

**Not the Simplest Christians:
Vernacular Charming and
The Limits of Orthodox Practice
in Late Medieval England**

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between charmers and the keepers of religious orthodoxy has been oversimplified in prior analysis. Both Keith Thomas and Eamon Duffy represent the Church's message on religion and magic as relatively homogeneous. They find the impulse to employ charms as rooted in the parishioners' faith in the ceremonies of the Church, part of either 'the magic of the medieval church' or as another element of the 'multifaceted resonant symbolic house' of medieval religion. Charms were an expression of the core mysteries of medieval religion. Even if they might technically be unorthodox, it could be excused as matter of religious ignorance. In this construction the individual collector and user of charms is treated as a passive receptor of ideas rather than an independent actor who engaged with the Church and its teachings, as well as the literature on magic, and made his own decisions. This thesis will employ charms and religious writings in the common place book of Robert Reynes to reconstruct the theological world of a medieval charmer. It will argue that charmers were not only more unorthodox than previously described, but also that they were active agents in the construction of their own religious experience as it pertained to protection, healing, and occasionally salvation.

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INTRODUCTION: CHARMS AS A LAY LITURGY

There is no universally accepted scholarly definition of charms. However, Lea Olsan, the principal historian and scholar of charms as a genre, has identified some of their central features. Olsan notes that *carmen*, the Latin root of the English word charm, is “used as a tag, a heading, or a marginal gloss to call attention to some kind of verbal cure.”¹ In nearly all charms, words or sound patterns serve as the active ingredient meant to bring about the desired effect. The words can be written or spoken, but in either case they serve to connect the charmer directly to the numinous forces or powerful figures that (in theory) protected against or dispelled illness and misfortune. Charms thus can be loosely defined as short verbal or written formulae that derive their apotropaic power from words with a perceived connection to the numinous. They can be considered a kind of combination prayer-exorcism, with the caveat that they have no specific ties to the orthodox Church.

Charms were not totally reliant on the orthodox liturgy nor wholly separate from it. The words used to invoke divine power were borrowed from the Church, and the narratives used often refer to saints or Biblical figures who were perceived as having power over a given affliction. However, charms often involved illicit purposes like knowledge of the future and the use of ceremonies not conventionally connected to prayer or the liturgy. These elements were also accompanied by unknown names and words, which theologians believed could serve as coded messages to demons. As a result, charms do not fall neatly into the category of prayer, medical recipe, or even magic, but represent a genre separate from but influenced by all three.

This position between conventionally defined religion and magic, and the fact that charms were used by members of all classes in the Middle Ages, allows scholars to use them to

¹ Lea Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral tradition” *Oral Tradition* 7, No. 1 (1992): 116.

explore the limits of medieval orthodoxy. Because of their intersection with traditional medieval religious practices, the relationship between the two has predominantly been framed by absolute notions about magic and religion that do not do justice to the complex devotional world of the Middle Ages. This thesis will examine whether charmers used the transgressive elements mentioned above because they could not access, and were therefore unaware of, the theology that condemned them or if they did so knowing these elements were outside the limits set by the keepers of orthodoxy. In the case of Robert Reynes, a medieval everyman whose commonplace book is used by historians of religion like Keith Thomas and Eamon Duffy as representative of typical medieval lay piety, we find a person confident enough to interpret texts for himself, rather than someone overawed by theological and catechetical authority. Reynes could access the catechism in multiple ways, and was aware of the Church's position on his practices. Nonetheless, his beliefs about how he could and should gain access to numinous power differed in subtle but important ways from those presented in the catechism of the Church.

For scholars like Eamon Duffy, charms represent the extension of orthodox Catholic belief into the lives of the medieval laity, while to Keith Thomas they are a fundamentally superstitious practice nurtured by Church ceremonies that supported belief in magic among the laity. More recent scholarship from Lea Olsan and Richard Kieckhefer sees charms as a phenomenon unique to their environment, a combination of medicine as well as liturgical and unorthodox rituals. This thesis will examine how Robert Reynes, the late medieval everyman whose practice informs both Thomas and Duffy's arguments, strayed beyond the limits of orthodoxy when he collected magical materials and whether he did so knowingly or out of ignorance. It will examine the devotional and proscriptive texts which he can reasonably be believed to have had access to, and what limits they placed on his practice.

The Historiography of Charms

The modern conception that charms result from ignorant people appropriating the automatic (or, as Keith Thomas would have it, magical) nature of some Catholic ceremonies into their day-to-day lives began with the publication of Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* in 1971. In a chapter entitled "The Magic of the Medieval Church" he argued that much of the lay belief in charms and other magic was "parasitic" to the teaching of the medieval Church.² He argues that the ceremonies of the Catholic Church were fertile ground for the development of superstitions. For Thomas, superstitions could grow out of even the most orthodox beliefs. For instance, he states that, "[t]he Mass . . . was associated with Magical power, and for this . . . the teaching of the Church was at least indirectly responsible."³ Thomas argues that many lay people in medieval England saw the Mass as possessing a "mechanical efficiency."⁴ This is to say, people believed that they could use elements of Catholic ritual such as words used in the Mass to get other sorts of effects because they were inherently powerful.

Thomas does not limit this sort of magical potential to the Mass. The bread and wine used in communion were carefully guarded by the clergy, so that no one could sneak a source of numinous power away from the church.⁵ Thomas goes on to describe the superstitious beliefs that blossomed around the other sacraments in the Middle Ages. For instance, baptism was believed to improve the health and growth of children and this theologically problematic idea

² Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 36.

³ Ibid. Ellipses mine.

⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

was even extended to animals. In at least one case, baptism was said to have restored sight to a blind baby.⁶

Thomas' construction of the medieval Catholic Church as a quasi-magical institution was based in part around a specific definition of magic. For the purposes of his work, Thomas argues that "the essential difference between the prayers of a churchman and the spells of a magician was that only the latter claimed to work automatically." Although he acknowledges that this distinction has been criticized by many scholars, Thomas argues that it brings to the fore the "non-coercive character of Christian prayers." In Thomas' construction, the magical use of orthodox prayers for healing, such as the Pater Noster and Apostle's Creed, assumes that the words automatically produce good effects.⁷ Thomas does not assert that the Church of the Middle Ages saw such quasi-magical practices as universally acceptable. Medieval theologians "vigorously refuted" the superstitious and quasi-magical uses of the liturgy.⁸ Nonetheless, Thomas argues that "the medieval Church . . . did a great deal to weaken the fundamental distinction between a prayer and a charm."⁹ Even when its practices were not being directly used for magic, "the medieval Church . . . appeared as a vast reservoir of magical power, capable of being deployed for a variety of secular purposes."¹⁰ Thomas argues that this ambiguity was the result of a self-conscious strategy of the Church during the conversion of Europe. He describes this as the "notorious readiness of the early Christian leaders to assimilate elements of the old

⁶ Ibid., 37.

