as “a cattle-goad”. As a result, his translation runs “a cattle-goad saves us”. Carey sees a similarity with the goad and “a point of Goibniu” of the first charm in the St. Gall collection: they both function by causing pain. A goad is a traditional farming implement used to spur or guide livestock, usually oxen, that are pulling a plough or a cart. Traditionally, a goad is a long stick with a pointed end. A goad can also be used to round up cattle, or to use a term fitting the context, to “bind” cattle. It can be questioned why such an instrument is included in the charm’s vocabulary, but it makes sense if we compare it to the horsewhips that were used in whipping Cú Chulainn in order to make him sick as well as to make him recover. The look and purpose of both instruments is rather similar. Interestingly, a later example in a sixteenth-century Irish manuscript (RIA MS 23 N 29 [467]) introduces a medical recipe in which impotence is cured by writing a name of the afflicted man on a stick of elm and beating him with it. See Hayden 2021, 261, 266.

charms have the ability to cause sickness and help the sufferer to heal from it. In short, they are not good or bad, they are simply powerful³⁰.

It would be tempting to speculate that there were different ways in which to understand illness and disease in early medieval period. Perhaps the recipes which include multiple *materia medica* were a result of knowledge how for example herbal remedies are effective in certain illnesses. When we have a charm that consists simply of words, the situation might be different: the cause of the problem was unknown and/or supernatural and therefore a charm was used in order for the healing process to begin.

In certain cultures, and with certain charms, in order for a charm to work, the charmer or healer needs to know their opponent and find out what is causing the harm at hand. The charm seldom names the problem directly; instead, the words seek to identify its underlying cause³¹. While Carey suggested that the St. Gall charm is praying to the “birdflocks of witches”, I suggest that maybe the charm is aiming to name the cause behind the urinary disease. In fact, perhaps the charm is doing both: help is asked for the same agent who caused the affliction³². The user of the charm dismantles the magical charge of the illness by naming the cause of the disease and by using powerful words, that is, a charm³³. Thus the power of the words turns a malevolent representative of the otherworld into a benevolent healing agent.

When talking about charms, we need to remember that their message is not straightforward. The communication is not only with this world, but also with the supernatural. When this context, too, is taken into account, the words make sense. The charm combines the laws of cause and effect in a mythical way that differs from our everyday thinking. The charm works in between two realities: even if the aim is to solve a problem in this world, the images provoked in the words of the charm belong to the mythical world of folk belief. The power in the charm which effects this world, comes from the supernatural reality³⁴.

³⁰ This is true in other cases as well, thus Goibniu, the metalsmith of the Tuatha Dé, mentioned in the first of the St. Gall incantations, seems both to cause afflictions and to cure them.

³¹ Ilomäki 2014, 10. This is especially true of my own native, Finnish tradition.

³² This might be true also for the other charms in the St. Gall collection that mention an otherworldly agent – the agent is the one causing the affliction and thus has the power to heal it.

³³ Ilomäki 2014, 132.

³⁴ Ilomäki 2014, 12.

3. “GO YE THEREFORE AND PREACH ALL NATIONS”

The charms against urinary disease in the Stowe Missal and the St. Gall manuscript share yet two more final similarities to be considered here. The first similarity might seem somewhat artificial but should be mentioned nonetheless: both texts have included biblical references in their vocabulary. In the Stowe Missal charm we read about camels, and the St. Gall incantation is followed by a line that is thought to derive from St. Matthew’s Gospel. It should be stressed however, that these two things are very different from one another: a reference to a nonnative (and not *solely* Biblical) animal in one case, and a line of text that is conceivably not even part of the charm on the other³⁵.

While it is certain that the vast majority of people in medieval Ireland would not have known what a camel looks like, the animal was familiar from the Bible, Isidore, and probably other sources³⁶. Having stated that, in the end the camel would have simultaneously been something strange and exotic, nearly like an agent from the otherworld³⁷. Similarly, one line in the St. Gall manuscript would have definitely looked exotic to the majority of people at the time: PreCHNYTϕCAHωMNYBVCKNAATY ONIBVS. It has been thought that the words stand for a Latin version of Matthew 28:19 (“Go ye therefore, and preach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”³⁸), incorporating one or two words of garbled Greek³⁹.

While it is not possible within the restrictions of this short study to investigate further why such a quote would have been appended to our particular charm (or if it indeed belongs with the charm at all), it is important to note that both charms against urinary disease combined images from the native-Irish tradition together with Christian influences. This is of

³⁵ See the earlier footnote on the matter.

³⁶ See, for example, Genesis 24 and Luke 18:25.

³⁷ Or else the camel was chosen simply because, like other large ungulates, it can urinate copiously.

³⁸ This was first suggested by J.K. Zeuss in his *Grammatica celtica*: “*praedicent omnibus nationibus*” (Zeuss 1853, 950). Interestingly, this garbled version of the Greek verb is completely different from what one finds in the Greek original: μαθητεύσατε. However, even if the Greek text is sketchy and inaccurate, the scribe evidently knew more than just the mere alphabet: the first bit of the text contains a correct third plural aorist ending *-san* (Carey 2019, 7).

³⁹ As noted by Carey, Jerome consistently uses *gentes* rather than *nationes* to render Greek ἔθνη.

course no surprise as it was medieval monks who were writing down these charms, and others among the charms have explicitly Christian content.

Finally, both charms include instructions on how to use the texts. In the St. Gall incantation, the direction (“This is always put in the place in which you make your urine”) is separated from the actual words of the charm by punctuation, but in the Stowe Missal charm the direction (“Give your urine into an *ai*”) is embedded within the words of the charm. The directions look deceptively simple, but in reality they raise multiple questions⁴⁰. What needs to be underlined, however, is that even if we do not know exactly what is said in the directions, both charms have them and thus we can deduce that a ritual was thought to be an elementary part of using the charm in order to start the healing process. This kind of thinking does indeed find support in ritual studies, where the so-called “rituals of affliction attempt to rectify a state of affairs that have been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect and purify”⁴¹.

4. FINIT – THE CONCLUSION

In this short article two early medieval Irish charms against urinary disease were studied in order to contribute to an understanding of the early medieval Irish world of illness, healing and overcoming a crisis situation. I argue that in both cases the problem was obstructed urination. Two texts, the St. Gall incantation and the Stowe Missal charm, which bear no resemblance to each other in their content, have proved to share quite a number of similarities. It is these similarities that enable us to take a glimpse into

⁴⁰ In the St. Gall incantation, the verb *fo-ceird* poses a problem in interpretation. It can mean either that the charm is to be placed somewhere, or that the words are to be uttered. Perhaps the twofold meaning is deliberate. It has been suggested that the charm was meant to exorcise a place, in order to prevent or cure a urinary disease (Borsje 2013). We can therefore ask whether the charm is supposed to be recited in the place where one makes one’s urine, or is it the physical charm that is meant to be placed there? Was the charm intended to be recited while copying the signs to a separate parchment, or while placing the parchment? In a prior publication, I have suggested that the line including the mixture of Latin and Greek words was supposed to be reproduced and then put in its place while reciting the actual charm (Tuomi 2013, 67–68). It is possible that the text was meant to be put over the genitalia. For further parallel evidence of placing charms on body parts, see the texts in James and Maura Carney 1960 as well as in Best 1952. In the Stowe Missal charm, the most obvious problem lies with the word *ai*, the meaning of which is unclear.

⁴¹ Bell 1997, 115.

the worldview of the medieval Irish and what they thought about illness and disease as well as about healing. Both charms are found in portable contexts, which means that healing could be brought to a person instead of the sick person having to travel to get the healing charm. Neither of the charms have *materia medica* included, so herbs or other healing substances were not used in order to cure a urinary disease. But because both charms include a ritual, it can be suggested that ritual action was thought to be needed in order for the healing process to begin.

