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2. Table of Contents

1. Title	1
2. Table of Contents.....	3
3. Introduction.....	4
4. Language and its Magical Power.....	9
5. Magic, Men, and The Man.....	28
5.1. Gender.....	30
5.2. Class.....	34
6. The Thief and Andromalcus: A discussion of Austin and Searle	38
7. Analysis of Extant Magic.....	49
7.1. Medical Magic.....	49
7.2. Protection.....	57
7.3. Minding Other People's Business.....	63
8. In Defense of a Magical Genre.....	65
Works Cited.....	69

3. Introduction

Below are the two most frequently asked questions about magick, with my answers.

Q: What is magick?

A: There isn't a man, woman, or child on this planet that does not know what magick is. Don't ask silly questions.

Q: Does magick work?

A: No. (Chapman 2008, p. 15)

The above is, in my opinion, quite a cheeky quote, especially considering that Chapman's quoted work (ironically enough) serves as a popular instructional manual intended to guide beginners towards a modern discipline of occult practice known as Chaos Magick. He goes on to write that the only way for one to discover whether magic is real, and furthermore become acquainted with its mechanisms and limitations, is for one to go out and do some magic themselves. All tongue-in-cheek witticisms aside, though, Chapman nevertheless reflects some of the dominant cultural ideas and narratives surrounding magic, and similarly illustrates how difficult it is for the idea of magic to be given a concrete definition. Famed occultist, founder of Thelema, and purported "wickedest man in the world", Aleister Crowley, defined magic (or *magick*, as he preferred) as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (p. XVI). Crowley's definition, although lacking the wit of Chapman's, retains a similar quality of nebulosity. Were one with an exceptionally rigid mind, or one prone to mischievous pedantics to read such a definition, it would be expected that they would return with the assertion that any act could be considered magical. And indeed, Crowley himself did, later on the very same page, assert that all intentional acts were magical acts. Unfortunately, as broad-minded as such an opinion may appear to be, it is not particularly helpful for our purposes.

Neither Chapman nor Crowley are examples of scientific literature (although they are occultists or practitioners of what they refer to as magic of some renown), so let us turn instead to a more scholarly source. The Oxford English Dictionary defines magic as "the use of ritual activities or observances which are intended to influence the course of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge; sorcery, witchcraft" (of course, not everything for which there is a word has a real-word referent. 'Unicorn', for instance, serves as an example, as well as

‘trustworthy politician’. Nevertheless, it’s important to examine the definitions of magic from varying sources in order to develop a solid concept for what will be discussed). Although the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition may seem far more specific on the surface, one immediately runs into the same sorts of issues as with the definition provided by Crowley. What sorts of ritual activities? What sorts of observances? There are a great many activities which could be defined as ritualistic that are carried out by humans with the express purpose of influencing the course of events or manipulating the natural world. Political, economic, and religious activities specifically spring to mind. Is the passing of a law, the manipulation of the stock market, or the blessing of communion wine categorized as magic?

Leaving the definition of magic aside for the time being, Chapman’s second question and the subsequent answer gives one much to ponder about. Is magic real? Most over the age of perhaps six or seven (eight, if you’re pushing it) would answer no. A belief in magic tends to fall to the wayside at approximately the same time as a belief in unicorns, Santa Claus, or the Tooth Fairy. Indeed, the assertion that magic does not work reflects dominant cultural attitudes and ideas surrounding the entire conceptual realm of the occult. Magic, to put it simply, does not “work”, which is to say that society at large holds the opinion that magic, as an operating force which can affect the material world in which we all live, does not exist. There is no physical process that we as human beings have observed that fits into the above definitions. And yet, the idea of magic maintains a near-unshakable position in the public consciousness, regardless of its perceived efficacy. Granted, there are few real-world examples to speak of regarding wizards in pointed, star-spangled hats arriving precisely when they mean to, nor are there a great many witches in gingerbread houses turning princes into frogs. Those who do exist somewhere out in the wide world are in all likelihood mere hobbyists with a penchant for costumes and theater, and unto them I confer my sincerest congratulations and well-wishes for the future. But despite this, magic nevertheless remains quite prominent in media, in fiction, in discussions of unexplainable events, and in the tiny rituals that people do everyday for good luck or to ward off misfortune.

This assertion, however, begs the question of what exactly it means for something to ‘work’. Is it perhaps the case that things only work when they, on their own behalf and under their own power, enact a measurable, physical change on the world around them? And, regardless of whether the answer to the

preceding question is affirmative or negative: does it only constitute the proper use of a scholar's time and energy if they consider and discuss exclusively those things which 'work' and which are 'real'? Should this be the case, there are many forces which do not work and are therefore not worth the trouble. The institution of marriage, for instance, or currency, both of which only function as they do due to a widespread social agreement in regards to their power. One will find very few people acting in good faith and outside of fringe internet forums who will argue with sincerity that marriage and currency are not real and do not work because they are not physical forces which can impact the world on their own behalf and through the use of their own power. Rather, they are social forces which compel others to act. John Searle discusses these exact points at length in *The Construction of Social Reality*, which will be discussed in more detail later on. However, one point of his bears mentioning right from the jump. Searle writes: "There are portions of the world, objective facts in the world, that are only facts by human agreement".

Given this, could magic potentially be counted as such a social force, one of Searle's objective facts by human agreement, either in the present day or at some point in the past? If not, why? What then separates magic from other social rituals which do not (so far as we're aware) enact material changes in the world around us, but rather impact interpersonal and societal realities? Should magic, much in the same vein as pronouncing a marriage or levelling a legal decree, derive its power from collective belief rather than from any tangible force, then so too must its historical manifestations be understood within the very same frameworks that gave it meaning. Beliefs, after all, are materially real, as are the actions that they inspire and motivate. Nowhere is the interplay between belief and action and social reality more evident than in Medieval and Early Modern England, in which magic existed at a sort of crossroads (not unlike the crossroads at which one traditionally might choose to make dealings and wagers with the Devil or one of his many associates) in a contested space between natural philosophy, religious doctrine, and popular belief.

Bearing these considerations in mind, I intend to contend with the following three broad research questions over the course of the next chapters as I undertake a qualitative analysis of purportedly extant examples of magical speech from the time period in question, as well as contemporaneous fictional examples. Firstly, I intend to interrogate the degree to which magical acts are like other social and

linguistic acts which change social realities, drawing on J.L. Austin and John Searle's frameworks of performative utterances and illocutionary forces to do so (which is to say, to investigate to which degree Speech Act Theory can appropriately deal with them), with the aim to probe exactly what imbues these speech acts with their perceived efficacy. Is it perhaps their linguistic form, the ritualistic context under which they're performed, or the speaker's alleged institutional authority? Extant examples from the Medieval and Early Modern periods will be analyzed alongside fictional examples from plays, novels, and poetry.

Secondly, I aim to describe and categorize the structure and distinctive markers of magical utterances in English. Is it the case, for example, that English-language magic employs distinct syntactic, lexical, or performative features in contrast to other similar speech acts such as prayers, oaths, orders, or legal declarations? How are examples of magic recognized as the speech acts they are intended to be? I will investigate whether magical utterances are marked by any formal traits (e.g. repetition, alliteration, or the utilization of the imperative mood) that either alone or in tandem with other features prove to be genre-specific, similarly comparing and contrasting 'real-life' (that is to say, those acts of magic which would have allegedly actually been performed in real life, with the intention of achieving a result) and fictional (that is, those acts of magic taking place within the confines of a novel, poem, or play) examples. Additionally, I will briefly discuss the distinction between "practical" magical texts such as examples of healing and anti-theft charms and fictional depictions such as Shakespeare's Scottish play or examples from Chaucer (such as *The Wife of Bath's Tale*), which have unfortunately remained undertheorized and underdiscussed. It could be the case that certain traits will be more concentrated in fictional instances, perhaps for the sake of aesthetics, narrative efficacy, or to conform to standards of their genre. Similarly, other traits may be more prominent in the examples that were potentially used by contemporary practitioners of the magical arts.

Thirdly, How do the themes of authority, gender, and class influence the position of magic in society? The depiction of magic as a performative speech act, quite similarly to an order or a prayer or a legal declaration, is after all entirely inextricable from the epistemological and social anxieties of its time. In the Medieval times (and to a lesser extent after the Protestant Reformation), the Church utterly monopolized

spiritual authority. As such, magical utterances more often than not appropriated liturgical language (e.g. genuine and pseudo-Latin invocations and nonsense words, which would later be referred to by a number of occultists, including English occultist and founder of the new religious movement Thelema, Aleister Crowley, as 'barbarous names'), while Early Modern texts wrestle for their place among folk practices often carried out by a class of women barred from full societal agency and budding sentiments of empiricism.

This thesis will be structured as follows: In the first chapter, the historical and cultural context of magic in Medieval and Early Modern England will be addressed, alongside the unique role of language in the magical act (that being the ritual or utterance which is intended to bring about the phenomenon known as magic). Following that, I will address Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, discussing Austin and Searle's differing perspectives on the categorization of performative utterances through the illustrative assistance of an anti-theft charm. A number of charms and invocations will then be analyzed, compared, and contrasted in search of distinctive features such as rhyme, alliteration, and repetition. A semantic and pragmatic analysis will follow, including the usage of symbolism and metaphor in spells, alongside the usage of taboo words and euphemisms. Then, the role of gender, class, and authority as it relates to magic and society will be discussed. This will all culminate in an argument for magical utterances as a genre in and of themselves. Throughout the body of this thesis, Medieval literature will be consulted and lightly discussed primarily to inform on Medieval and Early Modern attitudes and beliefs concerning magic, although it will not be the main point of any in-depth analysis. As this is an exploratory thesis, no hypothesis was presented from the start, save the hypothesis that magical acts of the Medieval and Early Modern periods are subject to Speech Act and Genre Theory, and that there are indeed certain speech acts which could be classified under a magical genre. Rather, I chose instead to comb through the extant examples of magical speech that I was able to find, and draw my conclusions after the fact.

4. Language and its Magical Power

The magic of the Medieval and Early Modern world was, in the eyes of those whose communities it permeated, a flexible force with near-endless utility. Magic could be used to heal and to harm, to protect or to put one in peril, to cause two people to fall in love or to separate or to reconcile. All manner of details about the future could be revealed or altered. Illusions could be put into place and then disposed of again. A person could be driven irreconcilably mad. All manner of materials could be utilized to achieve the magician's ends, from blood (either their own or that of another) to herbs to stones to the very position of the planets and stars in the night sky. To our modern understanding, all of these disparate acts calling on various sources of power are all, nevertheless, clear examples of activities reflecting a belief in magic. But how would someone from the time view these charms and rituals?

Three scholars, Klaassen, Kieckhefer, and Williams, collectively display a complex and interdependent relationship between the magical act and the spoken and written word that operates across multiple strata and linguistic registers. From the high theology of the church to the fictional representations of ritual performance, the importance of language stands stalwart. Kieckhefer's work, which complements Williams' literary analysis on Medieval marvels and Klaassen's focus on low magic charms and high magic ritual, paints a comprehensive picture of how the power of words was understood and utilized by those seeking preternatural power, with the ultimate conclusion being that the study of magical language is unable to be meaningfully separated from broader Medieval conceptions of the sacred. . Indeed, words could serve as a bridge connecting the human to the occult regardless of whether these words were classified as religious or magical in nature. The synthesis of the works of these authors provides an essential historical and theoretical background to address the degree to which magical acts are similar to other social and linguistic acts, and what exactly imbues them with their perceived efficacy.

Throughout *Magic in the Middle Ages* (2022), Richard Kieckhefer describes the magical practices of Medieval Europe and impresses the existence of a dichotomy drawn among contemporary scholars between “natural magic”, rooted in hidden properties of herbs, stones, and the circular passages of heavenly bodies, and “demonic magic”, which involved (and indeed, necessitated) the illicit invocation of, cooperation with, or interference and involvement of supernatural beings of assorted provenance. Natural magic, as Kieckhefer goes on to say, was moreso a branch of science— merely a science that dealt with the “occult virtues”, or hidden properties or abilities, of various aspects of the natural world, and as such garnered (at certain times, and from certain people) a level of tolerance. Demonic magic, on the other hand, was viewed as a “perversion of religion”, much in the same vein that natural magic was considered to be a part of, as opposed to being distinct from, science (p. 9).

Further in defense of natural magic, Kieckhefer explains that the supposed occult virtues of plants, stones, and the like were often based on physical structure. He writes: “Most properties of herbs, stones, or animals can be explained in terms of their physical structure. A herb that is “cold” or “moist” can treat an illness caused by excess “heat” or “dryness” (p. 14). These are in direct response to Aristotolean categories, bringing to mind notions of balancing various humors to aid healing and maintain health.

Demonic magic, meanwhile, was far more of a sticking point. Ignoring the fact that the dominion over, petitioning of, or bargaining with various supernatural forces positioned that supernatural force as supplanting God in the mind, heart, and soul of the practitioner (and for whomever they were performing the magical act, also referred to as a *spell*), views of magic varied wildly throughout the Middle Ages to begin with (p. 13), with attitudes surrounding the mechanisms, morality, and even the very existence of magic shifting in the time between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. Indeed, Kieckhefer concedes that to a layperson, any distinction to be drawn at all was more or less an academic one more suited for clergy and other learned men to argue over amongst themselves, and therefore largely irrelevant to their daily lives. For the average, everyday denizen of Medieval Europe, all magic had the potential to be considered as suspect at bare minimum, if not actively and inherently demonic in nature (p. 10). After all, perhaps the “occult virtues” of so-called “natural magic” were indeed intrinsic to the plant, stone, or

planetary body itself, but it may very well have been a demon who instructed the magician on how to unlock and use these powers for themselves, or who somehow aided in making them available.

This tension between Medieval academic and lay perceptions of magic and magical acts is further complicated by the contemporary legal frameworks surrounding witchcraft, as well as the theological complications. Hans Peter Broedel's (2003) analysis of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (TL: Hammer of the Witches), very much a legal and theological text on witchcraft and the detection and eradication with great prejudice thereof, only furthers this view. Broedel makes the argument (among many others) that the common person did indeed consider a practitioner of magic (a witch, if you will) as a direct agent of misfortune, injury, or harm. The witch, to the author of *Malleus Maleficarum*, Heinrich Kramer, as well as those who utilized the book in their efforts to impede, imprison, and execute alleged practitioners of magic, was equally as culpable for harm and damage as the wielder of a knife might be in the murder of a stabbing victim (p. 66). Although the academic and philosophical elite of the time more so considered the demon in covenant with the witch to be directly responsible for any such weal or woe that may have resulted, as opposed to the witch themselves, who existed merely as an equivalent to someone who had hired a sellsword or a hitman, a distinct connection was nevertheless drawn between the magical act and the end result made manifest in physical reality: a clear example, if perhaps imperfect, of cause and effect.

In no case is this more explicit, however, than in the case of 'actual' magic (here referring to magic which has been recorded from the time period in question and which may have feasibly been carried out at some point, as opposed to that magic which exists in stories and fiction). Peter Morton makes the argument through an examination of a 14th century English work, *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, that the true issue with witches and a reliance on magic was not necessarily that demons may have been involved. After all, if God, being omnipotent and omniscient, allowed the demons to do their dastardly work, then it must have been in line with his will (or at the very least, he must not have disapproved too much). Instead, Morton posits that the primary sin of the magician, against what exactly umbrage was truly taken, was that the witch was placing their trusts, hopes, and intentions for the future in something that was not based on the help and intercession of God (2018, p. 44-45).