⁷ Ibid., 41. In this thesis "Automatic Efficacy" refers to the fact that words spoken by a charmer or magician are seen as having an immediate and unconditional effect on the ailment it was meant to treat or demon it conjured. For instance, when the charmer spoke the word "Anazapata" the cause of the tooth ache, whether it was physical or spiritual or some combination of the two, dissipated. In the minds of medieval theologians, this conception impinged on the authority of God (who could grant miracles if and when he wished), and of the clergy who were the only link between humans and the divine.

⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁹ Ibid., 42. Ellipses mine.

¹⁰ Ibid., 45.

paganism into their own religious practices” in an effort to make the process of conversion smoother.¹¹ For Thomas, the result of these accommodations was that “many of the purposes served by the older paganism were now looked for from nominally Christian institutions.”¹²

The most direct challenge to Thomas’s assertions about the relationship between magic and the medieval Catholic Church originated from Eamon Duffy. In his book *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580*, Duffy notes that while Church ceremonies and charms shared a sense of mechanical effectiveness, there were important similarities between charms and orthodox observances such as baptism and rogationtide (the religious celebration of the days leading up the communal commemoration of the ascension of Jesus) that were designed to drive away demonic influences, just as charms were used to battle illness and misfortune.¹³ For Duffy, both charms and the liturgy were founded in the belief that demons caused illness and misfortune and that certain holy words and symbols could drive them away. Duffy argues that this battle between Christians and the demonic forces that caused misfortune was not a remainder of pre-Christian values or the result of a confusion of magic and prayer, but an important part of medieval Catholicism.¹⁴ Charms were not part of official Church liturgy, but were a result of lay people applying the logic and symbols of Church ceremonies to their own lives. They formed an unofficial lay liturgy that supported and was supported by the official Church.

Part of Duffy’s argument is that healing charms and prayers for salvation that went beyond what could be reasonably offered by the Church were used not only by the ignorant

¹¹ Ibid., 47.

¹² Ibid., 48.

¹³ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 279-280.

¹⁴ Ibid., 279.

peasants but are found frequently in the prayer books of the noble and mercantile classes.¹⁵

Charms can be found in the devotional literature of Robert Thornton, a Yorkshire gentleman “whose learning and devotion are everywhere evident in his manuscript collections.”¹⁶ Even royalty kept charms, and Duffy highlights the fact that Richard III had a prayer for protection copied into his book of hours.¹⁷ Neither Richard III nor Robert Thornton’s use of charms stem from the ignorance or poverty that Thomas argues enable charms to proliferate. Knowledgeable and devout Christians used charms just as much as their poorer contemporaries. Charms were not a product of peasants with no understanding of theology aping the Church, but a nuanced expression of devotion present in all classes of late medieval English society.

Duffy is careful to point out that, while these charms might not seem strictly orthodox to a modern observer, they generally fall within the parameters of the goals and sources of power that would be acceptable to the Church of the Middle Ages. Prayers for protection especially emphasised “the Christian’s need for eternal vigilance.”¹⁸ Duffy acknowledges that Church authorities found charms and overly ambitious prayers for physical safety and deliverance from sins “in the mouths of the unlettered problematic.”¹⁹ However, charms were generally in line with the teaching and moral disposition of the Catholic Church and were employed not only by the ignorant and unintelligent but also by the wealthy and educated. They were not a vestige of paganism, but instead represented the application of psychologically powerful symbols and rituals taken from the ceremonies of the Catholic Church for use in the lives of lay people.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 275.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 267.

¹⁸ Ibid., 266.

¹⁹ Ibid., 277.

²⁰ Ibid., 298.

Duffy also offers a less direct challenge to Thomas' construction of charms as remnants of a pagan past by noting that, while not every parishioner had a deep and complex understanding of their religion, they could at the very least be aware of its fundamentals. Manuals for priests and literate lay people focused on examinations of conscience through the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. Additionally, in at least one manual for preachers, the corporal works of mercy and the five senses were used to explore the nature of the sins that the people of a given parish had committed.²¹ Other pastoral manuals advised priests not only to help the laity understand which behaviours were sinful and why, but also to help ensure that they understood the articles of the Creed and had at least memorized the Lord's Prayer (Which was used as a kind of introduction to Catholic values and belief).²² Lay people were encouraged to help each other study the catechism, and an indulgence of forty days was given to anyone who helped another learn "the so-called *Lay Folk's Catechism*."²³ Furthermore, a lay person could receive a smaller indulgence of twenty days for reading a portion of the *Doctrinal of Sapyence* to another.²⁴ These indulgences were applied only to specific texts and were offered by local bishops and so did not apply in every diocese. However, the creation of these texts and the offers of indulgences by Church officials represent a coordinated effort to help the laity understand the logic that lay behind the behaviours mandated or forbidden by orthodoxy.

This effort to teach the laity about their religion was not limited to the use of texts. The wealthy community of York put on two liturgical plays that dealt with "the goodness of the Lord's Prayer" and other elements of standard Christian prayers.²⁵ These plays were instated by

²¹ Ibid., 58.

²² Ibid., 54.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 56.

²⁵ Ibid., 66.

two guilds but were eventually taken over by the City of York itself. While smaller communities may not have been able to match the scale and frequency of York's liturgical plays, they nonetheless put on more modest versions.²⁶ Visual representations of religion were unsurprisingly available in church but could be more complex than one might assume. Baptismal fonts that display the catechetical teaching with great precision were used to combat heresy in areas that had prominent Lollard activity.²⁷ The image of the composition of the Creed by the Apostles was found in churches from at least the fifteenth century.²⁸

Finally, Duffy notes that literature and preaching aimed at the laity in poems like *Handlyng Synne* helped those who were literate, but not Latinate, to understand the complexities of the Church's teachings.²⁹ This was accompanied by sermons aimed at the common people of the fifteenth century. Although "[p]reachers themselves could be skeptical of the motivation of those who flocked to hear them," Duffy notes that sermons were quite popular in fifteenth century England and were among the tools that could be used to reach the laity, even if many lay people only stayed for the sermons that appealed to them.³⁰

For Duffy, even when they were not strictly orthodox, charms were also never fully unorthodox. When Duffy refers to a 'multifaceted resonant symbolic house', he wishes to direct our attention to the similarities between charms and orthodox Christianity. Both charms and orthodox ceremonies sought to bring the power of Christ to bear in order to help the laity. Both charms and the liturgy claimed to do this directly by using his name, or by using the name of a saint or biblical figure who could intercede on behalf of sinners or the stricken. Charms and the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid., 71.