The mythical reality of charms is alien to the modern rationalist person. The Irish charms studied in this paper were used within a different worldview in which the structures of knowledge were built in a way different to ours. For the users of the charms, the supernatural wasn't strange, but a reality which had its own laws and structures⁴². An appeal to these laws and structures of the supernatural was used in order to solve an aim in this world, in this case to change reality of illness into health. A urinary disease had shaken the balance of an individual, perhaps because of an unknown and/or supernatural cause. A charm was a verbal tool with which one was able to overcome such crises by finding and naming the cause of the problem. It is hoped that this short article has provided some new approaches to thinking about charming practices in early medieval Ireland and also to enabling a larger readership to enjoy this fascinating material.

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MAGIC AS A STATEMENT OF POWER AND WEAPONS OF THE WEAK: HEROINES OF THE RUSSIAN EPOS

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-vese>

ABSTRACT

The focus of the article is motifs and plots of Russian heroic epos, where female protagonists act by magic means. The acts of heroines have been examined, taking into consideration M. de Certeau's concept of two modes of practices – tactical and strategic – and J. Scott's concept of “the weapons of the weak”. Following de Certeau, the author claims that the singer of epos informs his/her audience about the *modi operandi* existing under various circumstances and the ethical evaluation of those modes. The author compares the magic described in the epic plots with the magical practices that have existed and still exist in the Russian rural culture. The article is based on the material of *bylina* texts from the Corpus of Russian Folklore Epos and on the records of magical rituals and texts from the Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University. Heroes and heroines of Russian epos use magic knowledge as tactical and strategic *modi operandi*. In the epos, the success of magic actions depends on the ethical evaluation of the character, which is explicated in his/her epithets and definitions. The epic ethos claims that magical skills themselves are an ordinary part of human knowledge, but the magic abilities and the success of magic depend on the balance of power. In the poetic world of the Russian epos, power is secured in the hands of the elders and the virtuous, both men and women. The main prerequisites for the role of a successful epic magician are their age and chastity (those of saints, pilgrims, widows and widowers, honest wives and virgin brides).

Keywords: magic motifs; Russian *bylina*; Russian heroic epic; verbal magic.

In this article, I will show how magic practices and words work in the epic motifs and plots of a Russian *bylina*. *Bylina* is a genre of Russian epic poetry characterized by heroic themes. In Russian folklore, epic genres

include ballads, spiritual poems, historical songs, but the most famous epic genre is a *bylina*. The main heroes of the *bylina* are *bogatyrs*, who most often serve as Prince Vladimir's warriors, but there are also other *bogatyr* characters – merchants (*Sadko*), farmers (*Mikula Selianinovich*), and foreign guests (*Duc Stepanivich*). The texts of the Russian epos were first published at the beginning of the 19th century under the title “Kirsha Danilov's Collection of the Ancient Russian Poems”. This anthology included *bylinas* and other epic poems dated back to the mid-18th century (*Drevnie Rossiyskie stikhotvorenia*). More than half a century passed until P. Rybnikov discovered the *bylina* as a folklore phenomenon still alive – just 300 kms from the then capital of Russia (St. Petersburg), in the Olonets province (Rybnikov). These texts were recorded by local peasants.

The territories, on which the epos was recorded (the Russian North, Siberia, the South of Russia, e.g., the Don basin) happened to coincide with the places of residence of the so-called “state peasants” (i.e. the peasants who had never been serfs) and the Old Believers (i.e. those who did not support the Church reforms of Patriarch Nikon in the 17th century and left for the periphery of the Russian empire in order to escape persecution). This means that the performance of epos and the act of listening to it, as well as the phenomenon of epos singing as such, were characterized by the personal freedom of the practitioners of this genre.

The last recordings of *bylina* performance were made at the beginning of the 1980s. In the last one hundred years, thousands of *bylina* text recordings have been collected and published – mostly the ones from the abovementioned regions. There are more than forty plots of the Russian heroic epos that have been published to date.

Below, I will demonstrate how the epic motifs describing magic rites and actions of both male and female epic characters reflect certain magic practices still preserved in Russian villages; I will also discuss the attitude towards such practices. Following Michel de Certeau's idea, I assume that narrating *bylinas* serves the task of verbalizing the mode of action and the way of thinking in real life. “Tales and legends [...] are deployed, like games, in a space outside of and isolated from a daily competition, that of the past, the marvellous, the original. In that space can thus be revealed, dressed as gods or heroes, the models of good or bad ruses that can be used every day”¹. The narrator of the *bylinas* informs his/her audience first, about the *modi operandi* known to him/her from various life circumstances of his/her own, and, second, about the underlying values governing the choice of this

¹ de Certeau 1894, 23.

or that mode of action. While telling stories about *bogatyr*s to the audience, the singers speak not just about the archaic world order and the “good old times”, but about the values and standards of their own reality. I examine each epic plot as a device that the singers employ to communicate their own personal common life experiences to their audience. And here I would like to repeat after Albert Lord: “[...] every performance is a separate song; for every performance is unique, and every performance bears the signature of its poet singer”². The performer uses the possibilities of the genre to convey his knowledge of the world to the audience. Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of speech genres through the category of dialogue. He draws attention to the fact that a person comprehends reality and reflects on it with the help of particular statements: “It is possible to understand certain aspects of reality only in connection with certain ways of expressing it. On the other hand, these modes of expression are applicable only to certain aspects of reality”³. There is the reality of the genre and the reality available to the genre. The genre of *bylinas* becomes a special way of seeing and understanding reality. Thus, my task is to show how the magical techniques used in the epos are connected with the reality of the singers and their listeners.

- In what follows, first, I choose epic motives and plots, where the characters act by using magic means. In accordance with the idea of formulaic analysis, I examine these motifs both as part of the epic poetics and as part of the reality, in which the singers lived.
- Second, I specify what particular magic rites and tools are popular among the epic heroes.
- Then I compare epic magic motives with real magic practices, which my folklore team and I focused on during our fieldwork in the Russian North-West⁴.
- I focus on those motifs and plots, where women happen to be actors. I analyze the evaluation of their actions by both the *bylina* singers and by scholars of the genre.

Russian epic plots are full of magic formulas and motifs, such as miraculous birth and healing, shapeshifting, love magic, the use of magic potions (the wine of oblivion), and others. When exploring the concept of an epic motif, Boris Putilov called a “typical, formulaic character” one of

² Lord 1960, 58.

³ Bakhtin - Medvedev 1928, 182.

⁴ The fieldwork was organized by the folklorists from St. Petersburg State University. These interviews are stored in the Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University and in the Electronic Archive “Russian Everyday Life” (<http://daytodaydata.ru>).

its most important features, while “any (or almost any) epic motif exists not only as a narrative element of a given work, but also as an element of a given epic in general”⁵. In further analysis, I claim that the magic motifs are, on the one hand, representations of the oral-formulaic epic poetics and as such have metaphorical meanings, and on the other hand, they are a statement of behavioural stereotypes and ethical evaluations.

The inclusion of descriptions of the real magic practices into epic plots has been mentioned by many *bylina* scholars (Markov 1903; Toporkov 1998). A folklore theorist Yeleazar Meletinsky classified epic plots into archaic and classical ones based on the presence of magic elements. He thinks that “in archaic epos [...] main plot is all about the combats involving demonic *bogatyrs*-monsters; protagonists act using magic quasi-sorcerer means”, while “the classic epic heroes, typical *bogatyrs*, usually do not practice any magic and resort to their extraordinary physical strength and daring courage” (Meletinsky 1998, 12-13).