Astute readers may now wonder how exactly this relates to the power of the spoken word. The response is simple: magic, in the way it is most commonly conceived, is a spoken act, or at the very least an act of symbolic communication, be it verbal or nonverbal. The most common word for a magical act in English, *spell*, originally carried the meaning of news, discourse, or a narrative. A spell was (and is) something that is spoken, the words themselves containing their own power (see also: German *Zauberspruch*).

Etymologically, the Old English *spell* meant ‘news,’ ‘story,’ or ‘discourse.’ A spell, therefore, is fundamentally not only a narrative which attains to describe the world, but rather to reshape it. To cast a spell, therefore, is to perform an utterance which has the primary function of *doing* something, rather than merely *saying* something. Language in Medieval and Early Modern England, much like today, was far from merely a tool for communication. Poetry, plays, songs, scripture, and narratives surrounding larger than life characters and their famed deeds dominated the lives of many. However, language, if one chose and dared to do so, could also be used as a conduit of supernatural power. Consider the following excerpt from William Shakespeare’s *MacBeth*, which has in intervening years become so popular and common that Anglophone children can generally be counted upon to know at least a variation of it:

*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.
Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the caldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder’s fork, and blind-worm’s sting,
Lizard’s leg, and owlet’s wing,—
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble (Act IV, Scene 1).*

In this scene, the Three Witches (also known as the Weird or Wayward Sisters), are met by the titular character MacBeth, who seeks a kingship. MacBeth is then shown three apparitions (an armed head, a bloody child, and a child crowned), each pre-empted by the Sisters chanting prophecy. Although it’s unclear in the case of the Sisters if their magic hinged more so on the ingredients flung into the pot or their rhyming chant, it is nevertheless the case that magical practices of the time frequently hinged upon the precise utterance of words, the inscription of the names of angels, demons, or spirits, and the theatrical performance of certain invocations, blurring the lines between speech, ritual, and divine intervention.

To what extent, then, is language intertwined with the act of performing magic? Scholars such as Williams (2018), Klaassen (2021), and Kieckhefer (2022) paint a vivid and multifaceted picture of language and magic not only as deeply enmeshed, but as perhaps as inseparable as a person is from their very own bones. Be it in literary texts, protective charms, or ceremonial conjugations invoking the names of (oftentimes quite literally) God and everyone, spoken language, in accordance with the cultural belief described by the aforementioned authors, believed to possess the ability to heal, harm, transform, transmute, and command various forces seen and unseen. Although the nature of this power was contested, with some arguing that the hidden power imbued in the speech of magicians came from divine authority, infernal influence, or perhaps the sympathies of the natural world, the conclusion was invariably the same: the words themselves did indeed have some effect.

Consider charms, for instance, an example of ‘low magic’ or folk practice centered around practical goals such as protection, the finding of lost objects, or the warding off of thieves. Charms distinguish themselves from more ritualistic forms of ‘high magic’ through their accessibility. Rather than requiring rare materials such as gold or mercury, charms based their material component on commonplace items such as nails or coins. Some charms did not require a material component at all, rather depending entirely on the spoken word in order to work their proverbial magic. Klaassen (2021) positions such charms as a hybrid form of magic which set up shop at a three-way crossroads between medicine, folk belief, and liturgy. Unlike the dramatic (one might argue *overdramatic*) conjurations of ritual magic, wherein all manner of candles and chalk etchings and the facings towards the four directions and invocations of myriad names were required, or the enchantments narrativized in a classic Medieval romance which likely had very little bearing on the day to day, charms were uniquely ubiquitous. Written on manuscripts, in devotional books, on flyleaves, printed and scribbled in margins alike. Charms could be found all about, to the point where anyone with the ability to read would find themselves hard-pressed to avoid them entirely (p. 20).

The typical use-cases of charms (often healing or protection), perhaps aided in making them more socially acceptable, or at bare minimum allowed them to enjoy a base level of tolerance. Klaassen writes:

The keepers of orthodoxy had an ambivalent relationship with this literature. They objected when charms were assumed to be automatic or contained unorthodox elements such as mysterious words or signs, but they also often counseled tolerance if they were used in a spirit of humility and true piety. There was no sense in punishing people for practices that effectively reinforced conventional religion. (p. 21)

By blending themselves with Christian prayers and fragments from the Bible (particularly from the Psalms, which are used to this day as spells in other magical traditions such as Hoodoo, primarily practiced by the Black diaspora of the Americas (Smith et al 2022, p. 127)), magicians found themselves able to blend these protective and healing charms with pious intentions, distancing them from overtly demonic magic in the eyes of certain ecclesiastical authorities. The sign of the cross, or the recitation of rote prayers such as Ave Maria or the Pater Noster, assisted these works of magic in flying under the radar of scrutiny and persecution from the Church, so long as they reinforced orthodox piety rather than a dependence on superstition (p. 7). Charms thus exemplify the tension between sanctioned religiosity and the pervasive belief in the power of the spoken word. This is not to say, however, that charms leaning on the trappings of Christianity were wholly free from suspicion. The very belief in the implicit power of magic (that being the idea that correctly spoken or written words could compel divine or supernatural intervention) could nevertheless draw the ire of the powers that be, even despite their adherence to dominant Christian norms. Regardless of the stringency of a magical act's obedience to Christian hegemony, eyes would always be upon the act and the actor alike, ensuring that nothing traveled to a place the Church disapproved of.

Ritual magic, with all its pomp and circumstance, was no freer from the pressures of the Church. Klaassen mentions that despite the importance, or even the necessity, of the observance of the position and dignity of the planets and the stars (with specific attention paid to the phase of the moon and the planetary days and hours), it's nevertheless made extremely clear that the success of any ritual act of magic truly hinged upon the spiritual character of the magician. A few conditions noted specifically is that the practitioner of the ritual act is a Christian, and moreover a Christian in a state of grace (which Klaassen defines as having avoided unclean acts such as sexual intercourse within the previous three days, as well as having taken communion and confessed), to be "blameless in his comportment", to be physically clean in both his body and attire, and to have observed a regime of fasting and prayer (p. 4).

This emphasis on spiritual purity and the precision of the ritual itself also extended more or less seamlessly into the very fabric of magical practice taken as a whole. The spoken word and the intent behind a magical act very often found themselves crystalized into a physical, almost visceral form, as if it had a beating heart and rushing blood. The efficacy of charms, for instance, did not solely depend on the magician's devout preparation, on the "blameless comportment" and the state of grace. Rather, the tangible embodiment of divine language, be it recited, inscribed, or carried, also played a major role. Much in the same way that the practitioner's moral and physical cleanliness channeled divine favor, the charm made into a material object served as a physical vessel for that very same power, allowing the spoken word to endure in a written form. Did magic, then, differ meaningfully from religious rituals to the point of forming a distinct genre, or did the magical act function as more of the same?

Once again referring back to charms, as mentioned previously, materiality was often a crucial factor. Charms were often transcribed onto parchment and carried about as an apotropaic against evil and misfortune, blurring the line between the concepts of magic existing within speech and magic existing within objects (p. 7). This interplay between speech, writing, and object underscores Klaassen's argument that charms were not merely a means to an end, but rather participatory acts of devotion. By embedding familiar sacred language into a tangible form, the recipients of these spells found themselves able to wield divine power in a far more accessible way. The structure and performance of these acts further impress how language functioned as a magical medium. Klaassen notes a reliance on rhyme, repetition, and nonsense words (*barbarous names*, also known as *voces magicae*), as well as statements such as 'I adjure you' (p.21). Certain magical acts invoked sacred narratives (such as the healing miracles of Christ, causing the blind to see and the lame to walk and things of that nature), depending on the symbolic weight thereof in order to "activate" the spell.

Through Klaassen's analysis, the role of literacy and oral tradition in charm magic is further highlighted. As mentioned earlier, any (literate) fool could hardly go two steps without stumbling across a hastily-written charm in the margins somewhere or another, and certainly had their own private opinions about their efficacy which ran the gamut between contemptuous disbelief and total acceptance. To the illiterate majority, however, written charms projected an aura of deep mystery. One might even say that

part of the power of a written charm resided in the unfamiliar script itself. Meanwhile, for the religiously literate, those in the priesthood or the cloister or the monastery, Biblical tags such as a single verse of a Psalm evoked broader theological associations and resonances. This duality between the opaque and symbolic made charms adaptable to a wide range of diverse social contexts.

Ultimately, Klaassen demonstrates (successfully, in my mind) that the power of charms in the minds of those who used them lay not fully in arcane secrecy, but in their ability to harness the familiarly sacred, repurposing the means of the highbrow language of liturgy to immediately tangible ends. Furthermore, it shows that the power of religious language could be repurposed or even recycled to other ends, and the power inherent in the words would nevertheless remain strong in the minds of those who made use of it, those who were affected by it, and those who sought to regulate and control it. The England of Medieval and Early Modern times featured perhaps a more pragmatic spirituality than people tend to conceptualize, where words pulled double duty both as a plea to an almighty God and as a tool to bend the unseen world to human will, much in the same vein as in Aleister Crowley's definition of magic.

Tara Williams professor of English and Women's Studies, meanwhile, in contrast to Klaassen's focus on extant charms, examines the role of language in magic through the lens of Medieval literature. Holding a lens to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, she makes a number of points surrounding the immediacy and centrality of the spoken word to the magical act, revealing a vision of a magic which requires no invocation of holy names, no multi-day fasting, no requirement of having taken communion or having gone to confession, and indeed, no material components at all. Rather, Williams focuses on a marvel which exists and is performed through the act of speech alone. To provide context for the following discussion, a short summary of *Wife of Bath's Tale* will be provided below.

The eponymous Wife of Bath tells her tale as follows: In the days where King Arthur was still alive and kicking about (seeking the grail, if Monty Python is to be believed), the British isles were chock-full of supernatural creatures such as fairies, elves, and incubi, which had, in the intervening years between the time of Arthur and the time of the Canterbury Tales, been unceremoniously evicted and subsequently had disappeared due to the friars coming to settle. The friars, as the Wife of Bath takes pains to mention, were

in many ways not much better than the supernatural creatures which came before, as the friars (much as the incubi who came before were wont to do) were prone to assaulting women.

In Arthur's court, meanwhile, a young knight comes across a beautiful woman and assaults her, not only due to lust, but because he's preoccupied with a sense of his own power. Utterly scandalized, the court decrees that the knight's head should be chopped off. However, for reasons quite obscure to me myself, Arthur's queen, Guinevere, and the other ladies of the court beg on behalf of the knight, and ask for his life to be spared. They then present him with a challenge: should the knight discover within a time frame of one year what women desire most in the world, and return to the court to report his discovery, he would be permitted to keep his life. If he found himself unable to do so, or answered incorrectly, he would lose his head.

The knight proceeds to travel all about over the course of the year, asking every woman in his path what they desire most, only to receive a different answer from every single woman. Money, joy, beauty, sex, remarriage, and honor are all provided as answers for the knight's question. As the year draws to a close, he turns to head for Arthur's court once more in resigned despair, mentally preparing himself for his execution. However, on his way, he stumbles upon a group of women dancing in the forest, and he approaches with the intent to ask his question. To his surprise, as he approaches, the group of women vanishes, leaving behind a singular ugly old woman, often referred to as the Loathly Lady in the text. The knight, upon asking his question, is told that he must pledge himself to the Loathly Lady in exchange for her answer and his life. Having no other choice, the knight agrees.

The knight and the Loathly Lady return to court, and the knight gives the queen his answer: women most desire to have dominion over their husbands and lovers. This is, evidently, the correct answer, at least according to the Arthurian court, and the knight is pardoned. However, his joy and relief is short lived, as the Loathly Lady then publicly asks the knight to marry her. Although the knight begs her to take his material possessions instead, she is undeterred, and the two are wedded. After their marriage, the Loathly Lady asks the knight what he's in such a snit about, and he replies that he can hardly bear the shame of having such an ugly, lowborn wife. Rather than being offended by his statement, the lady replies by asking

if true *gentillesse* (noble character) can be hereditary. After all, many noble fathers have sired villainous sons, and that while her own family may be poor, true riches lie in having little and wanting for nothing.

The knight is then offered a choice: he may choose for the Loathly Lady to be physically ugly, but good and loyal of character, or for her to be externally beautiful but unfaithful. The knight, after mulling it over, gives the Loathly Lady the ability to choose for herself. As the knight gives her what she most desires, that being not only agency over her own life, but the life of her husband, the lady declares that she will be both beautiful and good, and the two have a long and happy marriage thereafter.

This is all very well and good, insofar as tales go, with a clear reflection of the knight's crime in his "punishment" and some attempt at redemption at the end. But what, if anything, does this have to do with language? The answer is simple. In *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the Loathly Lady's transformation is enacted through her own speech. She requires no herbs, symbols, or invocations of demonic names. Instead, only her declaration, "*For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe, This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.*" (lines 1240-1241), functions as the sole mechanism of her dramatic metamorphosis. Perhaps deliberately, Chaucer chooses to obscure any physical description of the change. He does not mention whether she grows tall or short, whether her hair is dark or light, whether weight is gained or lost. Instead, he emphasizes only the knight's astonished reaction as validation of the success of the declaration.

This narrative choice underscores one of Williams' arguments: in the context of the story, language does not merely describe the magical act, but rather performs it. Even the absence of visual spectacle, perhaps viewed by some as a narrative choice, only heightens the deep mystery of the transformation and positions the speech act as an authoritative and autonomous force. Williams writes:

In the Wife of Bath's Tale, however, the transformation occurs not only during but also through the lady's words. Language was crucial to magical practice outside of literary texts; acts of magic or illu-sion were often about significant terms or exact incantations, even when other methods, such as drawing diagrams or mixing herbal ingredients, were involved.⁴² The focus on words here relates to the translation magic of the Squire's Tale, and may remind us of the

importance of speech in Sir Orfeo (in which the Fairy King's promise is key) and the contrasting emphasis on actions in a magical context in Lybeaus Desconus and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (with the fearsome kiss and nonfatal beheading, respectively). The magical knowledge that the tale has already shown the loathly lady to possess, which I will discuss below, may also make her words more powerful, and the gentillesse speech that immediately precedes this moment sets up readers to perceive the Loathly Lady's words as important and authoritative (2018, p. 111)

By framing the Loathly Lady's words both as promise and fulfillment, as if answering the question at the very moment it had been asked, Williams paints her with the same brush as the Medieval wise woman, whose rhetorical prowess is only matched by her deep knowledge of the occult (p. 111-112). Here, magic is stripped of any material trappings and distilled into pure speech, challenging conventional notions of enchantment which depend (at least heavily if not exclusively) on elaborate ritual, such as the rituals mentioned by Klaassen. Williams continues:

Language and magic are intimately bound up here; the lady promises that she will be "bothe fair and good," and she becomes so as she says so. Chaucer describes no actions and proffers no visible evidence of that marvel taking place until the end of the speech. The command to "cast up the curtyn" reinforces that the transformation has been screened from view; neither the reader nor the knight sharing the lady's bed has seen any change up to this point. The speech provides the only access to the magic even as the speech acts as the agent of the magic. This is both mysterious—because no one, inside or outside the tale, sees the transformation occur, and Chaucer offers no explanation or description of it—and materially obvious, since the loathly lady says what she is doing and does what she is saying. (p.112)

Williams later compares the events of *Wife of Bath's Tale* with other Medieval texts such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Although the magic in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* seems to hinge primarily on physical gesture, the actual words spoken still profoundly impact the situation at hand. The true marvel, perhaps, of the Green Knight's Christmas game is the act of his head being decapitated by Sir

Gawain, followed by the act of the Green Knight proceeding to pick up his very own head and bandy it about. Despite the brutal physicality of the entire scene, the Green Knight very much declares his intentions from the start:

*Forþy I craue in þis court a Crystemas gomen,
 For hit is 3ol and Nwe 3er, and here ar 3ep mony:
 If any so hardy in þis hous holdez hymselfuen,
 Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,
 Þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer,
 I schal gif hym of my gyft þys giserne ryche,
 Þis ax, þat is heué innogh, to hondele as hym lykes,
 And I schal bide þe fyrst bur as bare as I sitte.
 If any freke be so felle to fonde þat I telle,
 Lepe lyztly me to, and lach þis weppen,
 I quit-clayme hit for euer, kepe hit as his auen,
 And I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on þis flet,
 Ellez þou wyl diȝt me þe dom to dele hym an oþer barlay,
 And 3et gif hym respite,
 A twelmonyth and a day;
 Now hyȝe, and let se tite
 Dar any herinne oȝt say.'* (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 9)

In translation:

Therefore I crave in this court a Christmas game,
 for it is Yule and New Year, and here are many gallants.
 If there be a man in this house who holds himself so hardy,
 is so bold in his blood, so rash in his head,
 that he dares stiffly strike one stroke for another,
 I shall give him as my gift this rich gisarm,
 this axe, that is heavy enough, to handle as he likes;
 and I shall abide the first blow as bare as I sit.
 If any warrior be wight enough to try what I propose,
 let him leap lightly to me and take this weapon—
 I quit-claim it forever, let him keep it as his own—
 and I shall stand him a stroke firmly on this floor.
 At another time, by our Lady, thou wilt grant me the boon of dealing him another blow;
 I will give him respite
 of a twelvemonth and a day.
 Now hie, and let us see quickly
 if any herein dare say aught.