³⁰ Ibid, 57.

liturgy employed a similar rhetoric that relied on the power of the name of Jesus to drive away demons or misfortune. To those who could not access the Latin theological texts that discussed orthodoxy in minute detail, charms which employed Christian symbols and asked for legitimate benefits might have been indistinguishable from orthodox prayers, and could be considered part of medieval Catholicism. In the most blunt terms, ignorant lay people took the symbols represented as operative elements in the liturgy and used them in contexts outside of church as a way of carrying the power into their own lives. For instance, a charm that contained a narrative of Jesus healing a fever would call to mind the story in which Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law.³¹ The Church itself had vouched for the veracity and power of Jesus' name and his ability to heal all manner of illnesses. Because this charm claimed to access healing power using the same symbols as the liturgy, the uneducated would see it as part of the same category as the prayers they said in Church.

Duffy offers two challenges to Thomas' thesis, arguing that charms fit fairly easily into orthodox practices and the worldview of the late medieval Catholic Church, and that the laity were not exclusively ignorant peasants who had no access to the subtleties of their religion. An interesting element of the debate between Duffy and Thomas is that both focus on the Norfolk Church reeve Robert Reynes (who will be further discussed in later chapters). Duffy observes that the texts Reynes left behind are difficult to consider completely orthodox and that "elements representing the central didactic aims of the fifteenth-century Church jostle charms and other items" that would not have passed muster with Church authorities.³² Duffy also notes that, though Reynes could not be considered elite, the content of his book was similar to a commonplace book produced by an unknown gentry family near the Norfolk border with

³¹ Holy Bible, Luke 4:30-40 NSRV.

³² Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 72.

Suffolk.³³ In other words, Reynes was a relatively conventional religious layman who reflected the wider culture of piety in late medieval England who more or less passively engaged with the late medieval church.

Thomas also sees Reynes as passive, but by contrast, as part of an uneducated underclass incapable of distinguishing charms from the ceremonies of the Catholic Church.³⁴ He might well have responded to Duffy's arguments by noting that the presence of a short ritual magic text in Reynes' commonplace book demonstrated his point about how Catholic ritual encourage the magic in the among the laity. The magical world view implicit in Catholic piety encouraged Reynes to seek other ways of controlling the supernatural through adapted Christian rituals.

In summary, both Thomas and Duffy construct Reynes as a late medieval everyman, whose views we could expect to have been professed by most within a given medieval community. The arguments of both Thomas and Duffy frame charmers as essentially passive and ignorant. For Thomas, they received and replicated the magical elements inherent in medieval Catholic practice. The automatic healing power of charms was an echo in uneducated minds of the power of the Mass to turn the host into the body of Jesus. For Duffy, such practices resulted from hope invested in specific symbols of which lay people had a sophisticated knowledge. Pious parishioners would extend these symbols beyond the purposes conceived by the Church, hoping to gather some of the divine power of the Mass for themselves but in so doing carried the core messages of the church with them. Both of these constructions frame charmers as unable to tell the difference between prayers and ceremonies endorsed by the Church and charms that incorporated unorthodox elements. Thomas's treatment of charmers as ignorant and passive misrepresents the religious and intellectual word of the Middle Ages. However, Duffy's

³³ Ibid., 75.

³⁴ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 42.

treatment of them as educated and yet able to incorporate unorthodoxy into their daily lives denies charmers, particularly Robert Reynes, of an agency which he clearly possessed. Reynes chose to include unorthodox material in his commonplace book, but also seems to have rejected material the strayed too far from conventional piety.

In her article “Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition,” Lea Olsan has argued that charms are a self-contained genre. She states that “charms, as a genre, occupy a place between non-verbal plant remedies and prayers for healing but overlap both.”³⁵ She recognizes that charms share elements with the liturgy and traditional medicine, but notes that there are also many elements unique to charms. The most notable of these is that charms drew upon a limited set of Biblical figures, saints, and narratives that were used to treat specific illnesses. For instance, a charm used to treat a wound would almost certainly refer to Longinus, the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Christ on the cross, or the wounds that Jesus suffered during the Crucifixion.³⁶ Olsan argues that these figures and motifs would be recognizable to people of the Middle Ages as sources of holy power, and in some cases, such references to individual figures could evoke far larger and more complex ideas. For example, one charm invokes Psalm 53 using a single line, but this line “adverts to the known, but here unspoken, contents of the Psalm.”³⁷ Another charm, meant to cure a horse with worms, invoked the name Job, but in fact counted on the narrative presented in the book of Job, rather than his action as an individual spiritual entity.³⁸ Charms differ from standard prayers in that they use words (which occasionally have no discernable meaning) and narrative (frequently apocryphal) to connect the charmer directly with the healing power of God. At the same time the text of

³⁵ Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England,” 137.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 119. I employ the Vulgate numbering here and throughout

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

charms themselves does not acknowledge that the charm may not cure a given affliction. These factors combine to make the words and narratives used in charms seem closer to a sacrament that works *ex opere operato* than a conventional prayer like the Pater Noster.

For Olsan, charms were defined by their orality. Although she acknowledges that “the degree of orality displayed in charms varies through a continuum” and that the tradition became increasingly textual, Olsan concludes that “[s]igns of residual orality and of an increasing textuality appear in the way charms are recorded in manuscripts” and “that the psychodynamics of charms seem dominated by attitudes, beliefs, habits of thought, and responses especially characteristic of traditional oral societies.”³⁹ While they are available to historians mostly in their written contexts, all charms began as part of a tradition that was transmitted orally, this orality could greatly influence the content of charms that were received by Church authorities. Olsan notes that “[s]ound patterns alone serve as the effective source of power in some charms” but also that these nonsense sounds were frequently derived from liturgical languages like Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, which was used more commonly in the Middle Ages.⁴⁰

Olsan does not address Thomas or Duffy directly. However, she does argue that, while charms were obviously influenced by the Church, they also had an internal logic that was determined by the orality of charms as well as the needs of the people who used them.⁴¹ This thesis aims to carry Olsan’s ideas further and explore the ways in which charms related to official orthodox religion both in the minds of those who used charms and in the fundamental pastoral writing of the Church.

³⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 124.

⁴¹ Ibid., 138.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to examine some foundational scholarship that surrounds magic more generally. This work informs the categories into which magic is divided and contributes to the methodology of this thesis. In his book, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Richard Kieckhefer, divides charms into three broad categories:

First there are *prayers* which have the form of requests and are directed to God, Christ, Mary or a saint. Second there are blessings which have the form of wishes and are addressed to the patient. Third there are *adjurations* or *exorcisms*, which have the form of commands and are directed towards the sickness itself...⁴²

In both blessings and adjurations, religious narratives from various Christian texts work as “archetypal events, directly analogous to the healing process itself.”⁴³

Kieckhefer makes a second important point about the relationship between charms and more explicitly transgressive magic; he notes that the symbols and narratives used by those who wished to heal or induce love could also be used to cause misfortune.⁴⁴ While they present a distinct genre, charms shared the conceit that words could influence the natural and supernatural world with practices such as necromancy that were more explicitly transgressive and theologically problematic. The conclusion will explore the decisions that some one copying transgressive material would have made about the nature of the magic he or she wished to copy will be explored in the conclusion.

Thomas’ related points that charms are not Christian in origin and were ignored when they did not flagrantly contradict Christian teaching, or even encouraged by the Church when they could be appropriated to support orthodox worship, have been supported by some scholars. Notably, Valerie I. J. Flint argues that the early medieval Church sought to appropriate the faith in, and emotional connection to, the traditional magical practices of western Europe, while

⁴² Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1989), 69-70.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

introducing new human figures and sacred objects that such feelings could be attached to.⁴⁵ Flint also sees the Catholic Church as complicit in the preservation of pre-Christian magic in western Europe and claims that the Church was “vigorous in its selection and rescue of that in non-Christian magic it thought would serve it, as well as in its rejection of that which it thought would not.”⁴⁶ These works of “rescue” began very early in the formation of the medieval Church. St. Augustine of Hippo asserted that in certain situations prophesy could be supported and that God allowed Moses and Aaron to perform magic by changing their rods into serpents before Pharaoh and his magicians. Flint argues that “the control of preternatural events given to Moses and Aaron is essentially similar” to the magic condemned by Church authorities and that only nomenclature separates the work of holy men and magicians.⁴⁷ As Flint sees it, magic itself was acceptable to the people of the early Middle Ages, but only under specific terms: “*Magi* and *Magus* had so long been used as terms of abuse that no part of them could be rehabilitated. The case was entirely otherwise with a quite remarkable number of the materials and practices these words described.”⁴⁸ These ideas would seem to put Flint in alliance with Thomas, but the tone Flint strikes is far more sympathetic. Flint views the medieval Church as adopting these magical practices in an effort to grant hope to new converts and long-standing believers in the possibility that their lot in life could improve.

Central to Flint’s thesis is the idea that some types of magic were “rescued,” that is, either brought back from obscurity or intentionally preserved to make Christianity more palatable to new converts.⁴⁹ Flint argues that three types of magic were rescued: astrology, demonic magic,

⁴⁵ Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 71.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

and the intervention of angels. Demons specifically were preserved “because they were useful as a means of isolating evil from good and of inspiring an appropriate fear of it.”⁵⁰ Augustine, for instance, employed demons to explain various magical practices of his non-Christian contemporaries, especially augury and divination, which would seem to imply the reality of gods other than the God of the Bible. Flint seems to see this as a conscious effort on the part of Augustine to make Christianity more palatable to new converts and to “vilify all those religious practices Christianity had come to replace.” Flint applies similar logic to the writings of other apologists like Caesarius of Arles.⁵¹ Flint acknowledges that the *diamones* of the Greco-Roman world and Germanic elves and dwarves had a great deal in common with demons as described by the Bible and Church Fathers.⁵² Over the course of her chapter “The Magic That Was Needed: Rescued Means of Intervention,” Flint argues that the conscious efforts of the Catholic writers to explain away the power of non-Christian competitors and bolster the Church’s claim to supernatural powers shaped the way people of the early Middle Ages interpreted magic. To Flint, because both hoped play on a sense of the numinous power in sacred words and objects, Christian missionaries sought to reproduce the loyalty and awe inspired by pre-Christian magi.⁵³ The mindset and logic of these competing groups regarding numinous power was similar enough that those who converted the tribes of northern Europe to Christianity appropriated non-Christian ceremonies and beliefs.⁵⁴ They could do this in part because Christian miracles and pre-Christian magic relied on a sense of “unreason.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid., 146.

⁵¹ Ibid., 148-149.

⁵² Ibid., 159.

⁵³ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 397.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4

The greatest challenge to Flint's thesis arises from Richard Kieckhefer in "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic." To Kieckhefer, medieval magic and religion were distinct categories that were not arbitrarily separated by the writers of the Middle Ages. Flint's definition of magic is too broad and allows for a number of very different practices to be categorised under the umbrella term "magical."⁵⁶ The core of Kieckhefer's argument is that medieval Europeans who used the term "magic" thought of it as "neither irrational nor nonrational but as essentially rational." To magicians in the Middle Ages, magic had "principles that could be coherently articulated."⁵⁷ Kieckhefer argues that medieval writers had a specific idea in mind when they wrote about magic, and it was not simply the extension of the irrational outside of the Church, but a system with its own logic. The magic of the Middle Ages was neither irrational nor appropriated from the pre-Christian past, as Thomas and Flint argue, but sprang from the internal logic of medieval science and religion. To Kieckhefer "the intervention of demons, the intercession of saints, and occult powers within nature were causal factors in principle distinct from each other, each having its specific rationality, even if in some cases they could be combined or confused."⁵⁸ The idea that religion and various types of magic have coherent logical underpinnings, and that these underpinning are not exclusive to any one numinous activity, has important consequences for Duffy's defence of charms as reliant on Church ceremonies. These consequences will be addressed in the concluding chapter. Finally, Catherine Rider has worked to understand the limits of orthodox practice in medieval Catholicism as understood by the medieval Church and passed on to the laity. The Church sought to teach less educated strata of medieval society through pastoral literature such as exempla and confession manuals which were