As Meletinsky mentioned, archaic *bogatyrs* often display a range of magic features: miraculous birth, miraculous childhood, miraculous healing, shapeshifting, and the receipt of supernatural powers. In the typically “archaic” Russian *bylina* “Volkh Vseslavievich” the protagonist is born from a woman and a serpent, then miraculously grows up so quickly that he refuses to be swaddled just one and a half hours after birth; at the age of seven he can read, and at the age of ten can turn into a wild ox, a falcon and a wolf; and at the age of twelve he puts together his private army (*druzhina*) (Drevnie Rossiyskie stikhotvorenia, 32-36). The scholars emphasize the archaic elements of the Volkh *bylina*, while the singers pay homage to the magic skills of the hero and his wisdom (Propp, 70). This plot is full of motifs of a miraculous birth (from the father-serpent), miraculous childhood and shapeshifting, but it’s also worth paying attention to the way the performers (and researchers) DO NOT categorize the hero. The *bogatyrya* with a supernatural lineage and abilities has never been called a “sorcerer” or a “werewolf”.

The next popular magic tool used by archaic *bogatyrs* is the “transfer of magic power”. In the *bylina* named “Sviatogor and Ilia Muromets” the older *bogatyrya* Sviatogor transmits his supernatural physical strength to the younger *bogatyrya* via his saliva or the “froth of death”. This way of “power transfer” is similar to the way mentioned in our own field interview about sorcerers and the transfer of magic knowledge to the “successors”:

⁵ Putilov 1975, 144-145.

In regard to Sasba Deriagin's father, I don't know who transmitted this diabolism to him, whether it was his grandfather or someone else. This relative apparently approached him, but Sasba was squeamish or something. Well, they agreed to do it right there in the bathhouse. And the bathhouse, they preheated it and that relative told Sasba: go wash yourself, and whatever they give you there – eat everything.

<Was it the power transfer process, or was something else going on?>

Yes, the transfer. "Well, I went," he says, "to the bathhouse, and there, uh, how it was transmitted there, I don't know ... I run in," he says, "and there are three dogs at the door, and they vomited, he tells me ..."

<God!>

And they ran away.

<And he was told to eat it?>

Here, he says, here, eat – you understand.

<It can't be true! Yep, that's... >

He didn't, you know. He says, he ate it after one of the dogs, but then he was disgusted or something, and he ate no more.⁶

Since *bogatyr*s are born of serpents, their ability to shape-shift and the supernatural origin of their power do not make them possessors of chthonic powers, "witches", or "heretics" in the eyes of the singers. The supernatural powers of the *bogatyr*s have been seen as a certain behavioural trait. Consequently, magic motifs involving male protagonists in the Russian epos are rather frequent. Certainly, such motifs as the motif of a miraculous birth from a serpent have no analogues in actual ritual practices, but metaphorically they denote the supernatural character of the hero⁷. Other motifs – like the motif of the transfer of power from the elder to the younger – have direct parallels in ritual practices of the Russian villages. Neither in the metaphorical meanings of magical motifs, nor in the description of actions similar to actually existing rituals, are male protagonists called sorcerers or snake offspring; they aren't characterized by singers using any negative epithets either (filthy, snake, etc.).

Now I will focus on motifs and plots, where women act using magic means. I will provide a retelling of epic stories from the *Anthology of Rus-*

⁶ Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University. Mez 19-9, Mez 24-96. Recorded from N.I. Okulov (born in 1956) in the village of Kimzha, Mezen district, Arkhangelsk region. July 16, 2007 by E.E. Lavrova and N.O. Bukavneva.

⁷ "Volkh is born because his mother, descending from a stone, inadvertently steps on a serpent. The serpent wraps around her leg, and she conceives. Volkh is born with the rise of the sun or the moon. [...] This beginning is preserved, of course, not because the belief in such a birth has been preserved, but because this picture is full of majesty. V.G. Belinsky noted its artistry in his retelling of the plot of this song. "This is the apotheosis of a heroic birth, full of greatness, strength," – this is how he writes about this beginning" (Propp, 70).

sian Folk Epics (by J. Bailey - T. Ivanova) in order to briefly introduce the plot of this *bylina*. I chose those plots where magic is practiced by heroines who have some kind of relationship with a serpent. In addition, the heroines appear in these plots in different social statuses and roles, which allows me to consider this factor in my analysis. I chose two popular plots, which are known in numerous versions – “Dobrynya and Marinka” and “Mikhaylo Potyk (and Maria the White Swan)”.

Dobrynya and Marinka

The song “Dobrynya and Marinka” is a story about a **supernatural witch, enticing courtesan, alluring sorceress, or enchanting shaman** who uses her magical powers to turn an epic hero into an animal. In many cases his mother or sister, who possesses even stronger magic, forces the sorceress to turn the hero back into a human being. There are many variations on this theme in magic tales and in epics, perhaps the most notable one appearing in the tenth book of the *Odyssey*, where the goddess Circe transforms some of Odysseus’s men into pigs. What may be involved in an ancient story about a temptress or seductive woman who acts in a **sexually provocative manner**.

In the beginning Dobrynya’s mother warns him not to go to Marinka’s streets because she is a sorceress and turns nine young men into a wild ox. Dobrynya accepts the dare and goes anyway. At Marinka palace he sees a pair of doves, usually a symbol of lovers, he shoots an arrow⁸ that misses the doves but kills Marinka’s lover Zmei (the Serpent). Dobrynya insists on retrieving his arrow, insults Marinka, who may offer herself in marriage, and leaves. Then Marinka cuts out a piece of the wooden floor where he stood and burns it in a stove while reciting an incantation to make Dobrynya fall in love with her. [...] Dobrynya returns to her as a compliant lover whom she transforms into a wild animal as a wild ox with golden horns. [...] A female Dobrynya’s relative, who has superior magical powers, comes to Marinka and demands that she restore Dobrynya to his human form, and threatens to turn Marinka herself into an animal (bitch in period of heat). Marinka promises to return Dobrynya to his normal state if he will marry her. Dobrynya agrees but later kills her.⁹

First of all, it is worth mentioning that Bailey and Ivanova classify this *bylina* as a tale of a supernatural sorceress rather than a *bogatyr* whose name is mentioned in its title in the first place. Bailey and Ivanova repeatedly call the heroine a “witch”, using Marinka’s designations used by epic singers. However, such characteristics as “seductive courtesan” and “seductive

⁸ An arrow is a symbol of male sexual power in Russian folklore and rituals (because his arrow is with her now – IV).

⁹ Bailey - Ivanova 1998, 98-99.

woman acting in a sexually provocative manner” are not folklore formulas, but the explanations given by the researchers.

According to the majority of the plot versions, Marinka uses magic only in response to Dobrynya’s insult. Dobrynya has violated her privacy by his arrow and also killed her lover. Marinka finds herself in a weak position without the male support and has to defend herself using her own devices. “Then Marinka cuts out a piece of the wooden floor in the place where he stood and burns it in a stove while reciting an incantation to make Dobrynya fall in love with her”. This description is close to a magical love spell called *prisushka* (“drying-toward”), which is still actively used, and which Russian villagers are still actively talking about¹⁰. According to the interview from the Folklore Archive, love magic is used when sexual attraction hasn’t worked or when former partners break out their relationships. In such cases, the former lover or the ignored admirer resorts to magic actions. The one being in a weak position in the domain of love relationships resorts to the argument of magic powers.

In Vytegra, Vaska Ignatov’s mother was a witch. He said so himself. If you want the girl to love you, count her ninth footprint. Take the dirt from it and seal a crack in the stove with it. At the same time, you should say: “Like a footprint dries out, so you get dried for me.” (Traditsionnaia russkaia magia v zapisiakh kontsa XX veka, 556).

From the behavioral point of view, Marinka’s use of magic in this *bylina* represents enforced self-defence. Metaphorically, the transformation of Dobrynya into a wild ox reveals the essence of his “wild” behavior: he is not transformed into a beast – he has acted as a “beast”. The threat of Dobrynya’s female relative to turn Marinka into a “bitch in heat” is also nothing more than a comparison of the heroine’s sexual activities to uncontrolled animal behaviour. As we can see, on the level of *bylina* poetics, the hero and the heroine are worth each other. Now, following de Certeau’s ideas, let’s take a look at this situation as “the models of good or bad ruses that can be used every day”: the positions of the male and female protagonists in a society and in the development of the plot are very different. The consequences of premarital sexual intercourse, in which a girl lost her virginity, in most cases were irreversibly damaging for her reputation.