Ignoring for the moment the narrative realities, the rudeness of turning up to someone's Christmas party uninvited, and the equal rudeness of decapitating someone at your uncle's holiday gathering, the Green Knight verbally lays out the magical circumstances right from the jump. Although Gawain perhaps thought himself clever for going straight for the throat, so to speak (and quite literally, at that), the Green Knight was very clear in his conditions: Gawain was welcome to take the axe in hand and deliver any blow that he chose without interference, so long as the Green Knight could do the same to him in a year and a

day. Although Gawain perhaps cannot be blamed for not knowing beforehand that he was, in fact, in the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one does perhaps question how he, as someone in a narrative universe where magic has been proven to exist, did not consider the possibility beforehand.

Would, then, the Green Knight's party trick have been possible without his speech beforehand? It is sadly impossible to say. Magic here seems to be a visceral, immediate force, and by juxtaposing these two examples, Williams highlights a spectrum of magical representation in Medieval literature with the Loathly Lady's purely linguistic declaration on one hand and the Green Knight's preference (or dependency) on tangible violence on the other (p. 88-89). In my own opinion, while *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* depicts the speech act as an opening act to the real show of surviving a decapitation, *Wife of Bath's Tale*, by contrast, positions itself as a case study regarding the ability of speech alone to transcend the boundaries of the material world, with the Loathly Lady's earlier discourse on gentillesse priming the audience to accept her words as authoritative.

But upon whose authority did the Loathly Lady draw her power, and from where did the Green Knight learn to survive a decapitation? Were these abilities drawn from the natural properties of the world at large, or from God, or from infernal forces? Much in the actual texts surrounding the origins and foundations of these supernatural occurrences remain unclear. Williams herself notes the ambiguity regarding the source of these abilities, writing "how does one separate well-intentioned charms from malevolent necromancy, or fairy magic from other types of enchantment? How can one identify whether a wonder is produced by magical or mechanical means?" (p. 100).

Do, then, the Loathly Lady and the Green Knight's declarations cross over from mere description of magic that just happens to be occurring simultaneously, to something which can be (even controversially) classified as a speech act? If these utterances can be interpreted as a spell, or as some sort of speech act, under our modern understanding, would the same conclusions surrounding the ability of magic to affect social realities still hold water for Medieval and Early Modern audiences? I will return to Kieckhefer for a brief moment, who provides a critical theoretical framework for analyzing and understanding the magical practices of Medieval Europe through the inquisition (and capital-I Inquisition, at certain points, of the

more Spanish variety) of the supposed dichotomy between magic viewed as demonic and magic viewed as natural— a dichotomy which begins to break down at a rapid rate upon scrutiny.

The power of words (and similarly, the power of the imagination), seemed to occupy an ambiguous middle ground in Medieval thought. Kieckhefer questions whether, assuming words had magical efficacy, if it was due to a simple matter of communication, in that the magician's will could be imparted to the demons, and influenced those demons to carry out the magician's intention, or if perhaps the words themselves contained some intrinsic power, much in the same vein as the occult virtues of gems and plants. "Or," writes Kieckhefer, "was the magically efficacious imagination a power distinct from those of both demonic and natural magic?" (2022, p. 23)

Kieckhefer continues:

Many people in medieval society assumed there was magical power in words, particularly in names. The fourteenth-century writer Berengar Ganell began his Summa of Sacred Magic with a definition: "Magic is the science of binding evil and good spirits by the use of God's name, by their own names, and by the names of things of the world." It follows that "magic is a science of words," for every name is a word, but unlike other sciences of words (grammar, rhetoric, and others), magic deals with words that can coerce a spirit. Ganell goes on to say that bread is changed into the body of Christ with words, God created the world with words, and Christ performed miracles with words " Making no clear distinction between sacramental and creative words, or between the miraculous and the magical, Ganell held that words have inherent power, and names especially hold magical power. Frequently, the words used in magic are addressed to someone or something, and in those cases the magic has what Nicolas Weill-Parot refers to as an "addressative" character. When demons or angels were conjured, the words of the conjuration addressed to these spirits were the chief means of summoning them and getting them to do as one wished. But this was by no means the only addressative form of magic. Charms could be addressed to the illnesses they were meant to cure, or to the plants whose power they were meant to enhance. Magic that attempted to bring down and exploit the power of the heavenly bodies could be addressed to the stars and planets themselves or to the spirits seen as linked with them. Objects that one might have thought inanimate could be addressed. The shoulder blade of a gray amphibian could be conjured or solemnly commanded by the Trinity, the passion of Christ, God's names, and so forth, to drive a woman mad with love. It could always be said that the real power resided in the spirits, or in the heavenly bodies, or in the plants and other objects used for magic, and that the words were merely instruments of persuasion, supplication, or command.

Kieckhefer suggests here that names and sacred words appeared to be interpreted as functioning in the minds of practitioners as autonomous sources of power, rather than as conduits for other forces or as simple means of communication (p. 20), by utilizing what he refers to as an "addressative" form of magic,

that being such words which were addressed to the object or entity which were being acted upon, or which possessed some power that was being invoked.

The Loathly Lady and the Green Knight, however, invoke no such names, and are not explicitly described as summoning, conjuring, or manipulating anyone or anything in particular. Rather, they seem to be drawing on a wellspring of their own power, demarking a key difference between the magic found in literature and the magic that was typically intended to be used. The characters in stories seemed to have been able to get away with quite a bit more, without having to go through some intermediary. The flesh-and-blood practitioner, on the other hand, would more often be forced to negotiate. Whether this was a result of the fact that *Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Green Knight* are works of explicit fiction, and those attempting to do magic in the real world were perhaps less confident in their abilities, leading to a tendency to invoke anyone they could think of, who's really to say. Perhaps it could be argued that as characters in a fictional work, the Loathly Lady and the Green Knight possessed within themselves a sort of narrative power that the would-be magical practitioner of the real world would attempt to tap into with invocations and references to the narratives of the Bible, as such negating any need to call upon a third party.

Regardless of the reason for this divide, the perspective surrounding addressative magic challenges the aforementioned (and indeed, rather simplistic and overgeneralized) division between the idea of magic that functioned through pacts with the infernal realm and magic that manipulated natural properties and intrinsic energies of the world at large. Nor is it the case that the usage of magical language constituted a third, distinct category of occult operation. Kieckhefer writes:

That is not necessarily to say that God or the gods are the agents who work the magic behind the scenes. It is, rather, to say that there is power in the sacred that is mediated by names and other words and can be exploited for magical effect. This source of power is usually not demonic; although names can be used to coerce the demons, the names themselves may be sacred. But neither does this source of power reside within the natural world, as magical plants and gems do, or magically efficacious rays emanating from the stars and planets. The theorists may view words as instruments of either demonic or natural magic, but the way words actually function in magic suggests that something else is going on that is not fully explained in terms of either demonic or natural powers (p. 23)

Although the performative aspects of magical language emerge as particularly significant in Kieckhefer's analysis, the usage of language is wrapped up in the anatomy of the spells themselves, existing as an engine upon which their power rested.

Williams' examination of literary examples of magic, meanwhile, operates in fascinating counterpoint to Klaassen's extant historical examples. Where Klaassen shows us how language was actually utilized in magical practice, Williams unveils how these beliefs were transformed and elevated in fictional contexts. The Loathly Lady's speech-act magic represents a kind of idealized, distilled version of the power of the spoken word, purified of any extraneous bells and whistles and reduced to its basest essence. The tale's emphasis on the autonomous power of speech (without herbs, symbols, or ritual implements), suggests as well a fascination with eloquence and rhetorical persuasion as forms of gentillesse in their own right, which in combination with the Loathly Lady's ability to make decisions about her own life (therefore allowing her to step into a position of agency and power), enables her to perform magic. Not only does Williams then extend upon Klaassen's description of a successful magician existing in a position of Christian grace (having confessed, fasted, taken communion, etc), as the Loathly Lady's magical ability is implied to at least partially hinge upon her possession of noble character, she provides what Klaassen cannot: that being insight into how people at the time imagined how magic might work in idealized scenarios, free from the limitations of actual practice.

It is of interest to note here that while the distinction between demonic and natural magic is broken down, a juxtaposition between spoken and written magic is built. Kieckhefer notes how spoken word creates an immediate "power of presence" throughout the magician's performance. The magician, speaking or chanting or intoning or singing the words and names required to bring about their desired result, enters an altered psychological state enhanced by the coordination of magical words, gestures, and various accouterments. Indeed, the surreality of the scene produced could trigger and intensify the sense that supernatural forces were afoot. *Voces magicae* served a similarly important function in marking the magical operation as existing outside of ordinary language and the affairs of the day to day, and the incorporation of religious language, divine names, and Biblical passages added the final punch. Meanwhile, Kieckhefer suggests that the written word, rather than speaking (pun intended) to the power

of presence, instead points towards a power of absence. The written word, which may be carried as an amulet or dissolved into a potion or worn underneath the sole of one's shoe or tossed into the river or torn into pieces or burnt into ash, was believed to maintain a more ambiguous (though no less potent) form of "vicarious presence" (Kieckhefer 2022, p. 22).

Klaassen's discussion of everyday charms offers a perspective on what might uncharitably be referred to as the 'lowest common denominator' of magical practice, that being the most widespread and perhaps the most socially tolerated form of magic wherein occult practice blended (in some cases, near-seamlessly) with Christian devotion. He writes:

Charms are found commonly in medieval medical and recipe collections. They are also scattered broadly in the margins and flyleaves of manuscripts of every kind. They are the most broadly distributed and most common form of magic of the premodern period, although they might be said to be on the fringes of the category, somewhere between magic, liturgy, and medicine. Their use of basic Christian prayers, their often sophisticated and poetic use of Christian symbolism and narratives, and their uniformly good goals of healing or protection make them defensible as pious exercises. The implicit assumption that their effects were automatic is simply an extension of the same assumptions made about liturgical performances, particularly the sacraments, or the power of relics. As a result they are just as easily classifiable as popular religion or a kind of lay liturgy. The keepers of orthodoxy had an ambivalent relationship with this literature. They objected when charms were assumed to be automatic or contained unorthodox elements such as mysterious words or signs, but they also often counseled tolerance if they were used in a spirit of humility and true piety (2021, p. 20)

That is to say, simple, uncomplicated texts, quickly written down on parchment or scraps of fabric and worn on the body, demonstrated just how thoroughly magical thinking permeated daily life, especially in matters of protection and health, which were especially fragile at the time due to insufficient healthcare and the everyday dangers of existing in a society where being stabbed by a brigand while travelling was a reasonable concern. The charms' reliance on Biblical phrases and liturgical formulas, meanwhile, is evidence not only of a mere borrowing from religious tradition, an arena already rife with performative speech acts, but rather an entire worldview wherein sacred language naturally extended into practical magic.

Kieckhefer's theoretical framework bridges the approaches of practitioners both in fiction and in the material world, while adding crucial philosophical dimensions. His rigorous examination of how

Medieval thinkers categorized word magic – whether as demonic, natural, or something else entirely – helps explain why both the charms and literary examples could be simultaneously powerful and problematic to the people of the Medieval and Early Modern periods. The theoretical debates he uncovers suggest at the intellectual tensions underlying what Klaassen and Williams describe. Particularly significant is his demonstration of how magical language appropriated religious power while often being denied legitimate status, a dynamic visible in both the charms' Christian elements and the Loathly Lady's morally charged rhetoric. Kieckhefer also expands our understanding beyond the other scholars by extensively dealing both "high" ceremonial magic and "low" folk practices in his analysis, showing how words functioned across the entire magical spectrum.

An additional, especially rich, point of connection emerges between the three scholars when one considers the mechanism through which magical language gains its efficacy. Klaassen's written charms, Williams' performative speech acts, and Kieckhefer's distinction between spoken and written magic all grapple with how words become effective– whether through sound, inscription, or memory. This shared concern highlights a characteristically Medieval understanding of language as something tangible and potent, not just symbolic. The physicality of words matters equally whether we're examining a scrap of parchment with a Psalm verse, Chaucer's vivid depiction of transformative speech, or the intricate rituals of ceremonial magic. All three scholars, in different ways, show Medieval people treating language as a substance that could be manipulated, as well as deployed, in order to affect change in the world.

Ultimately, these works collectively demonstrate that medieval magical practices cannot be properly understood without accounting for the central role of language. From the humblest healing charm to the most elaborate fictional enchantment, words were never merely vehicles or vessels for magic– they *were* the magic. The interplay between these scholars' perspectives paints a vivid picture of a vibrant culture wherein the boundaries between prayer and spell, between sacred narrative and magical historiola, between rhetorical persuasion and supernatural transformation remained fluid and permeable. This synthesis suggests that what we might anachronistically separate as "religion," "magic," and "literature" were in fact intertwined strands of a broader medieval worldview that took seriously the creative and destructive power of the word. The endurance of these beliefs well into the early modern period, as all

three scholars imply, speaks to their deep roots in English cultural imagination and their ability to adapt to changing social and intellectual circumstances.

5. Magic, Men, and The Man

Michael Bailey writes in *From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages* (2001) of a shifting perspective on the matters of witches and witchcraft throughout Medieval times: while sorcerers prior to the thirteenth century were not framed as mighty actors in their own right, sowing evil and discord wherever they may go, but rather as poor, unfortunate souls who fell victim to the lies and trickery of the Devil himself, post-thirteenth century thought began to move away from calls for penance and reform and more towards an ideal of persecution. With the rise of magic among the learned elites of Western Europe, however, magical practices such as astrology, alchemy, and demonic magic began to draw increased scrutiny from the powers that be, fearing a threat to their institutional power (2001, p. 964). Magic began to divide into two disparate paths: the necromancy and spirit-summoning affairs of the university and clerical literati, and the common spells, charms, blessings, and talismans utilized by all strata of Medieval society (including the clergy).