⁵⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *American Historical Review* 99 No. 3 (June 1994): 813–36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 814.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 824.

made available to priests and other preachers. This literature frequently classified magic as a sin against the first commandment. Even if they did not mention idolatry specifically, confession manuals instructed priests to ask penitents if they had used stars or dreams in an attempt to predict the future or if they had used incantations that employed objects like a sword or basin, with the implication that the practitioner had shown reverence for the demons that were responsible for the vision these objects showed.⁵⁹ Inscriptions and writing mysterious words also featured prominently in the pastoral manuals that dealt with magic.⁶⁰ Most penitentials focused only on naming acts that were forbidden, rather than addressing why they should be avoided. However, in longer treatises the connection between magic and idolatry was explicit, and priests were asked to inquire if the people had shown undue worship to demons or other creatures.⁶¹ The Church used sermon literature as an additional method of reaching the illiterate or semi-literate people of medieval Europe through preachers. Although magic was not mentioned with particular frequency in these sermons, many that did address magic focused on its relationship to the first commandment.⁶²

Attacks on magic as a violation of the first commandment could also be accompanied by more personal attacks directed at the people who were believed to use it. For instance, scholars or women were portrayed as using specific types of magic and as being led into sin by either weak will or credulousness and stupidity.⁶³ While less high-minded than explaining a transgression of the first commandment, these attacks would undermine the confidence that would-be magic practitioners had in what they were doing, and allowed the clergy to reclaim

⁵⁹ Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books LTD, 2012), 133.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

their position as the only legitimate and reliable mediator between humans and the supernatural.⁶⁴ Rider's work to elucidate the way that the Church employed penitential literature to ensure that lay people understood their religion and were able to practice it in an orthodox manner will inform a great deal of this thesis. Even when she is not directly cited, her work has guided the selection of primary sources, most notably catechetical material like *Dives and Pauper* and *Handlyng Synne*.

This study of Reynes' commonplace book can be considered in the tradition of Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and The Worms: The Cosmos of Sixteenth Century Miller* because both deal with the intersection and reciprocal influence of popular and high culture from perspective of a prosperous peasant. Ginzburg explores the ideas articulated by Menocchio, a miller who claimed that the world congealed from nothingness as cheese does from milk, that Christ was just a man, and that the Jews, Muslims, and Christian each had a right to their own laws, among other heretical claims. According to Ginzburg, Menocchio sat at the intersection between "popular" and "high culture" and Reynes might be said to be a similar case.⁶⁵ Both were peasants with access to some of the texts used by the dominant culture. Using the testimony that Menocchio and other witnesses offered at his trials for heresy, Ginzburg explores how the oral peasant culture influenced and was influenced by the texts of high literary culture and how ideas from both traditions shaped Menocchio's heresy.

Unlike Menocchio, Reynes does not record a systematic worldview. He did not preach on the benefits of magic and was never called to explain the content of his commonplace book to religious or secular authorities. His commonplace book contains personal, if transgressive,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) xiv-xv

material. Reynes' charms, and charms in general, offer fertile ground to explore the intersection between high and popular culture, but to attempt this in one study would be unwieldy. Charms appear not only in commonplace books, but in devotionals, medical texts, and in the margins of uncountable manuscripts. A study of charms as a meeting point between cultural strata should examine all of these sources carefully, and would likely be carried across a number of scholarly works. Examining Reynes and his commonplace book will be an important part of this scholarship, but using Reynes as the sole source for the lay-peasant perspective on charms would produce an unnecessarily skewed point of view.

As stated above, this thesis will work to examine the ways that charms strayed beyond the limits of orthodoxy, and explore what charmers knew, what the Church authorities believed they ought to have known, and how this is reflected in the text of charms. Duffy's ideas, that charms were an uncritical extension of approved piety to meet the needs of people who had only a basic grasp of religious fundamentals and who only unintentionally stepped outside the limits of orthodoxy because they did not know better, will be questioned by an examination of the text of charms as well as catechetical works like *Dives and Pauper*. Ultimately, this thesis will argue that in addition to clearly transgressive ritual magic, Reynes recorded charms that he would have known were not orthodox. We cannot know if Reynes considered himself a charmer, a necromancer, or simply a Christian, but we can establish that he recorded material he most likely knew to be unorthodox. If he did not know they were unorthodox, he had every opportunity to find out through interactions with the clergy, vernacular catechetical texts, and exempla.

As a first step, chapter 1 will seek to decouple charms from conventional religious practice and demonstrate specific ways these charms strayed into unorthodoxy. Since both Tomas and Duffy argue that charms were by-products of orthodox Catholic ceremonies, it is

necessary to explore how the broader corpus of charms made promises and required practices that were not derived from the liturgy. To do this, the first chapter explores a set of the most common late medieval charms drawn from a corpus assembled by Lea Olsan. It will examine the benefits that charms claim to grant, and what the charmer must do to receive these benefits. It will demonstrate that while many charms that circulated in medieval books fit into Catholic orthodoxy as constructed by Aquinas and Augustine, many also involved claims and practices that would not have been acceptable to Church authorities.

The second chapter will be the most complex. It will argue, as Duffy suggests, that Reynes was a committed and engaged Christian with close ties to the institutional church who avidly read and copied conventional devotional material written for the instruction of lay people. It will then consider the charms in Reynes' commonplace book and apply Augustine and Aquinas' standards for orthodoxy as laid out in the first chapter to them. The charms in Reynes' commonplace book will be divided into three broad categories: apotropaic charms meant to keep away evil and misfortune, next-to-medical charms that sought to heal using the power of words and Biblical figures, and finally unofficial indulgences that promise salvation without confession or penance. Procedures for divination and prognostication in Reynes' collection will also be examined and demonstrated to be unorthodox in ways that Reynes could have known and understood. The text of prognostication will be contrasted not only with Augustine's and Aquinas' warnings against divination but also with legitimate ways of knowing the future through natural phenomena.

This exploration of Reynes' commonplace book reveals a devoted Catholic who simultaneously did not shrink from recording clearly unorthodox, and in one instance, explicitly magical material. Unlike the informed but uncritical lay people represented by Duffy, Robert

Reynes was aware of the limits of his religion and recorded material that he ought to have known was unorthodox and that the Church discouraged him from interacting with.