<So they didn’t marry such women?>

MT Yes, yes. If a woman is “famous” for that, if it’s known that she sinned, then men stay away from her.

¹⁰ Toporkov 1998.

<And other women no longer communicate with her?>

*Yes, yes, yes. But they still communicate, after all, in the village. But still the guys and their parents already know this thing about her.*¹¹

In the plot of the epos, Marinka's reputational losses are demonstrated in the episode of the duel between Marinka's magical abilities and those of the elder relative of the hero turned into a beast. The power of Dobrynya's mother (or godmother, or aunt) conquers Marinka's witchcraft. Older women belonging to the higher social strata of the "ladies of the house" are considered more powerful sorceresses. Both Marinka the witch, and the respectable female relative of Dobrynya's demonstrate the knowledge of the same magic devices. Their opposition is presented as a "battle," where not the magic skills are at stake, but the social hierarchy and reputation. The younger and the "wrong-doing" woman is being conquered by the older, "respectable" one. The "sexually provocative manner" of the heroine was considered unacceptable in the village community more than a hundred years ago (judging by the negative assessments of the actions of the heroine by storytellers) and socially frowned upon in the Soviet countryside until the end of the 20th century (judging by the opinions we recorded in the interviews). Marinka embodies transgression: she is sexually active outside of the marriage bonds, does not conceal this fact, and is brave enough to propose herself as a wife in a situation of violence in order to protect her reputation and then punish the abuser.

Now let's look at the plot featuring Marya the White Swan from the *bylina* "Mikhailo Potyk", in which the heroine is first shown as a girl engaged in witchcraft, and then as a married woman. Forty-one records of this plot are known; seven of them are taken from manuscripts and are very close to each other, while one is too short. I have studied thirty-three oral versions, which contain from 240 to 1500 verses.

First of all, let us study the plot retold by Bailey and Ivanova:

Mikhailo Potyk

Potykh sees a white swan and wants to shoot it, but "she" declares that she is a maiden, Marya the White Swan. She offers herself in marriage to Potyk if he will take a vow that the surviving spouse for a certain time has to enter the tomb of the spouse that dies first. The bogatyr agrees to Marya's condition, takes her to Kyiv, and marries her. When Potyk learns that Marya has died, without hesitation he returns home, prepares three metal rods, enters the tomb, and is sealed in with his wife. During the night, when a serpent

¹¹ Folklore Archive SPbGU DAu11-190_Arch-Lesh_11-07-17_KlokotovaMT.

comes to devour her body, Potyk beats the serpent with the rods and forces it to bring him “living water”, with which he revives his wife. After hearing Potyk shouts, the people of Kyiv open the tomb, releasing him and his wife. Marya the White Swan then becomes famous for her immortality. As a consequence suitor may come seeking her, including the king of Lithuania, who may abduct her. [...] Potyk pursues the pair and confronts his wife, who gives him a sleeping potion of drink, pronounces a spell over him, and turns him into a stone. Potyk’s sworn brothers meet an old pilgrim who is Saint Nicholas, who shatters the stone, thus freeing Potyk. (Potyk twice pursues his ex, twice drinks wine, and twice is defeated by her.) In the end, Nastasia the king’s daughter sets him free on the condition that he marries her.

Especially in variants where Marya transforms herself into a serpent the episode in the tomb exposes **her true nature** and shows that she is a sorceress and enchantress, that she comes from **the world of the dead**, and that she may be regarded as belonging to the **“living dead”** or as being a vampire.¹²

After a brief retelling of the plot, let us trace how the storytellers call Marya in all the versions. The singers called Marya (Martha/Avdotyia) the White Swan “the sorceress” four times, once – “the filthy bitch”, “the shameful wife” and “the heretic”, in other cases the storytellers just used the heroine’s own name. In four versions, the hero’s friends warn him, in response to the news of a forthcoming marriage, that his future wife was a “fierce snake”. These remarks made by the hero’s friends, show their annoyance with the misery of their comrade, rather than imply a **true serpentine nature** of the hero’s bride. In the version of this *bylina* sung by the famous Soviet singer Marfa Kryukova, the heroine’s reputation is ruined by the reputations of her mother and grandmother as “sorceresses” and “charmers”. It is clear that in this context Marya is seen as having inherited their magical powers. In the interviews with the villagers, we often hear that magical abilities are being inherited through the female line:

AA *This grandma knew a lot. We went to that one a lot. They go to her daughters now. And these grandmothers help when women can’t bear children. Here, in the village, I know this grandmother helped two of us. One is my nephew, she helped his wife. We went there ourselves. I went there myself.*

VA *It is inherited. After all, Grandmother Olya is their mother ... It’s all inherited.*

AA *They are transmitting [knowledge]. Parents die – they pass it on.*¹³

¹² Bailey - Ivanova 1998, 148-149.

¹³ Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University. Syam20a-17. Recorded from A.A. Kukin and V.A. Kukina on July 14, 2005, in Pigilinka village, Syamzhensky district, Vologda region, by D.K. Tuminas, A.S. Semenova, A.A. Chechik.

Thirty-three reviewed versions of the abovementioned plot provide us with the information about thirty-one singers: twenty-five men and five women. There are five times more recordings of this *bylina* performed by male narrators, but the longest version of 1,143 verses was sung by a woman – Anna Mikhailovna Pashkova (Astakhova 1941, 134). All the storytellers report that Marya the White Swan is a rare beauty. In her 1938 version, Marfa Kryukova called Marya the “all-Russian beauty”¹⁴.

In one of the male versions recorded at the Kuloi, the beauty of Marya is described using the formula of “male admiration” for the female body:

*He lived with Maryushka the White Swan –
 And through the shirt the body and everything is visible
 All bones are visible through the body
 And through the bones bone marrow shimmers
 And yes, Potyk wanted to get married.*¹⁵

In addition to mentioning her beauty, in one version Marya is described as “cunning and wise”, in three – simply as “wise”, in one – as a wife “seeking wisdom above her husband”. In more than ten plot variants, Marya outsmarted her husband trice in a competition. In general, the theme of the “female mind” appears regularly in this plot. The proverb “long hair – short mind” is cited in six versions in the context of the heroine’s faked repentance to her husband. “Women’s minds are insidious” – with this phrase, Mikhailo’s new wife warns of the cunning deeds of his ex-wife.

Marya the White Swan is an exogamous bride, whom Potyk takes as his wife without proper matchmaking. In some versions, the characters get married as a result of the matchmaking initiated by the bride. The normative type of marriage in Russian traditional village culture is patrilineal. Accordingly, matchmaking arrangements on the women’s part are anomalous (but still occurring sometimes). In the overwhelming majority of cases, the initiative of marriage should be taken by the groom:

*<Does it happen that the groom comes to the bride’s house?>
 The groom, yes, it happens – he will come to her house. Then they do it without a wedding.
 <So they don’t propose then?>
 No. What about it? A woman is proposing to him, a girl. Natalya lived nearby, a neighbor, so she got married. This guy first went to propose in Zbikhovo – that*

¹⁴ Kryukova 1939, 546-556.

¹⁵ Recorded by A.D. Grigoriev on June 30, 1901, in Soyana village, Mezensky district, Archangelsk region, from Efim Kirillovich Melekhov, 30 years old (Svod russkogo fol’klora 2011, 234).

Magic as a Statement of Power and Weapons of the Weak: Heroines of The Russian Epos

girl's name was *Shurka*. *Shurka* did not consent. *Natalya* smelled it and decided to jump in. She came to him: "Come on, let's go to my place!" And they are gone! That's how it was. She came, took the man away!