This bifurcation of magic, that being between the scholarly and the vernacular, was only further complicated by the stringent social hierarchies which shaped its practice and perception. As elite magic only became more and more intellectualized, rooted in a ritual precision and hanging heavily upon notions of grace and uprightness of character, common magic remained deeply embedded in the fabric of day to day life. Highfalutin magical rituals, depending on a state of spiritual decontamination that was unrealistic for the average person to maintain, could not reliably meet domestic needs. These distinctions were not merely academic. Rather, as the Middle Ages ran their course and began to transition out into the Early Modern period, these practices began to be mapped onto the gender norms of the time as anxieties surrounding women's influence began to color perceptions of magic and witchcraft itself.

When we consider the social factors at play in the occult, the gendered dimensions in particular stand out as especially revealing. There's an idea of women's magic that frequently centers on charms, potions, and talismans relating to domestic concerns, that being healing, love, and protection, and often employed materials from household contexts. Looking at the protection charms used by witches previously analyzed, we see focuses on herb-gathering, on loaves of bread, and on hogs turds, of all things, which

suggest a certain comfort with bodily substances that sharply contrasts with masculine clerical fastidiousness. Those male practitioners with academic training, meanwhile, are viewed as tending more towards elaborate ceremonial magic involving ancient tomes, athames, and astrological calculations (Klaassen 2021, p. 5).

But does this strong gendered view of magic actually pan out when looking at the circumstances of the time? It is indeed the fact that protective charms have a certain communal significance, especially when one takes into account rituals to safeguard crops or livestock, or to keep away thieves or pests. Economic factors shaped magical practice as well. The contrast between silver rings and crystal stones utilized by some subsets of the population of magicians and the loaves of bread and hazel rods favored by others reveal how access to magic was in many cases mediated by wealth and status. The professionalization of some practitioners, that is the phenomenon of magicians charging for their work (Tabitha Stanmore, for instance, categorizes in her work 298 individuals charging for their services), also shows magic becoming integrated into local economies, however unofficially (Stanmore 2022, p. 75).

These social contexts go a long way to explain the remarkable persistence of magical speech throughout time and space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. For those without institutional power, be it through class or gender, the occult arts offered a tempting proposition: for the price of stepping outside the framework of acceptability and stepping away from the hegemony of the Church, one had the ability, if one was careful and clever and took pains to say the correct words in the correct order, win back some sort of agency for oneself. Magic distinguished itself through its existence as a flexible symbolic system which could serve both dominant and subordinate groups, adapt to rapidly-changing social, political, and economic realities, address needs unmet by institutional religion or the medical technology at the time, and perhaps of special importance to the practitioners, aid in lining their pockets with a little extra cash.

The analysis of gender and class is not a separate thematic inquiry, but rather fundamental to addressing the core problems posed by all three research questions provided earlier. Specifically, the possibility and perceived efficacy of a magical speech act is in many ways determined by a very crucial social context. A poor, elderly woman speaking a healing charm is an altogether different beast from a learned, male cleric

performing some complex ritual of high magic. Social reception and alleged power, as is often the case today as well, would be dictated by the speaker's position within hierarchies of gender and class.

5.1. Gender

Although the view of witchcraft in the modern collective consciousness is something very feminine, with witches near-universally being depicted as female (male practitioners of magic, meanwhile, are put in a sort of Merlin or Gandalf-shaped box), this was not always the case in the minds of those who discussed, wrote about, and practiced the magical arts. However, while harmful magic had long been condemned, the overwhelming stereotype of the female witch really only began to fully emerge in the 15th century. Crystallized in texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the author Heinrich Kramer's infamous claim that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable." (1486, p. 47) demonstrates this shift quite clearly, although the sentiment predates this publication. Rather, it's Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* in 1437 that first systematically linked witchcraft to the supposed weakness and lack of moral backbone in women, drawing on classical and Biblical misogyny alike (Bailey 2002, p. 123).

Bailey argues that this association was by no means inevitable: He presents earlier authoritative works, such as the *Canon Episcopi* dating from the tenth century, which dismissed fantasies of witchcraft as illusions crafted by demons as opposed to any sort of real threat. Buchard of Worms' eleventh-century *Decretum*, meanwhile, treated magic as a delusion requiring only penance, not persecution. Indeed, for much of the Middle Ages, clerical misogyny paradoxically made it more difficult for women to be perceived as capable of the organized, potent evil that would later be attributed to witches, and feared to the point of persecution and punishment. Women, viewed as spiritually weak, would ironically enough find partial protection in their perceived frailty—seeming moreso as the victim of the demons rather than their allies. The change, however, came when elite, male-dominated scholarly magic and folk maleficum (which was practiced by men and women alike), were conflated and consolidated into the new crime of witchcraft. By the 15th century, being a witch carried legal status, reimagined as a feminized threat and tied to the bodies and sexuality of women (Bailey 2002, p. 124). Bailey's work underscores that the classification of "witch" was not, in fact, an ancient archetype, but rather a late Medieval construct. As

witchcraft became a specifically female heresy, the social reality of magic thus evolved alongside cultural fears, with women's bodies standing as the battleground for a new kind of spiritual warfare.

Klaassen, meanwhile, in his examination of ritual manuscripts, further reveals how late Medieval and Renaissance men constructed masculine identity through the usage of esoteric practice. Unlike the stereotypical witch, who as we've just established became known from the 15th century as being typically female and operating through the usage of folk charms, the practitioners of ritual magic were predominantly educated, powerful, and oftentimes wealthy men whose power derived from mastery over the texts and precision in ceremony. Highlighting the dual nature of these manuscripts, Klaassen illustrates the vast divide between perception and reality.

On one level, these manuscripts present an idealized image of the magician as a commanding figure in a state of extreme Christian grace, capable of summoning spirits and unlocking the secrets of the divine alike. Broader cultural ideals of learned masculinity are reflected here, wherein intellectual dominance and spiritual authority were paramount— and indeed, perhaps even leading from one another. Underneath this performative gloss, however, lies a far more vulnerable reality. The practical operations detailed within these texts, be they love spells, divinations to catch a glimpse of the future, or invocations for wealth and protection, exposed private anxieties and fears surrounding celibacy and inadequacy in relationships, inferior social standing, and intellectual weakness. For clerics and scholars barred from traditional expressions of masculinity (marriage, siring children, engaging in physical combat), ritual magic offered a tempting alternative path to power (Klaassen 2007, p. 52).

However, Klaassen goes on to challenge this model of male magicians mired in anxiety and crisis, desperate to rectify perceived deficiencies. He writes:

For example, scholars have had to infer that the transgressive behavior of a priest, the initiation ceremony at a university, the actions of a poacher, or the self-conception of journeymen were responses to particular social circumstances and motivated by the desire to present or develop a particular masculine identity or character. They have done so convincingly for the most part. Yet the evidence remains circumstantial. Efforts to document this dialogue also have been heavily influenced by the anxiety and crisis models, both of which assume a dialogue between an interior state (usually a perceived deficiency) and external self-presentation (usually a compensation for

that perceived deficiency), a dialogue for which there is frequently very little evidence. (2007, p. 50)

Examples provided include a priest charged with carrying a weapon. The priest may be assumed to do so because he felt somehow unmanly due to his enforced celibacy and the fact that given his profession, he would never be able to marry a woman and continue his lineage assuming he adhered to the laws and guidelines set out for him. However, there's no proof that the desire to achieve a particular masculine ideal had anything to do with the priest's actions. Perhaps instead the priest came from a rank of the nobility who traditionally carried a sword, rather than being driven to brandish a weapon by some sense of need or lack (p. 51). That is to say, although certain practitioners may very well have turned to magic to compensate for emasculating factors such as poverty or vows of celibacy, many others likely embraced magical practice as a positive expression of elite, scholarly identity. The sexual ambiguities in the conceptualization of protests in the 17th and 18th centuries (such as the supposed maternal qualities of clergy), were not considered to be chiefly negative (p. 57).

This emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, which promises not only power but enlightenment as well, aligns with the humanist values of the Renaissance, where learning itself was considered to be a masculine virtue. This tension between public posturing and private desire makes the instructional manuscripts surrounding ritual magic particularly revealing. When juxtaposed with Michael Bailey's work on the feminization of the popular conception of witchcraft, Klaassen's analysis underscores a fundamental dichotomy in Medieval magic that began to emerge in the later portion of the time period. At the very same moment that male magicians were portrayed as active controllers of supernatural forces, female witches were (at least initially) portrayed as essentially passive vessels of demonic influence. Only starting in the 15th century did clerical authorities begin to redefine witchcraft as a predominantly female crime, linking it to unchecked sexuality (with the *Malleus Maleficarum* famously arguing that a woman's insatiable lust made her susceptible to the seduction of Satan) and moral weakness. Indeed, this gendered divide reflects broader structures and notions around power, stated simply as such: Women's magic was increasingly tied to a supposed biological and moral fragility. Men's magic, even when illicit, retained at minimum traces of intellectual legitimacy.

Bailey and Klaassen, when synthesized, demonstrate that magic was not only just a set of practices but a discourse of power, shaped by and in conversation with contemporary hierarchies. While the feminization of witchcraft served to police the autonomy of women, the masculinization of ritual magic allowed educated men to negotiate their own spiritual and social authority. Indeed, both scholars underscore how the classification of magic (be it learned or common, demonic or sacred) was never neutral, but rather deeply entangled with Medieval and Early Modern mores surrounding gender, knowledge, and control.

However, despite the dichotomy drawn in popular conception both then and now, Tabitha Stanmore's research on service magic reveals how magicians, both men and women alike, played vital roles in their communities by offering practical solutions for healing, love, and protection. Quantitatively analyzing over 500 examples of practitioners, she reveals that community-based cunning or folk magic was not, in fact, predominantly feminine as the narrative surrounding witch trials might suggest. Quite the opposite, in fact. Although women seem to have been far more likely to consult and cure through the abilities of fairies (with only one instance of a man utilizing the powers of fairies cropping up in Stanmore's data), and with all written charms examined being utilized by men, many practices, such as the use of the Paternoster as part of a cure, were used more or less equally (2022, p. 50). Even during the height of witch persecutions in the 16th and 17th centuries, demand for these services from both male and female magicians remained strong to the point of being almost overwhelming, demonstrating the enduring social value of magic despite official condemnation and persecution.

This nuanced picture challenges the popular feminization of witchcraft as described by Bailey. Although clerical authorities may have increasingly associated witchcraft with women's alleged moral and sexual deficiencies, Stanmore reveals that the world of actual magical practice was far more egalitarian than one might suspect. Despite the stereotype of the witch applying to the idea of malefica, the broader spectrum of service magic remained valued by communities. Klaassen's work on ritual manuscripts, while emphasizing a masculine, scholarly character, aligns with Stanmore's data showing men's near-monopoly on text-based magical practices. Stanmore, however, provides crucial context by demonstrating that outside these elite ecosystems, in the realm of everyday magic, women maintained significant presence and authority alike.

The intersection of these perspectives paints a complex portrait, one of premodern magic as both a reflection of and a challenge to the predominant social hierarchies of the day. Gendered divisions in magical practice (both perceived and those that actually existed) mirrored broader societal patterns. One can imagine, for instance, how men's greater access to education allowed them dominance over written, ritual, and literate magic, while the traditional roles of women kept them central in folk practices. Even still, the persistence of magic across all levels of society, even during periods of intense scrutiny, disapproval, and even persecution, speaks to its deep cultural roots and its role in society at large. Magic, to sum up, served as a contested space where boundaries were both reinforced and transgressed. Learned men could claim esoteric power through their mastery of texts, the names of demons and angels, and the copying of intricate ritual arrays. Women, meanwhile, could reclaim agency robbed from them in other aspects of life through the application of charms and folk wisdom. Be it through healing or unwitching, women were able to carve out a niche for themselves. Even in literature, figures like Chaucer's Loathly Lady wield transformative speech that challenges gendered norms and expectations, suggesting the potential of magic to complicate patriarchal hegemony even as institutional norms fought to suppress it. Far from being marginal, the persistence of magic instead illustrated the tensions and negotiations that displayed premodern society's understanding of power, knowledge, and gender.

5.2. Class

Distinctions of class (both the differentiation between noble and common and the differentiation between rich and poor) further shaped magical practice and the perception thereof. Similar to the divide between male and female practitioners of magic in the minds of the law, the Church, and the common people, so too did the divide between learned "high magic" and folk "cunning arts" mirror broader social hierarchies. University-trained clerics could practice necromancy as an intellectual pursuit, albeit a forbidden one, while the local cunning folk provided tangible services to the people in their communities. Even during times of increased scrutiny and persecution (as illustrated by much of Stanmore's data coming from records of legal proceedings against the magicians in question), communities continued to rely on the

services of these often lower-class practitioners despite the threat of legal involvement and extrajudicial executions (2022, p. 75).

Even the materials of magic served to reflect the class status of the practitioner expected to perform them: while certain herbs or a hazel branch (utilized, for instance, in a prayer to Mary against fever, which will be analyzed later) may have been more accessible to a garden-variety magician without land or title, and who was simply trying to make ends meet, other materials, such as protective inscriptions written upon parchment (which required a certain measure of literacy that the average person was unlikely to have) or silver rings (most notably introduced in a charm against the infection of rabies after one has been bitten by a rabid dog) marked a form of elite practice. A folk practitioner in a small town, who perhaps was exchanging their services for money but was equally likely to exchange magical spells for needed goods instead, was unlikely to either possess the skills required to inscribe the names of a smattering of angels upon a piece of parchment, nor were they likely to have spare silver rings lying about and waiting to cure some poor fool who had gotten bitten by a dog.

One could argue that the practice of service magic in Medieval and Early Modern England functioned as a site of class struggle, with community witches and magicians operating as proto-professionals who competed directly with institutional authorities for epistemic and economic control. From a Marxist perspective, these practitioners occupied a liminal space in feudal and proto-capitalist economies. While they were never fully integrated into the guild structures of urban trades, they also were not wholly marginalized as peasant labor. Of course, this economic autonomy threatened elite interests, as it siphoned resources and trust away from the sanctioned institutions of the day. However, this did not seem to act as much of a deterrent. Consider the 1523 case of John Thornton, presented to the Church courts in Leicester. At the time of his appearance before the Church, he had evidently been using ‘Moses rods’ (staves which were thought to carry at least a fraction of the power described in Exodus as given to Moses’ own staff) for healing purposes for upwards of thirty years (Stanmore 2022, p. 50).

The case of John Thornton, who seemed to operate for decades and do very well for himself with his ‘Moses rods’ despite Church scrutiny, only serves to demonstrate how service magicians persisted in their

trade, even as authorities increasingly framed such practices as not only spiritually dangerous, but economically damaging and subversive as well. Interestingly enough, in Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum*, the act of witchcraft is in fact compared to the act of counterfeiting, drawing an analogy between two acts perceived as illicit trades which undermined sanctioned systems surrounding value. Kramer writes:

And it is no valid objection to say that such wizards are rather apostates than heretics; for both these are offenders against the Faith; but whereas a heretic is only in some partial or total doubt with regard to the Faith, witchcraft in its very essence implies apostasy intent from the Faith. For it is a heavier sin to corrupt the Faith, which is the life of the soul, than to falsify money, which is a prop to the life of the body. And if counterfeiters of money, and other malefactors, are immediately sentenced to death by the secular courts, how much more just and equitable it is that such heretics and apostates should be immediately put to death when they are convicted. (1486, p. 158)

The *Malleus Maleficarum*'s vehement condemnation of witchcraft here is not merely an explosion of theological anxiety and concern for the immortal souls of the community. Rather, it exposes the material and ideological underpinnings of class struggle and conflict in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Kramer references here the punishment awaiting anyone who dares commit the crime of counterfeit or the falsification of money, which is of course death. Since then that fraud of the immortal soul by definition far outstrips the severity of fraud of anything mortal and material, it therefore seems to be a no-brainer that a similar consequence is levied against practitioners of witchcraft, who are (at least according to Kramer and his ilk), "counterfeiting" the works of God. Seemingly unwittingly, this position lays bare the economic stakes of persecuting witches— through the equation of magical practice with economic fraud and even sabotage, the author betrays not only a fear of spiritual degradation, but also a hefty fear of challenge to the economic order of the time.