The third chapter seeks to reconstruct Reynes' relationship to the catechetical literature that guided priests in their pastoral duties, but was also intended to educate lay readers like him. It will begin by examining popular catechetical texts before proceeding with a sampling of the various short religious stories that Reynes copied. It will seek out surviving contemporary volumes in which these texts were transmitted in order to establish a rough idea of the religious library from which Reynes drew. This will give us a partial reconstruction of theological messages that would have been communicated to him when he read such volumes. We cannot know the exact texts that Robert Reynes read or what they contained, but the message given in the library on which he drew was clear and consistent: that the charms contained many unorthodox elements and that the most effective ways to ensue safety and salvation was pious and consistent prayer. Given his education and clear engagement with the Church and its catechetical literature, it is unlikely that Reynes was unaware of the church's position on charms and magic. Charms may have been redolent with Christian mysteries but they reflected conventional religiosity on a superficial level. They employed the name of Jesus and other figures in ways traditionally reserved for the clergy and combined them with mysterious names that were explicitly unorthodox. If charms were a part of Duffy's 'multifaceted resonant symbolic house' they were unorthodox parts of it and, in all likelihood, Robert Reynes knew it.

The conclusion will compare Reynes' commonplace book with other magic texts that contain both charms and ritual magic: the "Antiphoner notebook" (Bodley Additional B. 1) and a treasure-hunting manual (Rawlinson D. 252). It investigates collections of charms not as static objects but as products of decisions made by scribes, and argues that the symbols, values, and

rhetoric shared by charms, exorcism, and ritual magic deserve more careful scrutiny by historians when considering values of medieval magicians. These shared patterns would have been visible to people like Robert Reynes. Given that he and other charmers would have been aware they were recording unorthodox material, their conception of these similarities could yield important information about the mindset of medieval charmers, ritual magicians, and those who were both simultaneously.

This thesis has two fundamentally related contentions. First, while charms and orthodox prayers have a great deal in common, theologians like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas clearly identify aspects of charms as unorthodox and magical, a message that was communicated broadly through vernacular preaching and devotional literature. Second, Robert Reynes (who has been treated as a typical charmer by influential historians) did not have to read high theology to get this message. It was widely available in the literature he demonstrably read and in sermons and religious counsel from the clergy who read and employed such texts themselves. In short, Thomas and Duffy's construction of Reynes as awed by the Church and innocently engaged in magical practices does not hold up under close inspection. It also denies him any agency in the process of knowingly finding and recording illicit charms and magic texts that promised health, hope, and knowledge of the future while rejecting texts that explicitly invoked demons.

Magic in Late Medieval Notebooks:

Although the writings of Robert Reynes came to be called his commonplace book, and although for convenience I will use the term in this thesis, Reynes' collection of texts was not a commonplace book. In fact, until the eighteenth-century, it was not a book at all. Gold lettering was added to the binding of Reynes' commonplace book in 1741, and this serves as *terminus ante quem* for when the manuscript was bound together. Because it was bound so late, it seems

quite possible that some of the original collection of quires has been lost. However, the good condition of the surviving leaves suggests careful preservation, which in turn suggests it may be almost complete. Only one quire of the manuscript shows signs of damage: two leaves are missing from a poem listing signs of the apocalypse.⁶⁶

The most significant variation in the hand is the size of the lettering, and is not enough to suggest different scribes, but rather one scribe working with varying levels of care depending on the entry. The entries in verse are recorded in smallest lettering while the legal formulae and charms are recorded with the least care.⁶⁷ Most of the entries in the manuscript were made between 1470 and 1475, but the latest entry is a formula for the restoration of lands from 1500. All the quires that make up the current manuscript were likely in use at the same time, and so it is unlikely that Reynes thought of the manuscript as a cohesive unit.⁶⁸

The term “commonplace book” is an awkward fit for what was originally a loose collection of quires. Reynes did not practice the systematic recording of useful information under organized headings, as is usually associated with commonplace books. However, related terms such as “anthology” and “miscellany” imply access to a literary culture that Reynes did not have, and focus on literary works that are simply absent in Tanner 407. The principle goal of Reynes’ manuscript was to recall information that was relevant to his work or interested him in a more general way. Although no term fits Tanner 407 perfectly, “commonplace book” comes closest to describing what Reynes use of his manuscript.⁶⁹ Commonplace books were and are books

⁶⁶ Cameron Louis, introduction to *The Common Place Book of Robert Reynes: An Edition of Tanner MS 407* by Robert Reyes (New York, Garland Publishing, 1980) 1-4

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-27

⁶⁹ Peter Beale, *A Dictionary of Manuscript Terminology: 1450-2000* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011) [accessed August 7th 2017

<http://www.oxfordreference.com.cyber.usask.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199576128.001.0001/acref-9780199576128-e-0194?rsk=y-zlRgLY&result=195>]

created for practical, personal purposes. They combine original material with texts by various other authors, or extracts from them. Particularly in the Renaissance, commonplace books were often organized and assembled intentionally by the authors as ways to remember texts they considered important or as aids to self-reflection. In whatever form they took, they remain practical books that reflected the daily lives of those who wrote in them. Most commonplace books were not meant to be read by anyone other than the person assembling them, or at least were not meant to be seen by anyone from outside of their immediate family. Throughout this thesis, I will use the entry numbers and titles given by Cameron Louis in his 1980 edition of Reynes' commonplace book for ease of reference. While following the most widely available numbering of the entries, this ordering need not, and probably does not, reflect the original ordering of the text.

Robert Reynes is unlikely to have recorded texts he did not sincerely believe were interesting or relevant. Ink and paper were expensive, and Reynes' modest status would not allow him to buy them frivolously. If we find a given item in Reynes' commonplace book, we can assume that he found it interesting, useful, or both. For this reason, Reynes' commonplace book grants us the opportunity to explore the mind of a medieval charmer in the most direct way possible. His recording of the charms he most likely used would not be encumbered by the desire to appear orthodox. As well, the prayers he recorded are more likely to be sincere because he or his immediate family were the intended audience. Commonplace books like Reynes' allow us to explore the occasionally conflicting beliefs that the average medieval lay person had about the nature of their Catholicism and the potential of words spoken by lay people to access numinous power in times of crisis.