<Who was in charge in this case?>

She was in charge. She was a fighting woman. A young woman.¹⁶

The behaviour of the young heroine of *bylina* manifests active defiance. Unlike *Marinka* in the previous story, *Marya* does not violate the norms of sexual behavior. She violates the norms of the traditional Russian wedding ceremony, according to which a man and his family should choose a bride. At the level of poetics, *Marya* regularly turns from a girl into a swan and back, but this does not bother anyone. Naming the bride a swan in Russian wedding lyrics is one of the most common formulas. The active matrimonial position in the first part of the plot represents only a potential danger for the hero, about which his friends are trying to warn him (she is a "fierce snake"). But at the next turn of the plot, the heroine's activity leads to a real reputational disaster and death. *Marya* marries for the second time and runs away from her ex-husband. Starting from this moment, her behaviour is replete with magic tricks, and this is where the assessment of her behaviour by the singers becomes extremely negative. The assessment of *Potyky's* reputation, judging by the opinions of all the singers, is also faulty. In one-third of the variants, he is shown as a bitter drunkard and never leaves the taverns. *Michaylo* is begging the prince for a reward in the form of his permission to drink for free in his subordinate taverns. Her husband's drinking is the reason why *Marya* prefers someone else to him. In two versions of the *bylina*, *Michaylo* is the first one to cheat on his wife, and she, upset, dies (but later magically resurrects). In two versions of the *bylina* *Marya* dies longing for her permanently absent husband. A new groom appears in a situation where the actual husband is constantly absent. The new groom deceives *Marya* by telling her false news about her husband's death. In other variants, he offers her more favourable conditions for a new marriage – offers her to become a queen instead of a washer of her husband's underwear. So the singers explain the situation of *Marya* leaving *Potyky* not by her serpentine nature, but by psychologically sound reasons. The singers describe the hero and the heroine of the *bylina* in detail and in a true-to-life manner, paying equal attention to both of them. Male drinking and cheating, women's tricks, a search for wisdom

¹⁶ Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University. DTxt08-002_Vol-Siam_08-05-20_Kuleshov. Recorded from I.I. Kuleshov, born in 1933, in the village of Nikulinskaya, Syamzhensky District, Vologda Region. August 20, 2008, A.V. Stepanov, O.G. Hon.

“above the husband”, foul play, even the disaster of the first marriage and a possibility of a second chance are all subject to the singers’ reflections.

At the first level of her magic skills, Marya the White Swan can turn into a swan and back into a woman. In metaphoric terms, it is not a shape-shifting attribute, but a confirmation of her bride status with the image borrowed from the Russian wedding lyrics. In two versions of the *bylina* Marya transforms not just herself, but turns the bridegroom into a hare, an ermine, a falcon, or a wolf during their first three nights after the wedding. The ermine and the hare are well-known male characters of erotic tales and wedding riddles. On the level of poetics, the transformation abilities of the heroine inform the audience of her bride status and sexual attractiveness, while each night spent with Marya costs her husband hours of running, hopping, or flying until dawn.

The next tier of Marya’s magic competencies is manifested in the status of a wife, especially when she becomes a wife who has left her husband. In the second part of the *bylina*, she makes him drink the “wine of oblivion” at the time when her husband overtakes her in the chase after her elopement. It is not a hard task because Potyk likes to drink wine; however, Marya fakes happiness from the “reunion” with him and plays a victim. Then she throws her husband, who is fast asleep from a lavish dose of wine, over her shoulder, turning him into a stone. In ten versions of the *bylina*, Marya accompanies her magic throw with “strong spells”. Marya repeats the gesture from the so-called “Cabala” rite. “Cabala” is a piece of birch bark, on which a practitioner of magic writes a message to a forest spirit seeking to find a man, a woman, or cattle lost in the woods. The cattle owner or a relative of a person who is lost in the forest shall take the imprinted Cabala in his left hand and throw it into the forest over his back or over the shoulder using a special “down and out” crisscross movement (*naopashku levukhoy naopaki-shu*) (Stepanov 2009). The same gesture is used in various rituals to throw food and gifts to the spirits who live in the forest or in the peasant’s yard.

Moreover, the *bogatyr*’s transformation into a stone is a metaphor for the deep and oblivious sleep after magic procedures – such sleep in Russian is called “stony”.

I spent the night in a house where there were a woman and her son, and the baby started crying and could not stop. I know a couple of things, so I thought: why not share them, so I said: “Put this water over him three times like this, wash him with water, and he will sleep like a stone.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Folklore Archive of St. Petersburg State University, DTxt11-203_Arch-Lesh_11-07-15. Recorded July 15, 2011 in Keba village, Leshukonsky district, Archangelsk region, from

Marya knows what any female head of a peasant household shall know: home calendar rituals and housekeeping rites. Her magic lore does not exceed the scope of normal magic skills of a mother and a mistress of the house.

Marya is forced to defend herself in a situation where her new husband refuses to fight her ex-husband who is pursuing her. In one plot, Marya fights in an open battle and defeats the hero. In all other versions, she prefers tricks of false weakness, which J. Scott called “the weapons of the weak”¹⁸, plus some magic. In all versions where the heroine uses magic, the transformation of the *bogatyr* back to a human from a stone is performed by either an old pilgrim or St. Nikolas. The old man turns out to be a better specialist in magic than Marya.

Like in the “Marinka and Dobrynja”, in the “Mikhailo Potyk” plot, the evaluation of the heroine as “a sorceress” and “an evil serpent” is not pre-defined by her magic competence, but is based on her reputation and “anti-social” behaviour: Marya has left her husband (even though she had her reasons to do it).

The magic battle of Marinka with an elder woman and the confrontation of Marya the White Swan with the pilgrim/saint present the competition of reputations. Thus, the magic motifs in epos have two goals. First, at the level of poetics, motifs with shapeshifting are used to speak about the “unspeakable”: for example, they hint at sexual attraction, sexual power, or sexual freedom. Second, magic motifs tell the audience about the hierarchy of reputations and values, and about the improper behavior.

In epic plots about female “witchcraft” in situations where fight or direct resistance is, for some reason, impossible or ineffective, magic means turn out to be an effective argument in the dispute. Both Marya and Marinka find themselves in a weak position making their own life choices, while being unsupported by social institutions. Being in a position of a weak one, they resort to tactical behavior with the use of magic.

An independent choice of a sexual partner and husband made by a woman in a patriarchal society is out of the ordinary. These actions can be performed, according to the storytellers, only if one has magical skills. But even in the domain of magical interactions, the position of a younger

Yevdokiya Stepanovna Levkina, born 1929 by S.B. Adonyeva, A.Y. Balakin, E.D. Kaplan, I.S. Veselova.

¹⁸ James Scott’s (1985) concept of “the weapons of the weak” shows witty and effective practices of everyday peasants’ resistance to elite domination. In my article, the concept of the weapons of the weak is applied to the behavior of women in a patriarchal social order.

and independent woman turns out to be weak, vulnerable to the magic of a more “powerful sorcerer” (an older woman or man). Thus, the singers talk about the balance of power in a society and the results of the revolt against the social order.

The societal factor is manifested in the fact that the singers condemn the “asocial” behaviour of the heroines – their sexual and matrimonial agency. Moreover, if we look at the Northern Russian epic storytelling in terms of transmitted ethos, we may come to the same conclusion about the patriarchal values prevailing in the Russian epos as Laura Olson and Svetlana Adonyeva. These researchers studied the relations between the patriarchal ethics and special feminine knowledge. “The epic drama confirms not only nationality, but also the patriarchal social system itself, since in its depiction of the hero winning a wife, epic briefly entertains the possibility that the female family line might dominate. The personal female line does not win: the hero inevitably wins over his bride through battle, and patriarchy is validated”¹⁹.