Kramer's comparison of witchcraft to counterfeiting mirrors the very mechanism by which ruling ideologies, as Marx and Engels would later articulate, conflate threats to community norms and societal authority with threats to material power. Marx and Engels observe: "the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance." (1846) That is to say, the "ruling ideas" of any given society, for instance its dominant beliefs, cultural norms, and the values it instills in its members, are not universal or even neutral truths.

Instead, they reflect and serve the material interests of the dominant class, the class that controls the means of production. These ideas are spread and reinforced throughout generations, and the power of the ruling class is embedded within them. Much in the same vein that counterfeiting is seen to be wrong due to the fact that it undermines the State's control over the economy and the livelihood of those who live under its jurisdiction, so too does *Malleus Maleficarum* frame witchcraft as an even heavier sin, as it undermines the ideological control of the Church, the "life of the soul", which in turn secured the Church's wealth and authority.

By contrast, magicians, especially cunning folk and service magicians, operated outside of these sanctioned channels. By offering (often relatively affordable) remedies, love charms, protection spells, and unwitching services that directly competed with standard medicine and with the sacraments of the Church, these practitioners (who acted as a sort of proto-proletariat in contrast to the learned and literate ritual magicians of the upper echelons) resisted the enclaves of knowledge and resources occupied by the elite. Indeed, the *Malleus's* call for witches to be "immediately put to death" could be considered a very real instance of literal class warfare, with witch hunts primarily targeting lower-class practitioners as opposed to anyone with any sort of money or status. The economic autonomy of women, after all, threatened the hegemony of the Church, with tithes and indulgences that crossed over the border into extortive territory at times, and the hefty fees of the emerging medical profession.

6. The Thief and Andromalcius: A discussion of Austin and Searle

Even stepping (very, very briefly) away from the fantastical realm of magic, the concept of the intrinsic power of words to enact change on the world at large, particularly on social realities, is far from a foreign one. We turn now to a Pragmatics concept known as Speech Act Theory, heavily based upon the philosophical and linguistic workings of J.L. Austin and John Searle throughout the 60s and 70s (although of course, work that falls underneath and utilizes the frameworks of Speech Act Theory are carried out more or less regularly to this very day). Specifically, we turn to a class of words known as performatives, or performative utterances.

Austin himself defines performatives quite succinctly, and as such his initial definition will be provided and further commented upon:

Utterances can be found [...] such that

- A. they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constatae anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and
- B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something. (Austin 1955, p. 5)

The examples provided thereafter are that of a person issuing a declarative by (quite literally) declaring that they hereby name a ship (while splashing a bottle upon the hull in the traditional fashion), a person bequeathing a watch unto their brother in their last will and testament, and a person taking a woman as their lawfully wedded wife (here an example of a commissive). As Austin points out, to speak one of these sentences is by no means merely to report, describe, or assert that one is doing the action in question. Neither do these utterances have a truth value—indeed, to respond to someone naming a ship, willing a watch to their brother, or announcing that they hereby declare a woman as their wife with “nuh-uh” would be utterly nonsensical, not to mention sophomoric.

Consider the following utterance, written in B.L. Sloane MS 3846 (emphasis mine, adaptation to contemporary English in italics):

I conjure thee theefe by the Father and the Soon and the Holy Ghost; also **I conjure thee** Andromalcus that thou make the theife to have that paine that I do to this eie heare.

I conjure you, thief, by the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, also I conjure you Andromalcus that you make the thief have the same pain that I do to this eye here. (via Stallcup 2015)

This is an excerpt from a variant of a charm known as the Eye of Abraham. Five variants of the Eye of Abraham, gathered and analyzed by Stephen Stallcup, are represented in the article from which I drew this particular invocation of Andromalcus, who appears to be a variant of the 72nd demon of the Goetia, Andromalius, located in the text *Lemegeton Clavicula Salomonis* (or the Lesser Key of Solomon), who has an association with thieves and the punishment thereof. Stallcup describes the mechanism of this spell, where one takes the blood of an owl and draws an eye using a pen fashioned from the feather of a crow (why one would not simply use the feather of the owl already killed in pursuit of his blood, I personally am unsure). After drawing the eye, the magician is instructed to prick the center of the eye four times while reciting the conjuration above. (2015, p. 33). Upon completion of any Eye of Abraham variant, it would supposedly be the case that the thief's eye would be out, although Stallcup notes that it's unclear whether the thief would be blinded, or if their eye would literally pop out of the socket.

Regardless of the state of the eye in question, in this instance of an anti-thief charm, the speaker, that is, the would-be conjurer, is by no means making a statement of fact. That is to say, they were not informing the listener (neither the thief in question, nor the honorable Mr. Andromalcus) that they have been conjured per se, nor are they describing the act of conjuring in question. The speaker is also not describing their act of conjuring or reporting that they have conjured, are in the process of conjuring, or are planning to conjure at some point in the near future (perhaps in fifteen minutes or so, after doing some light tidying around the kitchen). The magician is, rather, in the very moment that they speak aloud *I conjure*, doing the conjuring as a function of speaking the act into existence.

This is, of course, assuming everything goes as smoothly as expected. It is occasionally (one might even say *often*) the case that the directive fails or is unsuccessful in one of multitudinous and varying ways.

Austin refers to this failure state of a performative as *infelicity*, or unhappiness (in contrast to a happy or *felicitous* performative, which is successful). Insincerity, errors in formula, lack of standing or authority, and other factors may all contribute to misfires (those such states where the act itself is carried out, but void) or abuses (those such states where the act is indeed carried out, but is hollow, backfires in some way, or has unintended consequences (p.16).

It is of interest to note here, that the utterance may fail as a directive, but succeed as a performative. That is to say, the conjuring is somehow successful, but the directive of giving an order or making a request is somehow infelicitous. Let's say then, for the sake of the argument, that the performative itself fails– the would-be conjurer fails to actually do any conjuring. The thief is left to do as thieves do, and Andromalcus doesn't appear to be much help, either. What may have happened here?

Austin provides the following qualifications a performative utterance must meet in order to be considered felicitous:

- (A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,*
- (A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.*
- (B. 1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and*
- (B. 2) completely.*
- (I. 1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further*
- (I. 2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently. (p. 15)*

The idea that a certain procedure has a certain social effect through the utterance of specific words by a specific person under a specific circumstance does indeed have to be accepted by society at large, and the person and circumstance in question has to be appropriate for the procedure. If the procedure is carried out fully, sincerely, and without mistake, and the people involved subsequently act as they are expected to, the performance is considered to have been felicitous. Austin, using the example of marriage, provides the example that someone declaring another person as their lawfully wedded wife might fail, for example, if one of the two parties are already married, if the wedding is taking place in a play and carried out by actors, or if someone is somehow lying (p. 16-17).

This is to say, that if the thief and Andromalcus are not conjured, it might very well be the case that either the would-be spellcaster is not suited to do the conjuring, or that the thief and/or Andromalcus are not suited to be conjured for any number of reasons. Drawing comparisons to earlier mentions of the act of marriage and the associated performative utterances, it may have been the case that the magician lacked the proper authority to conjure, similar to the idea that laypeople often do not possess the authority to marry two people without undergoing an experience in the seminary, becoming a civil official, becoming the captain of a ship at sea, or filling out a free online form from the Universal Life Church. Similarly, since two people cannot be married if they are not of age, or if they are already married to someone else, it could be the case that either the thief or Andromalcus possess some quality that makes conjuring them difficult or impossible, or perhaps, interestingly enough, they might already have been conjured by someone else.

There will naturally be some that argue that casting spells upon other people is an act which is doomed to be infelicitous no matter what, based on the minor fact that magic is unlikely to be real, and as such there is no accepted conventional procedure to bring about the effect. These people might argue that although magic can be recognized by magicians, it is not recognized by society at large, and therefore the performative would be doomed from the outset. This ignores a number of key points: first, there are many forms of performative (for instance directives such as orders and requests) which can indeed be disobeyed. The fact that they are disobeyed does not necessarily render them null: If someone has been ordered to do something by someone with the authority to order, and disobeys nevertheless, they cannot accurately be said to not have been ordered at all. Indeed, they are considered to have been issued an order all the same, and may experience consequences for their disregard.

Secondly, to politely disagree with Austin, there are a number of obscure rituals and processes not known, understood, or recognized by society at large that nevertheless enact change upon social realities. Take the existence of “cooties”, for example, a fictional disease caught and transmitted by children in the United States. The function of cooties is to render a child a sort of untouchable within their community, a marked person with whom one cannot come into contact with or even draw near. Cooties are often drawn along

gendered lines, with references made to ‘boy cooties’ and ‘girl cooties’, to enforce separation between sexes. A child can be said to have cooties often just by another child with the proper standing declaring it to be so. Subsequently, by that declaration, the child with cooties experiences a change in their social reality— that is, becoming a pariah. The illocutionary act (that is, the force or intention behind the utterance) is to bestow cooties. The perlocutionary act (the effect the utterance has upon the listener) is that cooties are bestowed. Although to anyone outside of elementary school age (and indeed, often to anyone outside of that particular school), the assertion that a certain child has cooties is nonsensical, that does not change the fact that the social condition as experienced by the child with cooties is very real indeed.

So too with magic. Although international modern society may not recognize magic as real, for those in communities where the authority of magicians to bless and curse are recognized, the fact that magic is not considered real by other institutional authorities is of very little consequence. Much as in the case of marriage (or cooties), curses, blessings, and other magical speech acts can nevertheless be treated as “real” due to their status as an acknowledged aspect of social life in a given community, which is engaged with and maneuvered around and respected by various governing bodies. Even if magic is not real per se, and I am certainly not making any claims on that front, it is nevertheless a social force (albeit a stronger one in bygone years). The application of magic may encourage others, compel them to action, ward them away, or indeed, scare them out of their wits.

Stanley Tambiah, echoing this sentiment, argues that the working of magic is not in its material outcome but in its capacity to organize collective meaning. He writes:

... To view most ritual and magical acts as if they were directed to the purposes of scientific activity—to discover natural causes, predict empirical consequences in terms of a theory of causation is inappropriate and not productive of maximum understanding. Analogical thought of Western science and of primitive ritual have different implications. Like “illocutionary” and “performative” acts ritual acts have consequences, effect changes, structure situations not in the idiom of “Western science” and “rationality” but in terms of convention and normative judgement, and as solutions of existential problems and intellectual puzzles. These orders of thought and action after all are to be found in Western societies as well—they co-exist with science and thrive outside its field of action or relevance. (p. 471)

The “persuasive validity” of magic, according to Tambiah, is thoroughly misunderstood when the lens of empirical analysis is applied in the interests of judging some sort of scientific merit. Of course, ritual and magic alike have very little to do with applied science in a strict sense. Rather, by the very implementation of a magical act, a property is “imperatively transferred” to the recipient, be it object or person (p. 471).

Indeed, magic seems uniquely illuminating, insofar as it lays bare the latent “magic” inherent to all performative acts. Austin’s own unease with borderline cases such as theatrical declarations or poetic language reveal a tension underlying the very hypothesis he seeks to posit: if it is indeed the case that performatives derive force from collective agreement, then their power is always, so to speak, conjured in some form. On a base level, how exactly does the sorcerer’s incantation differ from the judge’s sentencing, from the president’s oath of office? Is there something special here about magical speech, to the point where a distinct genre or subgenre classification is warranted? Both the judge and the president possess authority no more tangible than that of the sorcerer. Their true ability lies in their capability of influencing others to adhere to a new shared social reality, a subject upon which John Searle has quite a lot to say, especially in regard to his discussion of *institutional facts*, those facts which require human institutions for their existence (1995, p. 2).

While it may be tempting to assume that these three occupations (the sorcerer, the president, the judge) are very different in their function and status in society, the sorcerer, president, and judge all make a marvelous living saying fancy words while wearing a very specific outfit. There are far more throughlines than might first occur to the casual observer. The judge declares one guilty. The president declares the nation to be at war. The sorcerer declares one to be cursed. These declarations, if society at large refused to treat them with any more seriousness than someone declaring that the sky is green, would have no effect whatsoever. They would only be blown away by the wind, leaving their speakers feeling a bit silly in the end. All three people, the sorcerer, the president, and the judge alike, are only considered authoritative or powerful in any way thanks to buy-in from the community they inhabit.

How, then, do we discuss magic under the frameworks outlined by Austin and Searle? Austin himself helpfully (although somewhat controversially) divides performatives into five categories on the basis of

illocutionary act, that is, grouping by like forces. What's more, he provides a handful of verbs that appear to fall under each designation. Of most interest is the category of exercitives, those utterances wherein a speaker exercises authority, influence, or somehow asserts their rights and/or power towards another party. Exercitives compel another person toward or against action, or declare certain acts to be permissible or impermissible. Verbs indicating the presence of an exercitive, according to Austin, are order, command, sentence, direct, plead, and pray (p. 150). Note here that authority in the traditional sense, that being the occupancy of a higher position on a hierarchy in relation to the listener, is not necessarily required. Though it would be flouting social tradition indeed for someone from a lower position, be that class, rank, or otherwise, to exert their power on someone above, it is by no means impossible, and indeed, there are exercitives which enable one to do just that. Not only the mighty possess the ability to change social and institutional realities. One may absolutely choose to deliver an exercitive from underneath. Harkening back to B.L. Sloane MS 3846, *I conjure* reads as a very prototypical example of an exercitive. In saying *I conjure*, one is delivering an order, or perhaps a request, or even a plea, depending on how confident the magician is in their authority, and in their ability to influence the behavior of the thief (and of Andromalculus).

Equally relevant to the topic at hand are John Searle's influential descriptions of various classifications of illocutionary acts, which differentiate and expand themselves not only from Austin's classifications, but from one another as well, through their placement on multiple axes (1975). An order differentiates from a promise, for instance, through the speaker's objective to either force the listener to perform some action as opposed to the speaker planning to take some objective unto themselves. Other differences take on their flavor from their affiliation to either side of the word vs. world dichotomy, as to whether the act intends to follow from the preexisting circumstance in the world at large, or perhaps dictate a new circumstance and change the world to match (p. 346). Searle refers to this as *direction of fit*, drawing a distinction between *word-to-world*, wherein one attains to match their words to the material conditions which already exist (such as in the case of descriptions and explanations) and *world-to-word*, wherein one endeavors to change the world to match their words (such as in orders and requests).

Searle goes on to politely criticize, discuss, and expand upon Austin's five taxonomic categories of performatives. As mentioned prior, Austin's class of exercitives are perhaps of most interest when discussing magical acts, encompassing the concepts of ordering, directing, commanding, begging, and the like (p. 351). However, Searle notes that these exercitives, which appear to hinge upon some act of authority on behalf of the speaker, are only partially defined by Austin along these lines. Instead, he offers the following categories of interest.