A discussion of Reynes' agency in choosing the material that went into his commonplace book necessitates the explicit articulation of the difference between the broad categories from which he was selecting his material. The fact that both charms and ritual magic are similar to exorcism may obscure some important differences in the eyes of a modern reader. Charms, the primary focus of this thesis, are generally short and as close to official religion as possible. They address concerns such as health and salvation that would be considered entirely legitimate by Church authorities, while the methods they used were dubious. If charms contain a ceremony it is usually simple and very brief. Similarly, any unknown words used to address an affliction or injury are outnumbered by words and names from the liturgy. No demons are explicitly addressed in charms. Most of the figures called upon in charms have a connection to the illness or injury they are being called upon to treat.

The most significant difference between charms and ritual magic is that ritual magic explicitly addresses demons and forces them to do the will of the conjurer. To do this it invokes not only mysterious words, but explicitly calls upon infernal forces that outrank the demon(s) being addressed. Ceremonies in ritual magic are more elaborate and may include specifications for location, bodily and spiritual conditions, and materials to be used for the spell. In many cases the goals of ritual magic, such as sex or money, run counter to the asceticism needed to perform the spell. Spells that require rituals of fasting or abstinence were frequently meant to bring a specified sexual partner to the practitioner; others sought to find treasure or magical objects. Ritual magic also frequently sought knowledge from demons, which was deeply problematic in the eyes of Church authorities.

The difference between the transgressions of ritual magic and charms is one of degree and not of type; both used mysterious words to achieve their ends, but only ritual magic claimed

these were the names of demons. Both types of magic sought worldly goods, but only the those offered by ritual magic diverged from Christian values. An important difference is the contexts in which charms and ritual magic were recorded. Charms appear in books of hours, medical manuals, commonplace books, and anywhere else space to write them could be found. Ritual magic, by contrast, travelled in larger volumes that were frequently devoted exclusively to demonic magic. These two genres occupied a very different space in the minds and libraries of the people of the Middle Ages. Ritual magic was to be kept secret, safe from the prying eyes of authority figures, while charms could harmlessly be written where multiple readers might find them.

It possible that Reynes collected charms out of a mere interest in, rather than practice of, the occult. However, the ubiquity of charms themselves suggests otherwise. Charms can be found written into the margins of medical and other manuscripts, and were used frequently in the Middle Ages. To have recorded them with no intention of employing verbal measures against disease and misfortune would make Reynes an unlikely exception to the general pattern of charmers. The fact that charms were transgressive does not change the fact that they were ubiquitous.

In her Ph.D. Thesis “Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth Century England” Laura Mitchell argues that magic could be used by people of various strata in medieval society to establish an identity in every-day situations. Magic was mixed with non-magical texts and became a part of quotidian life. She also argues that this day-to-day recording of magic allowed those who did so to establish their identity within a given community.⁷⁰ For instance, Richard Dove, an inquisitive monk who found himself stifled by the drudgery of life with the Cistercians

⁷⁰ Laura Mitchell “Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth Century England” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2011), 2

in Buckfast Abbey, recorded the *Ars Notoria* and other magical texts to establish his identity as an intellectual.⁷¹ The magic that Reynes recorded may only have been a method of establishing his identity as a literate and prosperous peasant, but that seems unlikely.

One of the manuscripts that Mitchell explores, TCC O.1.57, is a commonplace book kept by the Haldenby family, who were members of the Northamptonshire gentry. The Haldenbys recorded practical magic such as charms for putting out fire and treating wounds, as well as natural magic designed to induce a sense of wonder in those who read the entries.⁷² The Haldenby family collected charms to highlight their prominence in the community and access to obscure material.⁷³

Unlike Reynes' spells and prognostications, the physiognomy and chiromancy recorded by the Haldenbys can all be connected to systematized rationalist enquiry.⁷⁴ Neither practice was without controversy, but the Haldenbys were careful to avoid recording demonstrably and explicitly transgressive texts. The charms in TCC O.1.57 are similar to those in Reynes' commonplace book, but the Haldenbys stopped short of recording the heavenly letter or any other textual amulet. A gentry family who recorded charms in a specifically performative and inquisitive context was willing to write down material that approached the limits of orthodoxy, but was unwilling to overstep the boundary in the explicit way that Reynes did.

The Haldenbys' commonplace book also contains a wider variety of magic than Reynes'. At least part of the text was focused on natural magic and exploring the hidden properties of natural materials.⁷⁵ Despite his access to a variety of texts and obvious interest in the occult,

⁷¹ Ibid., 204-210

⁷² Ibid., 97

⁷³ Ibid., 98

⁷⁴ Ibid., 114

⁷⁵ Ibid., 122

Reynes recorded no natural magic. His interest in magic lay in specific verbal formulae and knowledge of the future. If Reynes recorded magic out of a general interest in the occult or to establish his position within the community, we would expect to find natural magic along with the charms and spells for divination. Therefore, Reynes either did not encounter natural magic or did not think of it as important enough to record. Even if Reynes never used his charms or procedures for divination, he at least sought out and recorded texts he knew to be transgressive.

Charms can be used for a number of purposes, but mostly focus on easing injuries or ailments. As stated above, the source of power in most charms relates to the words spoken by the charmer. These words maybe accompanied by actions (such as crossing one's self or the patient) or by a variety of plant remedies, but the words give meaning to the action of the charmer or make the plant remedies more effective than simply applying a balm. Implicit in charms' use of rituals and words is that they were in some way more effective than simply reciting a prayer.

Apotropaic texts with names from the liturgy written on them function in a way very similar to charms, employing sacred words to bring the power of God to the aid of a person who is either stricken with, or hoping to prevent, illness, injury, or demonic attack in general. Because they share similar goals and views about the nature of God's healing and protective power, both verbal charms (which are spoken aloud) and amulets (that use holy words or images carried on the body) will be covered under the term "charms." Separating them into two categories is useful for modern scholars seeking to study the development of medieval magic, but is not a distinction that Robert Reynes seems to have made.

Charms are verbal or written formulae used to treat or prevent illness, injury, or general misfortune. They can incorporate and combine words from the liturgy, holy images, and frequently outright nonsense. Charms could and did move between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy.

For instance, taken on its own, a prayer to a saint would be perfectly orthodox and might even be encouraged by the clergy. But, if found among other charms that used mysterious words or took God's power for granted, the presence of such a prayer might be interpreted differently.