The epic ethos claims that magical skills are a necessary part of everyday knowledge, along with the skills of power confrontation and cunning wisdom. But the balance of power in the patriarchal world of the epic is the same in the physical, social and magic realms. The elders in the hierarchy, men and women, always win, and the younger ones who violate social norms are defeated and punished.

The reality of the genre is as follows: those condemned for the use of magic are the ones without the confirmed social authority. Those whose behavior is condemned do not have authority, i.e., sexually provocative girls and cheating wives. On the contrary, older women, preferably widows, like Dobrynya’s mother or aunt, whose sexuality does not threaten anyone anymore, or older men, preferably monks or saints, like St. Nikolas or the wandering singers-storytellers (*kaliki*), who saved Potyk, have a moral permission to use their magic to the fullest extent.

¹⁹ Olson - Adonyeva 2012, 31.

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RESTRAIN, LIBERATE, KILL: PARSING THE LANGUAGE OF BLOCKING SICKNESS IN IRISH CHARMS

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7359/996-2022-wolf>

ABSTRACT

Although the words used within charms have always varied with international context and even within a regional or national community, the importance of the precise selection of words from the perspective of the charmer is often indicated in descriptions of how the charms are used. Focusing on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish-language medical charms found in manuscript sources, this essay considers contemporary meanings of three particular words that appear repeatedly in this corpus, *marbhair* (“kill”), *cosg* (“block/restrain”), and *saor* (“free/liberate/release”).

Keywords: Irish-language charms; manuscript charm corpora; medical charms.

This essay concentrates on a set of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish-language charm texts oriented around a specific theme, medical healing, and within this genre, instances that share certain lexical features in their approach to restoring health¹. These attributes are the use of words that suggest actions of restraint, liberation, attacking, or killing. While this choice of genre and lexical features is seemingly narrow, in fact it includes a strong cross-section of the surviving charms corpus for Ireland in this time period. An estimated sixty-three percent of the nearly 150 surviving charm texts found to date in Irish-language manuscripts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are medical charms, and of these,

¹ The author wishes to thank the anonymous readers who reviewed this essay for their excellent, detailed comments particularly on translations and on the question of word meaning change over time.

A sense of the contents of these Irish medical charms can be gleaned from a charm against farcy, the glandular ailment that afflicts people and horses, that features such language. The ethnographer and folklorist Douglas Hyde included a version of this charm for his publication *Abhráin Diadha Chúige Connacht*, a two-volume miscellany of prayers and religious songs that appeared in 1906. Hyde had taken the charm from a mixed devotional and secular manuscript produced by the County Longford scribe Brian Ó Fearrghaile in the 1770s. Hyde's transcription and translation consists of the following:

Charm against Farcy
I slay [...] fresh farcy
I slay the maggots of the grass,
I kill the fresh worm,
I put a poisonous poison-charm
On the deadly murrain
A charm which Peter and Paul sent
That kills the maggots in the flesh
That kills maggots in teeth and in clothing.³

² The source for this appraisal of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century charm texts is a dataset, not yet completed, compiled from charms directly or indirectly identified in the indices to the two largest collections of Irish-language manuscripts – held at the National Library of Ireland and the Royal Irish Academy – and supplemented by further charms identified in the same collections by Champagne 2001.

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seven and eight, combined with the allusions to St. Peter and St. Paul, are traits that mark out these charms as a distinct body within the larger corpus of Irish charms – characteristics that also link these charms to similar features in the broader international corpus. These attributes include the use of language referring to resisting, restraining, and killing: the charmer “kills” the illness; similarly, other charms order a stop to bleeding or a liberation from sickness.

Not all Irish charms rely on this convention. Charms in which the actions of named individuals (such as saints) serve as a metaphor for how the affliction is to be vanquished, for instance, involve a more indirect description of how healing is to happen. The *Super petram* charm provides a common example of this form. The extraction of Peter from the stone on which he sits metaphorically stands in for the healing actions that are to take place. Similarly, transferal charms in which sickness in the body is to be swapped for something benign involve a much more indirect description of how healing is to be enacted. By contrast, in these charms of attack and action the charmer orders a direct banishment of sickness or a transformation of the body.

The analysis below interprets these charms of active intercession through a series of steps. First, the lexical features of the charms are placed against a wider contextual understanding among charms scholars of the way such characteristics operate from the point of view of the charmer and his or her community. Second, an understanding of the meaning of three common words found in these texts – *marbhaim* or its verbal noun form *marbhuigheadh*, *cosg* (modern Irish orthography, *cosc*), and *saor* – will be drawn out by examining what contemporaries might have understood, either directly or indirectly, by these terms. Finally, the potential significance of these charm types in helping us recover something of the vernacular understandings of sickness in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland will be proposed.

1. THE POWER OF WORDS IN CHARMS

It is well established that the lexical content of charms – whether words recognized as part of that language community’s repertoire or nonsense words that lack inherent meaning outside of the intended use as magic speech – are not considered arbitrary or variable by charm practitioners. The lexical content of the charm – the words – are what H.S. Versnel has

called the “ritual words” (as opposed to the “ritual action”) that are necessary to enact the goal of the charm⁴. This is not to say that lexical meaning is essential to a charm. The use of nonsensical words in charms has long been recognized as an international feature of the phenomenon, as are sound features such as the alliteration that is present in the charm for farcy noted above⁵. Nor are the lexical contents of charms always affixed. The international charms corpus exhibits far too many variants on the same motifs – for one, we have a multilingual corpus – for us as scholars to share the view of charmers regarding the supposed fixity of the precise words of charms in conjunction with precise actions.

But a helpful framework presents itself in the approach of Gábor Klaniczay, who draws our focus to “efficacious words” in the context of Christian church-sanctioned rituals, verbal magic, and prayers⁶. Whereas practitioners of praying, Klaniczay notes, see the words of the prayer as petitioning a higher being to accomplish something, Catholic rituals such as the Eucharist are based on the understanding that the sought goal is accomplished concurrently with the uttering of the words, via divine intercession. The oral performance of the words enacts the transubstantiation, for example, rather than trigger its accomplishment later. This, Klaniczay notes, is more akin to how charm practitioners see the performance of the specific words contained in the charm – much to the chagrin of theologians (he is speaking of the medieval variety) who saw charms as the demonic antithesis of church ritual. In short, while the focus of charm scholars must necessarily be on the micronarratives, the orally significant nonsense words, and other features such as alliteration, it is worthwhile to see lexical meaning, insofar as we can recover those meanings for past communities, as yet another key feature of charm texts.

2. THREE IRISH-LANGUAGE WORDS

There are a wide variety of “action words” concerned with vanquishing illness or healing a patient that appear in Irish-language texts, among them *slánadb* or *slánaigh* (heal), a word long associated with charms in Irish-language exemplars, as medieval instances attest; *fóir* or *fóirthint* (help/relieve/

⁴ Versnel 2002, 107.

⁵ Passalis 2012, 7-8.

⁶ Klaniczay 2013, 283.

save; both forms of this word, incidentally, have strong religious usages); and intriguingly, *leigheas* (to cure/remedy), a word with strong medical connections. But it is the contemporary meanings of *marbhaim/marbhui-igheadh*, *cosg*, and *saor*, three words that appear in Irish-language charms that are not obviously connected with healing and yet find their way into a number of examples, that are of interest here.