First, declarations. Searle offers examples such as "I resign", "I excommunicate you", and "You're fired".

Searle writes thusly:

It is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality; successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world: if I successfully perform the act of appointing you chairman, then you are chairman; if I successfully perform the act of nominating you as candidate, then you are a candidate; if I successfully perform the act of declaring a state of war, then war is on; if I successfully perform the act of marrying you, then you are married. (1975, p. 358)

Is this the case for a magical spell? If I conjure another person, is that person then conjured? Is that person blessed by the very act of my blessing them, and cursed as consequence that I have had them cursed? As Tambiah wrote, has that person had some property (be it blessed, cursed, or conjured) "imperatively transferred" to them? If we accept the magical act as a performative utterance, the answer seems to be yes. After all, as Searle wrote, (assuming the act is successfully performed) if one appoints you chairman, then you are chairman. If you are nominated as a candidate, then you are a candidate. If one blesses you, then you are blessed. If one curses you, then you are similarly cursed, with all the benefits, drawbacks, rights, and responsibilities that come along with the designation. In the case of the magical directive, one can certainly successfully order someone (a thief, a demon) to do something. Whether that order is then followed is quite another matter entirely. This may hold additionally true for conjuring—perhaps it is the case that one can conjure, but whether or not something is indeed conjured is an entirely separate matter.

Searle goes on to state that declarations, solely through their successful performance, do indeed alter the status of the object or objects being performed upon. Assuming this is the case, much as Tambiah stated,

simply by speaking the words “I conjure thee theefe” and “I conjure thee Andromalculus”, the thief and Andromalculus, would instantly take on a new quality. Much as if an invisible tag has been applied to them that reads ‘conjured’, they are from that moment on conjured as so, adherent to all the consequences and responsibilities thereof. This similarly tracks in the other aforementioned examples: blessing the blessed, cursing the cursed, and many other such cases. However, the conjuring discussed earlier feels somehow different, perhaps because the illocutionary force is far more similar to that of an order.

Searle’s proposed class of directives steps in to remedy this issue. With such offered examples as “I order you to leave” as well as such verbs as “dare” and “challenge” and “permit”, they stand in light contrast to Austin’s exercitives, which despite admission of concepts such as begging and pleading nevertheless hint at the requirement of possessing some shape or form of the ability to change institutional and social realities. Any fool can issue a directive (Searle 1979, p. 22). If I double-dog dare a person to (for instance, as I was once double-dog dared during my undergraduate tenure) to ring the doorbell of the president of a certain university and then run away, then that person takes on the property of having been double-dog dared, regardless of whether they actually carry out the action in question. If I challenge a person to defeat me in a game of mini-golf, they similarly take on the property of having been challenged, regardless of whether they win, lose, draw, or even agree to play mini-golf with me at all. If I permit you to drink your coffee on my balcony, that permission stands whether or not you choose to indeed have your coffee out on my balcony, or if you prefer to have it at the table instead. Much in the case of orders mentioned earlier, where someone who has been ordered to do something whether or not they actually follow through, the conjuring present in B.L. Sloane MS 3846 may behave in a similar way.

The imperative mood, utilized to press commands, requests, or instructions, is perhaps a bit obviously the most commonly seen structure in the magical acts I will be examining. Even in fictional examples, mystical ends through the use of the occult are often brought about through the issuing of a command. Consider again Shakespeare’s *MacBeth*, although we will now be addressing Lady MacBeth in conjunction with the Weird Sisters. The Witches declare that “none of woman born shall harm MacBeth” (Act IV, Scene 1), not as mere speculation or by passive prediction, but as a constitutive act that later shapes MacBeth’s own actions, trapping him in a web of self-fulfilling declarations. Indeed, this prophecy (which

perhaps additionally functions as a spell in and of itself) holds true to the end of the play— MacBeth is slain by MacDuff, who was delivered through the use of a Caesarian section. He was not ‘born’, in the traditional sense, through vaginal delivery, but rather surgically extracted. For the purposes of the play, this counts as MacDuff being “none of a woman born” in an almost genie-like turn of meaning, further hallmarking the importance of exact verbiage in the magical act.

Lady MacBeth further amplifies this theme in her own right. Her invocation of “unsex me here”, and her command to the spirits, “take my milk for gall” (Act I, Scene 5), mirrors the sympathetic magic (magic based upon the principle that like produces like, wherein the magical act or tool mirrors what the practitioner intends to bring about in the real world) of Medieval curses, where words physically alter the body. Yet Shakespeare subverts the idea of a successful performative— Lady Macbeth’s speech actually fails to fully erase her humanity, as her later guilt during the Out Damned Spot monologue attests, underscoring the play’s tension between magical linguistic potency and the limits of the human heart.

Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him. (Act V, Scene 1)

In contrast with Chaucer’s Loathly Lady, whose speech successfully transforms her, Lady MacBeth is left to grapple with the consequences of an incomplete transformation. So too does the play’s climax expose the fragility of performative authority— MacBeth’s reliance on the promises of the witches later ends in his own demise at the hands of someone not bound by the chains of prophecy. Shakespeare seems to critique here the premise of magical language as well as aligning with previous Medieval anxieties surrounding demonic deception: the power of language perhaps derives not from its intrinsic efficacy but from the speaker’s and hearer’s belief.

The thief-charming (and harming) ritual of the Eye of Abraham, the Weird Sisters’ prophecies, and Lady MacBeth’s failed invocation all have one thing in common: the exemplification of the precarious power of performative utterances. Empirical causality has no authority here. Rather, the efficacy of these acts hinge

upon collective recognition of their abilities. Austin's framework clarifies why such utterances might succeed (such as in the Witches' prophecy) or fail (such as in Lady MacBeth's case) through the discussion of felicity conditions. Searle, meanwhile, expands and revises the categories Austin posits, revealing how magical speech both confers certain properties and compels action, such as in the case of Andromalculus being ordered to punish. Yet, as Tambiah reminds us, the *persuasive validity* of magic rests upon the scaffolding provided by the social sphere in which it exists. To conjure a demon, much as in the case of declaring guilt or declaring war, imposes a new reality upon the recipient of such an act, upheld through a collective buy-in. Although the thief's eye might not literally burst, the social consequences of being marked could be just as painful (painful in a quite literal sense, as well, if the placebo effect is brought into it). Much like Andromalculus lurking in the charm and waiting to strike, the power of words resides in the faith that they matter.

7. Analysis of Extant Magic

For the purposes of analysis, I have gathered spells, charms, and curses from various sources, including Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), a skeptical critique on witchcraft, witches, and the persecution and hunting thereof in contemporary England, and an occult commonplace book (similar in many ways to a diary or journal) written and curated by a Robert Ashley (ca. 1612), English lawyer and translator. Other spells have been pulled from the digital collections of manuscript collections from British libraries, such as the Sloane Collection. Each spell will be provided (in full, if possible, and in excerpt with reference to where the full example should be found in two cases, in which the full text extended to several pages), categorized and discussed in relation to Austin and Searle's classifications, and then compared and contrasted against one another. The spells have been loosely divided into three broad categories: that of medical magic, which is to say healing charms performed with the intention to rid the recipient of some disease, magic of protection, such magical workings performed with the purpose to ward off danger, theft, or other misfortune, and a third category I have decided to (perhaps cheekily) refer to as minding other people's business. Minding other people's business constitutes a large spectrum of occult activity, from a desire to gain knowledge, to find treasure, or to interfere with matters of the heart. I will begin first with perhaps the largest group, that of healing charms, and continue on from there.

7.1. Medical Magic

Medieval healing charms, whether they invoked the saints, commanded demons, or whispered secrets to donkeys (yes, really), operated at a key intersection of language, belief, and material ritual. Not only were these texts mere superstitions, but rather performative acts, wielding speech in such ways that echo J.L. Austin and John Searle's theories surrounding illocutionary force. In many cases, these charms were used to deal with illnesses that could not reliably be treated by the medical technology of the time: in the case of

a fever, it often had to be waited out, and if one was bitten by a rabid dog, often the only thing one could do was pray. As such, these charms represent not only the anxieties of the time, but the determination of these practitioners to do something, anything, against incredibly daunting opposing circumstances.

The first example to contend with is a charm directed to Saint Mary, from (f.156va) and later referenced by Tony Hunt (1990), which reads as follows:

Lady seint Marie, I prey þe in þe worship of þe seven crosses þat þou cussid þi son on þhe rode, so save þis man of þe evel þe which men clepe þ fevre, be it hot oþer cold, and þat in tokenyng of his hele þis 3erd of hasil mote joyne togidre.

In translation to modern English: Lady Saint Mary, I pray to you in the worship of the seven crosses that as you kissed your son on the rod (cross), so save this man of the evil which men call the fever, be it hot or cold, and as a sign of his healing may you join this staff of hazel together.

The charm as printed here opens with a direct petition, that being “I prey þe” (I pray thee). Albeit not nearly so forceful as a conjuration (for instance, “I command”), this is nevertheless a directive speech act spoken with the aim of compelling some sort of action, in this case through intercessory prayer. Later in the charm, the speaker continues with the imperative mood (“so save þis man”). These are both straightforward examples of one of Austin’s exercitives to start with. Austin himself cites the verb “pray” as a signpost for the presence of an exercitive illocutionary force, and even without a trademark requesting or ordering-type verb in the second instance, the imperative mood makes the speaker’s intent clear (Austin 1955, p. 150). So too is this a straightforward example of Searle’s directives, following his outlined deep structure *I verb you + you Fut Vol Verb (NP) (Adv)*: I prey þe (...) þat þou (...) save this man (1979, p. 22). The speaker is attempting to alter reality by invoking the aid of Mary (Mary, mother of Jesus, as opposed to Magdalene, as is later confirmed by the reference to Mary’s son). Not only is reference made to Mary, but also to the crucifixion of Christ (“þi son on þe rode”) as well as “þe seven crosses”, which could be covert references either to the Seven Last Words (which are moreso actually small sayings or proverbs). Furthermore, the speaker harkens back to Mary kissing the wounds of Jesus on the cross, tying the healing act to affective piety (a common medieval motif), aligning with Kieckhefer’s observation that magic taps into the sacred through embedding itself in orthodox narratives. Not only words, but material binding are utilized in this instance. A “3erd of hasil” (a rod or staff of hazel wood)

must reunite as a sympathetic sign of the patient's successful healing. What's more, the types of fever mentioned ("hot ober cold") suggest humoral alignment, implying the charm adapts to natural cycles.

The next example of healing magic can be found in the fourteenth chapter Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, which deals with documenting charms to get a thorn out of a limb, a bone out of one's throat, and to ease a toothache. Scot, writing as follows, claims: "There be innumerable charmes of conjurers, bad physicians, lewd surgians, melancholike witches, and couseners, for all diseases and greefes; speciallie for such as bad physicians and surgions knowe not how to cure, and in truth are good stuffe to shadow their ignorance" (1584, p. 176). Indeed, many medical charms do surround the curing and easing of ailments that could not be dealt with the medical technology of the time. The following charm, purported to be against the biting of a mad (rabid) dog. Rabies as an illness is commonly known to be incurable even today once symptoms set in, and even before, a long and painful course of medication is required to prevent onset of the disease after exposure. The charm reads as follows:

Put a silver ring on the finger, within the which these words are graven ✕ Habay ✕ habar ✕ hebar ✕ & saie to the person bitten with a mad dog, I am thy saviour, loose not thy life: and then pricke him in the nose thrise, that at each time he bleed. ✕ Otherwise: Take pilles made of the skull of one that is hanged. ✕ Otherwise: Write upon a peece of bread, Irioni, khiriora, esser, khuder, feres; and let it be eaten by the partie bitten. ✕ Otherwise: O rex gloriæ Jesu Christe, veni cum pace: In nomine patris max, in nomine filii max, in nomine spiritus sancti prax: Gasper, Melchior, Balthasar ✕ prax ✕ max ✕ Deus I max ✕ (1584, p. 196)

We see here a clear example of voces magicae, those nonsense words utilized to bring a sense of authority or liminality to an occult working. "Habay habar hebar", according to my own brief research, are words which appear only here, as opposed to any other (pseudo-)religious context. These words were then to be engraved upon a silver ring (whether these words should be engraved upon the inside or the outside of the ring, or if the placement of the engraving matters at all, is left unclear in Scot's account), and placed a ring upon the finger of the person bitten by the rabid dog. Silver, of course, was used over the course of millennia from pre-history for a variety of medical purposes, primarily for purification and wound care. Even from the writings of Herodotus, there are accounts that Persian kings would only drink water that had been stored in silver containers, and Hippocrates himself utilized silver preparations in the treatment

of ulcers, even despite the fact that silver's antimicrobial properties would first become known to empirical researchers thousands of years in the future (Alexander 2009, p. 289).

Accompanying the written inscription, we have the direct address to the victim: *I am thy saviour, loose not thy life*. Here we have a declarative statement, one that puts the practitioner in an almost divine position over the afflicted person, mirroring the healing ability of Jesus Christ. Following this is a standard command, an order unto the recipient to not lose their life. The patient is then administered a course of what almost appears to be a form of symbolic bloodletting— although one cannot draw much blood from the nose, and as such likely only a few beads of blood were shed with each prick, it nevertheless opens an additional egress from the body, perhaps allowing the affliction an avenue for escape.

Several alternative methods are also provided. Pills made from the skull of a hanged man, for instance, which gave me great pause as I tried to determine whether these were carved and rounded chips of skull, or a skull which had been powdered and then pressed into pills. This makes at least a surface level of sense— by taking into the body something which has already died (and through very ill-fated circumstances at that), there is an avenue through which misfortune and untimely death can be directed off of oneself. There is also a method for inscribing further voces magicae upon a piece of bread (irioni, khiriora, esser, khuder, feres), and much in the same manner as the pills made from the skull of a person who was hanged until dead, allowing said piece of bread to be ingested by the person bitten. This calls back to Kieckhefer's reference to written charms occasionally having their ink flaked off and dissolved into potions and then subsequently drunk: the magical inscription, taken into the body, is then enabled to take full effect free from prying eyes. Finally, a prayer to Jesus Christ is provided, with reference also given to the three wise men, Gasper (Caspar), Melchior, and Balthazar.

Scot provides his own commentary directly after providing the charm in question:

But in troth this is verie dangerous; insomuch as if it be not speedilie and cunninglie prevented, either death or frensie insueth, through infection of the humor left in the wound bitten by a mad

dog: which bicause bad surgions cannot cure, they have therfore used foolish cousening charmes. But Dodonæus in his herball saith, that the hearbe Alysson cureth it: which experiment, I doubt not, will proove more true than all the charms in the world. But where he saith, that the same hanged at a mans gate or entrie, preserveth him and his cattell from inchantment, or bewitching, he is overtaken with follie. (p. 176)

Scot is correct here that if not “speedilie and cunninglie prevented”, frenzy and death will follow in a patient bitten by a rabid dog. Unfortunately the treatments of the time (oftentimes cauterization) were similarly dubious, with the immediate closing of the wound leaving little chance for the infection to be flushed out before it could take hold (Rohde 2020, p. 74). When contending with rabies, a virus which poses great peril to humanity even today, praying and attempts at magic might have worked just as well if not better than anything else.