The word *marbhaim* appears in a second example taken from the same scribe mentioned above as a source for Hyde, this time in a manuscript currently held at the Royal Irish Academy as MS 23 E 7 and dateable to the 1770s and 1780s. Scribe Ó Fearrghaile recorded in this volume the following:

Orrtha mharbhuiigh achma asbuin, no peiste a bfeoil

Marbhuim thú a pheist ruadh

Marbhuim thú a pheist ceannruadh

Cuirrim Criost dod lagan, Dia fire dod lagan

Na 9 noird Ainglidhe ata a bflaithios

Dod ruagadh agus dod lasgad as do leabaigh

Agus na raibh do shaoghal agad a pheist

Acht go ndearfaid missi mo phaidir

A charm for the killing of _____ farcy, or worms of the flesh

I kill you, red worm

I kill you, red-haired worm

I send Christ to weak you, true God to weaken you

The nine orders of angels that are in heaven

To expel and thrash you from your bed

And may you not have your life, worm

When I will say my prayer.⁷

Once again, it is the worm (*péist*) that the speaker kills. What understanding, however, did an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century charm practitioner attach to the term *marbhaim*? For modern Irish, the foundational Irish-English dictionary *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* (1904-27) compiled by Patrick Dinneen glosses this as “kill, slay, slaughter, oppress”⁸. A slightly later reference work, the later twentieth-century dictionary *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* produced by Niall Ó Dónaill, translates this into English as “kill”, but not always in the sense of person-to-person action – an example is *mbaraigh an galar é* (disease killed him), or *iasc a mharú* (catch a fish).

⁷ Translation by author.

⁸ Dinneen (1927) 1996, s.v. “marbhaim.”

Marbhaim thus has a more expansive definition referring to all manner of killing or arriving at death, whereas a separate term prefixed with *dún* (close, shut), *dúnmharaigh*, is used only to refer to “murder,” making the latter a narrower term more closely connected to interpersonal violence⁹.

Turning from twentieth-century dictionary attestations to more contemporary uses, it is beneficial to make use of the recent *Historical Irish Corpus, 1600-1926*, completed by the Royal Irish Academy, a compilation of printed texts in the Irish-language that allows for full-text searchability of keyword terms. *Marbhaim/marbhuigheadh* shows up in several instructive cases that expand on the limited explanations of the word’s definition found in the Irish-English dictionaries. Notably, as a supplement to the glosses provided by Dinneen or Ó Dónaill, the word is taken to refer to a just killing – that is, a killing conducted within the context of a conflict between communities or carried out as a justified order from authorities. An Irish-language sermon by the Cork priest Maurice Power, composed in 1836, for example, speaks of a general carrying out a killing at the orders of a king. Similarly, a Fenian story collected from an oral source and included in the late nineteenth-century folklore collection *Siamsa an Gheimhridh* (1892), tells the story of a king’s son who strikes out to seek his fortune with the hero Fionn, only to meet death at the hands of a foreign prince whom he angers. The term *marbhuigheadh* appears in the delivery of the message of his death: “He has been killed”¹⁰. *Marbhuigheadh/marbhaim* thus presents a particularly strong word that signifies the slaying or killing of something or someone – but one that may have suggested a more complicated interpretation as to motive or justification than an English translation like “murder” would provide.

Turning to the next term, *cosg*, in modern Irish orthography *cosc*, this word is glossed by the Dinneen dictionary as “the act of restraining, preventing, hindering, impeding”. In Ó Dónaill’s dictionary it is presented as synonymous with “check, stop, prevent, restrain”, as in *tuile a chosc*, “to stem a flood”, *ocras or tart a chosc* (“to check hunger” or “to check thirst”), or, most notably, *fuil a chosc*, “stem blood”. This focus on the restraint of flowing blood is common in the charm corpus, as in an example from the Limerick scribe Tomás Ó Conchubhair recorded in the National Library of Ireland manuscript MS G 233 and originally written down in 1791. The

⁹ Dinneen (1927) 1996, s.v. “dúnmharbhaim”; Ó Dónaill (1972) 1992, s.v. “maraigh”, “dúnmharú”. Ó Dónaill defines the latter sparsely as “murder, to commit murder”.

¹⁰ *Historical Irish Corpus, 1600-1926*, n.d., s.v. “marbhuigheadh”, http://corpas.ria.ie?fsg_word=marbhuigheadh.

charm consists of a blood staunching narrative with a Longinus motif, clearly a variant of the same blood charm identified in twentieth-century oral tradition that has been linked more closely to Irish-speaking contexts (and before that, Latin-antecedents)¹¹.

Ortha na fola do chosg

Allevemus ainm an fir do sgoilt air taobh an Dáluigh shug [*sic?*]

uisge fuil & fion amach air taobh árdrighe

An nomine patrie cois[g] an fuil *et fili* tá camhair

spiriti sancti amen Jesus coisg an fhuil & tá si trean

Charm to staunch blood

Allevemus [Longinus] is the name of the man who split the side of Dáluigh [?] water, blood, and wine from the side of the High King

In nomine patrie staunch the blood *et fili* there is help

spiriti sancti amen Jesus staunch the blood and it [the blood] is [flowing] strong¹²

An additional example included by Hyde in his collection and reportedly taken from a late nineteenth-century source relies instead on a native saint, Bridget, as a source for its efficacy:

Ortha Cosgtha Fola

Taraidh a athair le do chabhair

Taraidh a mhic agus fóir

Taraidh a Bhrighid a bhan-naoimh

Agus an dá abstol déag

Agus cuir coisg [ar] an fhuil

Atá teacht go tréan.

Charm for Stopping Blood

Come, Father, with thy help

Come, Son, and relieve

Come, Brigid, female saint

And the twelve Apostles

And put a stop to the blood

That is coming powerfully.¹³

In both cases, the charm pairs the stoppage with commentary on the nature of the blood flow, using the term *tréan* (strong) to describe its power.

¹¹ Hillers 2019, 90; Ní Fhloinn 2019, 138-139.

¹² Translation by author.

¹³ Hyde (1906) 1972, 2, 380-381. Translation by Hyde.

The term *cosg* lacks the punch of *marbhuigheadh* or *marbhaim*, which suggests a complete obliteration of the ailment rather than its mere restraint. But contemporary texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century indicate a complex, even metaphysical meaning attached to the word *cosg*. In these examples it has connotations of restraint of bodily needs in particular, as in releases from thirst or hunger. Contextual meanings also shade into religious restraints, such as checks on the urge to sin. The mid-eighteenth-century poetic composition *Duanaire na Midhe* thus speaks in several instances of *cosg íota* (to quench one's thirst). On the other hand, the well-known collection of sermons assembled in 1818 and referred to now as *Seanmóirí Mhuighe Nuad* refers to *cosg do chur ar an gcuirptheacht* (place a restraint on corruption) and *cosg do chur ar an olc* (to place a restraint on evil)¹⁴. A third text, particularly helpful because it is a diary kept in the 1830s by the Kilkenny schoolteacher Amhlaoidh Ó Súilleabháin and therefore takes us more squarely into natural writing and usage of the time, presents the word *cosg* in the sense of "suffocating", that is, stopping the breath. He uses the term to describe the actions of the famous Burke and Hare murderers in Scotland (1828) in which victims were smothered to death in order to sell their body to science¹⁵. Thus, while the use of *cosg* connotes a restraint on natural, occasionally evil, and sometimes essential bodily functions, when deployed to describe a restriction on vital human needs can have similar fatal associations, if indirectly.

Both *cosg* and *marbhuigheadh* are relatively generic in their use, with broad application in a variety of contexts but typically apoliticized in meaning. This feature does not hold true for the third term used in the charms, *saor*. This word could command distinctly political meanings, as the work of scholar Peter McQuillan (2004) in tracing its noun form (*saoirse*) has revealed. An example from the 1860s, collected from a County Limerick charmer, Daniel Sheahan, found in a charm for pregnancy and childbirth pain illustrates its use:

Artha mná a d-tinneas cloinne

Do dhá gheal cioch, a Mhuire, máthair agus búime Iosa,

ó n-gádh rug slán sin a tabhairt fóir a's fuasgladh anála

don m-ban so tinn a b-pianta gaibhtheach.