Immediately after the charm to heal one bitten by a mad dog, Scot provides another charm against an injurious animal bite, this time to heal against the sting of a scorpion:

*Against the biting of a scorpion.
Saie to an asse secretlie, and as it were whispering in his eare; I am bitten with a Scorpion. (p. 176)*

Here, interestingly enough, we see no command to any force, be it human, demonic, or divine. Nor is there any instance of a petition, prayer, or request, as we’ve seen before in the healing charm against fever addressed to Mary. The victim of a scorpion sting, a sting which would be quite painful and possible lead to some sort of long-term tissue damage or necrosis, is rather instructed to make their way to the nearest donkey and whisper in its ear that one has, indeed, been bitten by a scorpion.

Is this, then, even a performative utterance at all? The answer appears to be no. *I am bitten with a Scorpion* is a constative statement, that is to say, a statement of fact, which can either be true or false (Austin 1955, p. 3). If the victim of a scorpion sting has, in fact, been stung by a scorpion, the statement is true and valid (despite my temptation, I will not be succumbing to the urge to split hairs over the terminology of scorpion bites versus scorpion stings). However, Austin repeatedly insists throughout his lectures that performances are such utterances with an illocutionary force. That is, they are utterances

spoken with the intention of performing some action. Indirect speech acts, after all, are a very real phenomenon— if one is to say, for example, “it’s a bit chilly in here”, that might well be a disguised request to close the window or to crank up the heat. Even in the case of statements of fact, Austin himself meditates for multiple paragraphs on the validity of a concrete barrier between constative and performative utterances.

“this contrast is not so sound either: for, to take statements first, connected with the utterance (constative) ‘John is running’ is the statement ‘I am stating that John is running’: and this may depend for its truth on the happiness of ‘John is running’, just as the truth of ‘I am apologizing’ depends on the happiness of ‘I apologize’.” (p. 55).

“I am bitten with a Scorpion” fails Austin’s *hereby* test (wherein performatives can sometimes be identified by inserting ‘hereby’ into the sentence, for example, “trespassers will be prosecuted” becomes “notice is hereby given that trespassers will be prosecuted”). “I am hereby bitten with a Scorpion” or “notice is hereby given that I am bitten with a Scorpion” does not express the speaker’s true intent, and sounds a bit silly, besides (p. 58).

What, then, is the speaker’s true intent in saying “I am bitten with a Scorpion”? Is it in fact an example of an indirect speech act, wherein one explains one’s plight to the donkey with the expectation that the donkey then does something about it? And from where, exactly, does the power for this working stem? No invocations of names are made, nor are there any Christian elements of which to speak. Instead, the donkey becomes a silent witness to the injurious act which has befallen the person, and perhaps acts as a recipient for the affliction itself, the poison from the scorpion being transferred over, so to speak, through speech. Scot sadly provides no further commentary here as he did with the charm against the biting of a mad dog to inform us whether or not the donkey is intended to fall ill in the person’s place, or if the scorpion’s sting is simply intended to heal through the mechanism of being gossiped about to a beast of burden. The associations of asses and donkeys as hardy and foolish (see: the term *jackass*) might have also played a role, as the donkey may have been unintelligent enough to accept the scorpion’s sting onto itself, and of substantial enough constitution in order to withstand it.

Our next charm, a spell to heal an unspecified illness, also from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, reads as follows:

*Take the sicke man by the hand, and whisper these wordes softlie in his eare, I conjure thee by the sunne and moone, the gospell of this daie delivered by God to Hubert, Giles, Cornelius, and John, that thou rise and fall no more. * Otherwise: Drinke in the night at a spring water out of a skull of one that hath beene slaine. * Otherwise: Eate a pig killed with a knife that slew a man. (p. 176)*

We see here another example of conjuring a recipient party, in this case to “rise and fall no more”, that is to say, to heal from their sickness and not succumb to the sickness again in the future. Much in the case of the charm against a scorpion sting, we have the aspect of whispering into someone’s ear. But rather than whispering into the ear of an animal, in that case a donkey, we see here that the command to be healed is whispered into the ear of the patient themselves. We also see an aspect of physical contact between the magician or healer performing the charm and the recipient in the form of hand-holding.

This charm seems to draw its authority from two distinct sources. The first is astrological forces, that being the sun and the moon, referencing a pre-existing tradition of planetary magic and making use of the purported abilities of invoking (or evoking) the energy of a specific celestial body. The second are a number of named figures: Hubert, Giles, Cornelius, and John. Given the absence of anyone named Hubert, Giles, or Cornelius in the Bible (although there are Johns aplenty, for instance John the Baptist and John the Apostle), these names are likely in reference to popular saints from the time, for instance St. Giles, who is the namesake of several churches, and most notably, a cathedral in Edinburgh.

Although there is no bloodletting as in the case of the charm against the biting of a mad dog, we do see here the presence of two separate gruesome remedies, should the hand-holding and the whispering and the invocation of the sun and moon and the saintly boys’ crew fail to get the job done. First, one has the option to drink spring water out of the skull of one who was slain. The charm specifically dictates that it must be a person who was slain, as opposed to someone who died of natural causes or perhaps met with an accident of some kind. Less specific, perhaps, than the charm against rabies, which called for pills made from the skull of one that had been hanged, but morbid nevertheless. The second option is, under the prerequisite of owning a knife that had once been used to take the life of a person, using that very same knife to kill a pig, and then feed its flesh to the ill person. Once again we see the implementation of some aspect of violent death involved in the cure of a difficult illness, possibly as some means to attract

sickness and misfortune from the patient under a principle of sympathetic contagion. Alongside these gruesome acts, however, is a declaration of conjuring that has been seen before in our other examples. “I conjure thee by the sunne and moone, the gospell of this daie delivered by God to Hubert, Giles, Cornelius, and John, that thou rise and fall no more” follows the same structure as the conjuring of the thief and Andromalcus observed in the previous section, although here we see the sick man conjured (through the powers of the sun and the moon and the gospel delivered to Hubert, Giles, Cornelius, and John) to “rise and fall no more”, or to become well.

The final charm in this category, likewise taken from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, is transmitted in the form of an anecdote, which I alongside many readers may find to be amusing. Scot writes as follows:

A Gentlewoman having sore eies, made hir mone to one, that promised hir helpe, if she would follow his advise: which was onelie to weare about hir necke a scroll sealed up, whereinto she might not looke. And she conceiving hope of cure thereby, received it under the condition, and left hir weeping and teares, wherewith she was woont to bewaile the miserable darkenesse, which she doubted to indure: whereby in short time hir eies were well amended. But alas! she lost soone after that pretious jewell, and thereby returned to hir woonted weeping, and by consequence to hir sore eies. Howbeit, hir jewell or scroll being found againe, was looked into by hir deere friends, and this onelie posie was contained therein:

*The divell pull out both thine eies,
And *etish in the holes likewise.*

** Spell the word backward, and you shall soone see this slovenlie charme or appension.*

Firstly, we must address the couplet contained within the scroll, which seems to stand in utter contrast to the purpose of the talisman in question. First, there is a threat, wish, or intention for the devil to pull out not only one, but rather both eyes of the patient, which is perhaps excessive (after all, even the infamous code of Hammurabi demanded only one eye for an eye). Furthermore, although the devil pulling out both of one’s eyes would indeed be an instant and efficient cure for soreness of the eyes, it is not what I would consider to be a desirable treatment. Most of those afflicted with eye soreness, I might imagine, would prefer to undergo a treatment that would allow them to retain use of the organs in question. Secondly, there’s an especially curious wish (or threat, or intention) in the second line of the couplet: “and etish in the holes likewise”. Following the asterisk downwards, Scot notes that if we spell the word backwards, the

“slovenlie charme or appension” will be revealed to us consequently. Doing so, it becomes apparent that the scroll prompts the devil to pluck out both of the patient’s eyes, and likewise to shite (shit) within them, which is not only unhelpful for the ailment at hand, but both rude and unsanitary to boot.

Scot notes immediately after that “according to the saieng of Plato; If a mans fansie or mind give him assurance that a hurtfull thing shall doo him good, it may doo so”. Was it the case that the placebo effect was such that even a curse, hidden within a securely sealed scroll, would do the patient some sort of good? Or was it perhaps the case instead that a curse kept under tight binding and concealed from the world would then somehow have the opposite effect, or that the curse and the ailment somehow cancelled one another out? Certainly this might be considered a form of demonic magic, a circumstance where the devil is named as the agent but his violence is instead repurposed for healing.

7.2. Protection

We now come to our second section, which is largely representative of protection magic. As mentioned prior, this constitutes all manner of protection that is not explicitly healing or medical in nature, for instance, wards against thievery. Our example in the previous section, the whole bit about conjuring thieves and Andromalcus, is similarly party to this category. While Andromalcus unfortunately does not make an encore appearance in any of these spells, thieves most certainly do, as do a number of witches, holy herbs, Jesus Christ, various cursed body parts, and hog turds.

We first address an orison from the Sloane collection:

Wo-so wol this oureson saie
 Be ny3th other be daie
 if any man be so vn-sele
 That wold thi good stele
 Thi schep that ben in thi fold
 3ounge other the hold
 Other any other good bat is in feld
 With this oureson bou schalt it scheld
 Al round thou schal gon a-bout
 Be it with-inne hous other with-out
 And this oureson bou saie with deuocion
 And ʒen a-non as the thef is com
 Al round a-bout he schal gon
 Al the ny3t be seint Ion

[...]
 And power he schal haue non
 Awei benne forto gon
 And he be in wil thi good to stele
 Be it quik or ded other lasse or fele
 And this is the oureson
 Saie him with good deuocion (MS Sloane 2457)

In translation:
 Whoever will say this orison
 Be it night or day
 If any man is so wicked
 That he would steal your goods
 Your sheep that are in your fold
 One young, the other old
 Or any other goods that are in the field,
 With this ourison you shall shield them.
 You shall go all roundabout,
 Be it within the house or without,
 And you shall say this orison with devotion.
 And then as soon as the thief has come,
 All roundabout he shall be gone,
 All the night, by Saint John
 [...]
 And he shall have no power
 And he will go away
 If he is intent on stealing your goods,
 Be it alive or dead or little or much,
 And this is the orison,
 Say it with good devotion

Rather than the directives dealt with in other charms and spells, this particular instance of an anti-theft charm employs an almost instruction-manual-esque directive rather than a direct conjuration. In addressing “wo-so wol this oureson saie” (whoever will say this orison), it makes such claims that “be it with-inne hous other with-out / and this oureson bou saie with deuocion” (Be it within the house or without, And you shall say this orison with devotion) will be shielded from thieves and having their goods stolen.

Much as this charm does not take the tone of a directive (functioning moreso as instructions or a promise), neither does it take on the petitionary tone of the prayer to St. Mary against hot and cold fever. Religious figures and themes are indeed mentioned: Saint John, for instance (almost certainly John the Baptist or the Apostle John) is channeled as a protective authority, and the repeated emphasis on “good deuocion” aligns the spell with orthodox prayer practices, mimicking Klaassen’s reports of successful

contemporary magicians requiring good standing in the Church (2021, p.4). However, this example lacks the detailed Biblical narrative of the Marian charm against fever, focusing on ritual efficacy: the words work because they are said correctly, not just due to referencing sacred narratives.

In sharp contrast to the poetic verse of the orison above, our next example is a simple, to the point charm against witchcraft and any such witches that may wish to lay their witchery upon the speaker:

I binde these Witches [...] by the vertue of all these holy Characters herein written, that these Witches [...] may have noe power at any tyme or tymes hereafter upon me [Name], The Bearer hereof.' (MS 3824, f. 70v)

Seen here is, as one might expect from reading the text above, a binding charm against witches. The spoken charm is accompanied by an amulet inscribed with the names of God and the Evangelists, to be worn on the person as a protection against malefica. Through the invocation of these sacred names, not only of the Lord but of his most famous followers, the speaker declares that witches will no longer have any power over them “at any tyme or tymes hereafter”. Furthermore, since the speaker is called upon to personalize the incantation by speaking their own name as well, this suggests some contractual relationship with the sacred that cannot be transferred to another.

Unlike in the example of the Marian charm against fever, there is no direct prayer to any entity, Christian or otherwise. Instead, the speaker appears to assert their own power, albeit while referencing and invoking the “holy Characters” (that being God and the evangelists) written inside their amulet. Unlike in the case of the amulet worn by the gentlewoman with sore eyes, however, there is no hidden curse sealed within, nor any reference to the devil. Instead, only the names of these Biblical figures are contained within.

Interestingly enough, this is the only example of magic so far to claim effects that purport to be permanent. The healing charms dealt with earlier are more focused with healing the ailment that the patient is presently struggling with, and although in the case of the gentlewoman with sore eyes, her eyes remain healed up until the very point where she loses her amulet, there is still no verbal or written

reference to how long she could expect the healing quality to last. But in this charm, the practitioner declares that they bind these witches, not only in the moment, but forevermore, so that they may no longer have power over the person in question ever again.

I conjure thee theefe by the Father and the Soon and the Holy Ghost; also I conjure thee Andromalcus that thou make the theife to have that paine that I do to this eie heare. (B.L. Sloane MS 3846, fol. 83v)20

Our next charms are cited by Scot as being examples of protection charms utilized by witches. As they are presented as a group of three, so too shall they be analyzed as a unified group.

A charme to be said each morning by a witch fasting, or at least before she go abroad.

THE fier bites, the fier bites, the fier bites; Hogs turd over it, hogs turd over it, hogs turd over it; The father with thee, the sonne with me, the holie-ghost betweene us both to be: ter. Then spit over one shoulder, and then over the other, and then three times right forward.

*Another charme that witches use at the gathering of their medicinable hearbs.
Haile be thou holie hearbe
growing on the ground
All in the mount *Calvarie* Though neither the hearbe nor the witch never came there.
first wert thou found,
Thou art good for manie a sore,
And healest manie a wound,
In the name of sweete Jesus
I take thee from the ground.*

An old womans charme, wherewith she did much good in the countrie, and grew famous thereby.

*AN old woman that healed all diseases of cattell (for the which she never tooke any reward but a penie and a loafe) being seriouslie examined by what words she brought these things to passe, confessed that after she had touched the sicke creature, she alwaies departed immediatelie; saieng:
My loafe in my lap,
my penie in my pursse;
Thou are never the better,
and I am never the wursse.*

These three charms – that being a protection spell to be said in the morning, an incantation to use while gathering herbs, and a charm to heal cattle– demonstrate the rhetorical and performative moves utilized by practitioners of magic. Each charm manipulates language, religious symbolism, and physical gestures

(and in subtly different ways when standing in comparison to one another, at that) in order to assert control over supernatural forces. Starting with the “charme to be said each morning by a witch fasting, or at least before she go abroad”, we see the charm opening with a declaration in triplicate: “The fier bites, the fier bites, the fier bites; Hogs turd over it, hogs turd over it, hogs turd over it”. The subsequent trinitarian formula, “the father with thee, the sonne with me, the holie-ghost betweene us both to be”, appropriates Christian doctrine much in the same vein as some of the other charms seen previous, appropriating sacred language and the names of religious figures to apotropaic ends. Reinforcing the ritual is an accompanying spitting action, where the practitioner spits over each shoulder and then forward three times.

First, the emphasis on doing things in triplicate (reciting both “the fier bites” and “hogs turd over it” while invoking the names of the Christian Trinity, that being the names of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, as well as spitting three times forward, seems to tie the ritual to the number three, which is especially pertinent due to the exhibition of that number in Christianity. What’s more, this charm seems to enact a symbolic smothering of fire (perhaps a metaphorical representation of malice or ill intent) by burying it in filth. This inversion of norms of cleanliness and purity, through the juxtaposition of excrement alongside holy imagery, adds a healthy degree of shock value, which likely empowered the witch to believe they were repelling threats.