Saor í a athair, saor í, a mhic, ós tú fuair thús baisde

¹⁴ *Historical Irish Corpus, 1600-1926*, n.d., s.v. "cosg", http://corpas.ria.ie?fsg_word=cosg.

¹⁵ McGrath 1936, 108.

do ghein a Spiriod naomh,
fág do cabhar aguinn agus beir leat isi slán.

Women's charm for child pain

Your two white breasts, Mary, mother and nurse of Jesus,
from distress carried safe, give help and release breath
to this woman sick from dangerous pains
Save her, Father, save her, Son, as you who received a baptismal start
born of the Holy Spirit
leave us your help and carry her safe.¹⁶

Saor can be translated here with the English words “save” or “free,” meant in the sense of liberation from pain and the threat of death. But wading into the modern dictionaries by Dinneen or Ó Dónaill reveals a list of complex meanings. Dinneen mostly focuses on the ideas of saving and salvation and rescue, perhaps no surprise given his clerical background. Ó Dónaill prioritizes “raising to free status”, “to free or to liberate”, similarly proposes “save, redeem”, and, at entry six, to rid, as from disease.

It is this notion of freed status that McQuillan has identified as the primary use of this term up until the eighteenth century – the state of being *saor* was to be free from paying tribute or obligation to those of a higher social status, or to be free from enslavement. But from the eighteenth century onward the term, often superseded by the noun form *saorise*, began to be imbued with the sense of release from generalized oppression and often specifically to liberation from foreign rule. It was therefore not just a weighty term but a word that was increasingly politicized (and, according to McQuillan, nationalized) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against a backdrop of Irish rebellion directed at English rule¹⁷. This trend is confirmed in the Royal Irish Academy's longitudinal *Historical Irish Corpus*: dominant uses of *saor* adjectively to express the state of freedom from sin begin to be supplemented by the nineteenth century by distinctly political uses such as freeing the land, or freeing one's country¹⁸. In this sense, the uses of *saor* in the charms appear to beckon more toward the older meaning of freedom from enslavement or liberation from a restricted (i.e., a sinful or ill) state.

¹⁶ Traditions of the Irish Peasantry Compiled by William Smith O'Brien, ca. 1860, MS G 1,252, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Translation by author.

¹⁷ McQuillan 2004, 183-229.

¹⁸ *Historical Irish Corpus, 1600-1926*, n.d., s.v. “saor,” http://corpus.ria.ie?fsg_word=saor.

3. CONCLUSION

Collectively, these gleanings offer not only a better understanding of how practitioners understood the workings of charms or of the Irish-language context for such healing practices, but also a glimpse of vernacular understandings of illness. The lack of surviving sources offering that vernacular view, particularly for Irish-speaking communities, means that we know far more about middle- or upper-class views of what constituted sickness. Scholars, reviewing the more voluminous surviving commentary of those classes, have emphasized that well into the nineteenth century sickness was viewed as an outcome of pestilential afflictions on the one hand, and moral failings on the other. Illness from this point of view was caused by poor environment, including crowding and lack of sunlight and air. It was also an outcome of the failure to feed the spiritual being or the turning away from orthodox, church-centered religious practices¹⁹. Indeed the notion of moral failure informed a broad swath of emerging Irish state intervention in health and poverty needs by the nineteenth century, represented by the attempts to differentiate between poor who were “deserving” (those who were poor despite living a moral life) and those who were “undeserving” (impoverished because of immoral living)²⁰.

What does the vernacular point of view presented in these charms suggest about alternate view of healing in the pre-twentieth-century period? Scholarly investigations into vernacular views of middle-class moralizing of poverty have shown that the distinctions drawn between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor were shared widely by the Irish populace, but that a strong rural-urban divide around the nature of the itinerant poor provided an alternate divide between the emerging state-driven medical charity institutions and an older alms-based rural concept of informal support²¹. Similarly, the concept of illness and healing presented in the charms both replicates and rejects an emerging professionalized and middle-class view of medicine. On the one hand, they are frequently rooted in the perceived goodness and saintliness of the figures discussed in the charm narratives, whether major religious figures (saints, usually), God, or Christ. At the same time, there is little sense of moralizing or time spent ascribing the illness to moral failing – or its eradication to a turn from immorality. Rather, it suggests a contrary vernacular view of illness as an inevitable,

¹⁹ On the persistence of this moral imbalance theory of illness, see Farmar 2004, 68.

²⁰ Cox 2017, 267-268.

²¹ Ó Ciosáin 1998, 98.

if invasive, aspect of everyday life – a product of general fate, not necessarily one infused with moral causes. And illness was, in this telling, to be met head on, with combative and liberating actions, be they charms or any other remedy. In some ways, this seems distinctly modern – we speak today of a war on cancer, for example. But in its focus on remedy over cause, this vernacular view differed from that of better-off contemporaries and of modern society, who seek to bare the roots of illness first in order to prevent sickness, rather than react to its arrival.

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PUBLICATIONS: “The Colic Leaf: An Icelandic Charm and Amulet”, *Filologia Germanica-Germanic Philology* Suppl. 2 (2021), 101-120; “Magic and Precious Stones in the Old Swedish Eufemiavisa Hertig Fredrik av Normandie”, *Filologia Germanica-Germanic Philology* 13 (2021), 171-196; “Sogni e visioni nel mondo nordico. Poesia epica e poesia a scaldica a confronto”, in *Sogni, visioni e profezie nella letteratura germanica medievale*, a cura di R. Rosselli Del Turco, Alessandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2021, 89-128.

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PUBLICATIONS: “Verbal Charms from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript”, *Incantatio* 2 (2012), 42-54; “The Slavic and German Versions of the Second Merseburg Charm”, *Incantatio* 3 (2013), 43-59; “Charm Indexes: Problems and Perspectives”, in *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, edited by J. Kapáló - É. Pócs - W. Ryan, Budapest - New York, Central European University Press, 2013, 71-100; “St Sisinnius’ Legend in Folklore and Handwritten Traditions of Eurasia and Africa (Outcomes and Perspectives of Research)”, *Studia Litterarum* 4, 2 (2019), 312-341.

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PUBLICATIONS: “Parchment, Praxis and Performance of Charms in Early Medieval Ireland”, *Incantatio* 3 (2013); “‘As I Went Up the Hill of Mount Olive’: The Irish Tradition of the Three Good Brothers Charm Revisited”, *Studia Celtica Fennica* 13 (2016); “Nine Hundred Years of the *Caput Christi* Charm: Scribal Strategies and Textual Transmission”, in *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern*, edited by I. Tuomi - J. Carey - B. Hillers - C. Ó Gealbháin, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2019, 51-64.

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RESEARCH INTERESTS: Contemporary urban folklore and rituals; narrative traditions; fieldwork; Russian traditional folklore.

PUBLICATIONS: *Speech and Ritual Culture of the Russian North*, edited by I. Veselova, St. Petersburg, Philological Practicum, 2012; (ed.) “The Cheburashka Complex, or the Society of Obedience”, St. Petersburg, Proppovskij Zentr, 2012; *Pervichnye znaki. Naznachennaia real'nos (Primary Signs. Prescribed Reality)*, edited by I. Veselova - S.B. Adonyeva, St. Petersburg, Proppovskij Zentr, 2017; “Transforming Reality: Personal Names in Ritual Speech”, in *Charms and Charming: Studies on Magic in Everyday Life*, edited by É. Pócs, Založba, Ljubljana, 2019, 269-280.

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PUBLICATIONS: *An Irish-Speaking Island: State, Religion, Community and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770-1870*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014 (Michael J. Durkan Prize for Books on Language and Culture, American Conference for Irish Studies; Donald Murphy Prize for Distinguished First Books, American Conference for Irish Studies); “The Irish-Language Community in New York on the Eve of the Easter Rising”, in *Ireland's Allies: America and the 1916 Easter Rising*, edited by M. Nyhan Grey, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2016,

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