The charm to gather herbs, meanwhile, adopts a sort of liturgical address: “Haile be thou holie hearbe growing on the ground all in the mount Cavalrie” almost reads as a prayer (see, for instance, the Catholic prayer to Mary mother of Jesus, *Hail Holy Queen*). Through treating this plant as a sacred interlocutor, the speaker therefore elevates its status, not only embedding it within the context of a wider Christian narrative but also allowing it to borrow some of that narrative’s power. The closing line, “in the name of sweete Jesus I take thee from the ground” frames the act of harvesting almost as a sort of divinely sanctioned theft, therefore legitimizing the witch’s appropriation of the herb’s power in the eyes of God.

The cattle healer’s charm seems to distance the magician from any accusations of maleficum by framing the healing as a neutral exchange “thou are never the better, and I am never the wursse”. Furthermore,

the stipulated payment, “a penie and a loafe”, acts moreso as a ritualized token than any sort of true compensation (after all, even at the time, a penny would not get you very far), almost mirroring lore surrounding fairies and other supernatural creatures wherein symbolic offerings bind unbreakable agreements– or rather, agreements that can perhaps be broken, but only if one accepts the leveling of a heavy price. Through the use of blasphemous repetition, poetic historiola, or even a sort of economic subterfuge, each of these three charms neatly demonstrate the fluid interplay between folklore, religion, and cunning craft.

Our next charm, or rather a curse, is aptly named as “Saint Adelberts cursse or charme against theeves” by Reginald Scot. For the sake of consideration regarding the sheer length of the curse, the full text will not be reproduced here. Rather, excerpts will be provided and dealt with as they become relevant, with the full text available for perusal in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. To sum up, Saint Adelbert’s curse involves invoking the Christian Holy Trinity, Mary mother of Jesus, the angels and the archangels (including Archangel Michael, referred to by name), Saint John the Baptist, Saint Steeven (sic; probably Stephen), the martyrs of St. Sylvester, St. Adelbert, *all* the confessors, St. Alegand, all the holy virgins, and all the saints in Heaven and Earth. There is then quite a production made about excommunicating, damning, cursing, and binding against all manner of thieves. The charm goes into a fair amount of detail regarding the locations the recipient should be cursed:

Curssed be they in the field, in the grove, in the woods, in their houses, barnes, chambers, and beds; and curssed be they in the court, in the waie, in the towne, in the castell, in the water, in the church, in the churchyard, in the tribunall place, in battell, in their abode, in the market place, in their talke, in silence, in eating, in watching, in sleeping, in drinking... (1584, p. 190)

Mentioned as well are the activities by which they should be cursed, and the specific body parts which should be cursed

Curssed be their navels, their spleenes, their bladder. Curssed be their thighs, their legs, their feete, their toes, their necks, their shoulders. Curssed be their backs, curssed be their armes, curssed be their elbowes, curssed be their hands, and their fingers, curssed be both the nails of their hands and feete; curssed be their ribbes and their genitals, and their knees, curssed be their

flesh, curssed be their bones, curssed be their bloud, curssed be the skin of their bodies, curssed be the marrowe in their bones, curssed be they from the crowne of the head, to the sole of the foote... (1584, p. 191)

Saint Adelbert's curse is the most violent example of magic we've seen. If it were not for its heavy dependence upon Christian imagery, it would no doubt be viewed as a particularly striking instance of malefica (perhaps it even was, by those with certain perspectives). It utilizes Christian doctrine to enact an aggressive, total damnation of thieves, resembling almost a magical airstrike in the thoroughness of its devastation. Beginning with a veritable roll call of sacred figures (*"BY the authoritie of the omnipotent Father, the Sonne, and the Holie-ghost... and by the holie virgine Marie... and all the saints in heaven and earth"*), this curse frames itself as a sanctioned act of the Church, affording it legitimacy that might have been otherwise difficult to receive. Systematically cursing every conceivable aspect of the thief's existence, from their physical body, to their daily activities, to their social and spiritual life, the curse plugs every possible avenue of escape in an almost legalistic manner. Lucifer is also interestingly mentioned (*"I conjure thee Lucifer, with all thy soldiers, by the father, the son, and the Holie-ghost... that thou rest not day nor night, till thou bringest them to destruction."*), effectively recruiting both teams to veritably curb-stomp the thief in question.

7.3. Minding Other People's Business

The charms examined here (one to reveal a future lover in dreams, another to summon a spirit), offer striking examples of how performative language operates beyond institutional religious frameworks. Hemp seeds bind a lover, spirits are conjured with the force of a command. Unlike the ecclesiastical charms which derive authority from saints or scripture, these spells rather rely on the utterances themselves, the *I conjure* and *I sow*, to reshape reality. The hemp charm, utilizing an agricultural metaphor, functions as a declarative act, planting desire quite literally as one might plant a seed. The summoning of Sagngit, however, is based upon the names of varying spirits (none of which appear in traditional Christian canon, according to my research), compelling the entity to appear and obey.

hempe seed, hempe I thee sow lede and vnlede. she that shalbe my worldes make come after one and rake sleepe sleepe and I her see, wake and her know. (Trinity College Cambridge MS O.1.57 (1081))

In translation: Hemp seed, hemp I sow, lede and unlede. She that shall be the making of my world, come after me and rake. Sleep, sleep, and I see her, wake and I know her.

This charm appears to be a spell to allow the visage of one's true love to be revealed in a dream. Unlike previous examples of ecclesiastical charms which depend on the Biblical authority of saints, angels, or God. This spell operates through sympathetic magic, wherein the agricultural metaphor of a hemp seed being sown and then growing acts as a mirror for the knowledge of one's true love similarly growing. Interestingly, help is itself a plant associated with ropes and binding— perhaps through the performance of this spell, rather than simply being revealed, the woman in question would also be somehow 'bound' to the practitioner in question. Leaving the speculation aside, however, it strikes me as particularly interesting that Christian figures are not mentioned here at all. Although there are certainly other examples of Jesus-free charms which have already been analyzed in this very thesis (see, for instance, the charm against the biting of a scorpion, where one whispers in the ear of an ass), such spells very much stand in the minority.

Our second charm, on the other hand, located in Ashley's occult commonplace book, deals with something else entirely:

To Speak with Spirits:

Call theis names Orimoth, Behemoth, Limoc, and Say thus, I conjure you by the names of the Angels Sator and Azamor yee summon to me and Send to me a Spirit called Sagngit, to fulfill my command and defer and that can also understand my words for one or two horse, or as long as I will.

The charm here, "to Speak with Spirits", invokes the names of two angels (Sator and Azamor) and Orimoth, Behemoth, and Limoc, to summon an additional spirit, known only as Sagngit. Although the powers and abilities of this Sagngit are not clearly defined here, one can nevertheless deduce that there might be some sort of intent towards communication, considering the pains taken in the spell to insure that Sagngit can understand the practitioners words "for one or two horse, or as long as I will". It could also be that Sagngit's purpose is not only to have a discussion or reveal information to the magician in question, but to also carry out certain tasks ("to fulfill my command").

8. In Defense of a Magical Genre

In my analysis of the above magical texts, a few insights and observations begin to emerge. Not only is there is an argument to be made that magical speech constituted a legitimate Medieval language game (a la Ludwig Wittgenstein) with its own rules, allowances, and conventions, but the persistence of magical speech as a genre acknowledges and respects it as a sophisticated mode of symbolic negotiation, whether or not such magical speech is only mere superstition. Indeed, the implications extend far beyond historical interest, with residual waves splashing forth even on the world of today. The magical speech of the Medieval and Early Modern period reminds us of the transformative potential of language, even as the powers that be in the world of today often reduce the purpose of language to the mere transference of information. We as members of this present society, much as the people of the Middle Ages did, must contend with political rhetoric and placebos alike, encountering remnants of the belief that properly framed words truly can alter reality.

The study of magical speech, even setting aside notions of preempting modern debates surrounding performativity, materiality, and the social construction of efficacy, offers a window into premodern consciousness while challenging us to reconsider our own assumptions regarding the limits and powers of speech. In a way, these spells stand as testaments to human creativity and a refusal to bow to adversity, even in the face of the uncertainties and vicissitudes of life. Magical speech functions as a technology of negotiation. Negotiation between human beings and supernatural entities, between the desires of the individual and the norms of the community, between the spoken word and the material reality, between gender and class and notions of authority, are all hallmarked here. The durability of magical speech, persisting across centuries, truly stems from its capacity to address fundamental human concerns: protection and punishment, healing and harm, love and loss. Chaucer's Loathly Lady, declaring "*For, by*

my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe, This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good", did not describe a transformation but rather enacted one, illustrating the power of will given words.

It is worth noting, perhaps for the thousandth time, if I may be so bold as to exaggerate, that magical speech also functioned as a discursive arena for the working through of cultural tensions. The fusion of the pre-Christian elements present in folk charms especially with elements of blatant integration of the Christian faith reflect an active negotiation of belief systems. An older magical logic is preserved in the careful phraseology of these spoken rituals, demonstrating how communities struggled against dominant religious frameworks, even despite the heavy disapproval of the Church, reflecting myriad anxieties of the time. Indeed, the magical genre's relationship to other genres of Medieval speech prove to be particularly illuminating. Magical utterances stand alongside legal oaths and liturgical rites as examples as heavily scripted performative acts with no shortage of pomp and circumstance, yet differ in their presumed automatic efficacy. While sacraments required the will of God, magical words were thought by some to work *ex opere operato*— that is, through their correct performance alone, making magic uniquely accessible as a tool for those traditionally excluded from formal power structures.

When taking the examples presented in the previous section as a whole, the formal markers of a semi-distinct genre seem to emerge. Structurally, magical utterances favor constructions in tripartate (three commands, three repetitions, invocations of all three parts of the Holy Trinity), ritualized openings and closings, the strategic embedding of authoritative names or narratives, the invocations of holy and infernal names, and the usage of *voces magicae* or barbarous names. The imperative mood was, while not requisite for inclusion as an example of a magical act, also highly overrepresented, appearing in the vast majority of all examples analyzed. Although my sample size is surely representative of a mere snippet of the spells, hexes, blessings, and charms that have been used in the Medieval and Early Modern period, and perhaps a slightly larger snippet of the ones that still exist as extant documents, it is still heartening that certain throughlines can be identified and earmarked as avenues for future study.

Carolyn Miller's concept of genre as social action (1984) offers a tempting framework through which one could understand Medieval and Early Modern magical texts as a distinct communicative genre, one which

both mirrored and shaped the social realities of audiences and practitioners alike. Miller argues that classifying genres by formal features (structure, style, medium) is superficial. Instead, genres in a Millerian sense are defined by the social action they are used to accomplish. Much in the same vein as liturgical rites or legal documents, magical texts appear to have operated within a (loose, admittedly, but certainly existent) system of shared conventions which signalled their purpose and legitimacy to specific communities. These conventions were far from mere formalities— instead, they functioned as rhetorical strategies as well as the very mechanism through which action could be achieved. This was adaptable to differing social contexts: clerical necromancers could utilize all the fancy tools at their disposal, such as conjurations in (faux-)Latin and references to obscure holy or infernal figures, presenting magic almost as a sort of extension to university or seminary learning. For lay practitioners, meanwhile the social action of the magical genre was quite different indeed. Folk charms and healing spells would rely more on accessible oral formulas, often in the vernacular, with repetitive triads or rhyming couplets aiding memorization and perceived effect. These texts prioritized usability for the common person over any scholarly prestige. This makes perfect sense— after all, if someone desperately needed unwitching, it was in everyone's best interest to ensure that said unwitching took place rather expeditiously, and with as little unnecessary to-do as possible. As such, the flexibility of magic as a genre allowed it to serve communal interests as well as the interests of the elite. This adaptability underscores Miller's argument that genres are typified rhetorical actions which respond to recurrent situations.

Of course, there is tension between these variations, much as there's tension between a highly formulaic prayer performed in the Vatican and a prayer performed in a very charismatic and Protestant American church, or between legal declarations made in differing jurisdictions. Clerical texts and their insistence on verbatim precision, rare materials, and arcane scripts erected barriers to entry, reserving power for the literati of the day, while lay magicians' oral and practical conventions could be simple— perhaps even overly so, such as in the example of whispering to an ass about your misfortune in being stung by a scorpion— but this only served to allow these charms to flourish more in their ease of access and resistance against institutional control. Yet, both subsets shared a core function: to mediate, command, and invoke the unseen. Regardless of whether this took place through the celestial or infernal summons of

a learned necromancer or through a folk cure, the conventions of the magical genre evolved and twisted to meet the needs of their users while asserting their rightful place in a contested epistemic landscape.

Of course, the legacy of magic extends far beyond the premodern period. In today's culture, the allure of magic as a genre persists through neo-pagan and esoteric movements that consciously aim to reconstruct certain practices from the Medieval and Early Modern periods, or from even further in the past. Certain practices, for instance (such as modern Wicca), draw extensively on reinterpretations of Medieval folk magic (or at least draw upon some perception of what magic was like at the time), adapting herbal lore, the cycles of the moon, and the invocation of certain holy names into a structured religious framework. Even ignoring modern occult practices, the cultural fascination with magic also extends into popular media, utterly permeating genres such as fantasy (such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*). Although the magic of fantasy novels and television series is a romanticized one which flattens the historical complexity of these ritual frameworks, its depiction nevertheless speaks to the staying power of magic as a genre. Indeed, the enduring appeal of these traditions testify to the adaptability of magic. Where it once served to navigate crop failures, illnesses beyond the healing power of medicine at the time, or political intrigue, people utilize it even now to address their modern anxieties surrounding institutional distrust and a sense of alienation from all that came before.

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casters, the vanitie of dreamers, the beggerlie art of Alcumystrie, the abhominacion of idolatrie, the horrible art of poisoning, the vertue and power of naturall magike, and all the conueiances of Legierdemaine and iuggling are deciphered and many other things opened which have long lien hidden, howbeit verie necessarie to be knowne. Heerevnto is added a treatise vpon the nature and substance of spirits and diuels &c. all latelie written.

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Abstract

In dieser Masterarbeit verwende ich die Sprechaktheorie von Austin und Searle, um Fragen zu untersuchen, inwieweit magische Sprechakte des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit in England anderen sozialen und sprachlichen Akten ähneln, die soziale Realitäten verändern. Die Stellung der Magie in der Gesellschaft wird unter den Gesichtspunkten Autorität, Geschlecht und Klasse hinterfragt, um herauszufinden, auf welcher Grundlage magische Sprache ihre Autorität erlangt. Es werden erhaltene Beispiele für Hexerei aus dem Mittelalter und der frühen Neuzeit analysiert und untersucht, ebenso wie Beispiele für Magie in Theaterstücken und Gedichten, beispielsweise in Shakespeares Macbeth, Chaucers Wife of Bath's Tale und Sir Gawain and the Green Knight von Pearl Poet. Letztendlich argumentiere ich, dass magische Sprache tatsächlich eine Form des Sprechakts ist und auch als solche betrachtet werden sollte.

In this thesis, I utilize Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory to address questions surrounding the degree to which magical speech acts of the Middle and Early Modern period in England resemble other social and linguistic acts which alter social realities. The position of magic in society is interrogated through the lens of authority, gender, and class, in order to discover upon which basis magical speech would gather its authority. Extant examples of witchcraft from the Middle and Early Modern period are analyzed and dissected, alongside examples of magic in plays and poetry, such as in Shakespeare's MacBeth, Chaucer's

Wife of Bath's Tale, and the Pearl Poet's Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Ultimately, I argue that magical speech is indeed a form of speech act, and should be considered thusly.