Charms are most effectively contrasted with more elaborate ritual magic. Multiple forms of magic can be classified under this umbrella term. Necromancy (the conjuring of spirits to deliver knowledge, influence, sex, or other benefits) and astrological image magic (which used images prepared under specific condition to direct stellar influences to obtain similar benefits) both required lengthy ritualised preparation, either to ensure spiritual purity or the correct interaction between astrological conditions and material. Some necromantic rituals could be extremely elaborate, requiring lengthy programs of fasting, prayer, and ritual. Others (such as Reynes' text for angel scrying), required only brief rituals. But from the perspective of the medieval Church, it did not matter how long or elaborate a given ritual was; the result was still interaction with an unknown being likely to be a demon.

Some magical terms can be applied to both charms and ritual magic. The word "incantations" refers to recitation of *voces magicae* (mysterious and/or powerful words meant to bring about the magic effect) and is applicable to both charms and ritual magic. A spell is any magical procedure that uses words, known or unknown, as its source of power. The term can refer to a charm or necromantic procedure, but is best applied to prayers to saints found among charms with extreme caution. An important caveat is that these definitions reflect my synthesis of multiple scholarly perspectives, and may even then be controversial. This thesis will attempt to explore the magic in Robert Reynes' commonplace book from the perspective of the person who wrote it, and the institutions that policed medieval orthodoxy; they did not necessarily share the definitions that I have chosen.

CHAPTER 1: CHARMS, CHARMERS, AND THEOLOGIANs

As we have seen, the principal dispute within the historiography surrounding charms is between Keith Thomas, who argues that charms are a product of a quasi-magical liturgy that used implicitly automatic power to maintain the faith of a simple and uneducated laity, and Eamon Duffy's assertion that charms were the result of the medieval laity appropriating the liturgy into their own lives in occasionally unorthodox ways. Thomas and Duffy both see charms as resulting from the laity appropriating the liturgy into their own lives. Important differences arise when they explain what led to this appropriation. For Thomas, it resulted from simple peasants aping the automatically efficacious ceremonies of the Church, while for Duffy these appropriations were the result of devotion and an understanding of the power held by holy words and objects.

In the chapter "Charms, Pardons, and Promises" Duffy argues that charms grew out of the apotropaic elements of the Mass and other orthodox ceremonies, drawing specific attention to rogationtide, baptism, and the blessing of salt and water as rituals in which the power of holy words, gestures, and things was pitted against the devil.⁷⁶ Duffy notes that the blessed objects associated with baptism were carefully guarded by the Church because of their supposed power over demons, but the apotropaic salt and water produced by the blessing of the salt and water were distributed by priests or employed as other ways to assist local lay people in their battle with the infernal.

For Duffy this "set of paradigms," in which the power of holy words could drive away demons directly or produce objects that could do so was at the heart not only of conventional medieval Catholicism but also of medieval charms.⁷⁷ He notes that this relationship between

⁷⁶ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 279-280.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 282.

sacred words and protection from evil in the minds of medieval laity is especially important when investigating magic found in devotional texts like *Horae* (books that detailed religious observances throughout the day) and devotionals:

It is in this overall context that the “charms” of the *Horae* and the private prayer collections need to be read, for they have clear and close similarities to the sacramental. Their use of the sign of the cross, their direct address to the devils they seek to exorcize, in fact their whole rhetorical strategy is borrowed from this area of the Church’s official practice.⁷⁸

Duffy does not “suggest that all such invocation fit within the bounds even of fifteenth-century orthodoxy.” Instead, he argues that charms were the application of sacred and orthodox ceremonies to the needs of every-day life.⁷⁹ Later in the chapter, Duffy summarises his argument by describing the late medieval Church as “a single but multifaceted resonant symbolic house” which included official prayers and ceremonies (for example the Pater Noster or Communion) but also included less orthodox lay practices such as charms. Official prayers such as the Pater Noster and unofficial charms all sought the same broad benefits of safety and salvation, and used the same symbols as a connection to numinous power to attain these benefits.⁸⁰

Duffy’s conclusions are based on solid evidence; it can be demonstrated that charms borrow heavily from conventional medieval piety. However, a closer look reveals that charmers engaged in practices not drawn from the liturgy and in some cases forbidden by prominent theologians, and did so frequently. In some cases they may have done so knowing the keepers of official orthodoxy would have regarded them as magic, and therefore illicit. Duffy’s work does not address the fact that (as we shall see) unorthodox charms were used by those who most likely knew them to be unorthodox.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 298.

We will begin with an examination of a variety of representative charms from the later middle ages. We will then analyse them according to the standards of the principle framers of orthodoxy in the late Middle Ages, Augustine and Aquinas. It will be found that Christian mythology and language are found alongside unorthodox elements like mysterious words and non-ecclesiastical ceremonies in charms. In subsequent chapters, we will turn to the question of how common charmers would have learned about the boundaries of orthodoxy established by these theologians.

Charms and the Theologians.

Charms occupied a kind of no-man's-land between magic and orthodox religion. Some were certainly more or less orthodox, but many also had commonly recurring features identified by theologians as signals of idolatry or magic. Charms might use unknown or nonsense words, their medicinal features sometimes did not appear to be legitimate, they sometimes used non-orthodox prayers, and they might involve attempts to gain knowledge of the future through means not connected to a larger religious or natural system. Examples of charms including each of these elements will be explored, followed by a discussion of the ways they violate orthodox teaching.

Lea Olsan provides a representative sample of the most popular charms in “The Corpus of the Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books.” These verbal cures were used frequently by medical practitioners between 1200 and 1500 and survive in multiple remedy books designed for healers who never attended a university medical program.⁸¹ Several of these charms move outside the boundary of what was permissible in Christian doctrine. Consider the

⁸¹Lea Olsan “The Corpus of Charms in Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books” in *Charms, Charmers and Charming* ed. John Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 214-215.

following charm for helping a woman struggling in labour, the ninth of twenty-one such charms that Olsan records:

Bind Þis to here rigt thy: In nomine +patris + et filii+ et spiritus sancti amen. Per uirtutem Dei sint medicina mei pia crux et passio + Christi. Vulnera quinque Dei sint medicina mei + *sancta Maria* peperit +Christum+ *sancta Anna* Peperit +*Mariam*. *Sancta Helizabeth* peperit +*Iohannem* *sancta Cecillia* peperit +*Remigium*. +sator + arepo + tenet + opera + rotas+ Christus uincit + Christus regnat + Christus imperat + Christus te vocat + Mundus et gaudet. Lex te desiderat. +Christus dixit Lazare, veni foras +Deus vlcionum dominus+ deus ulcionum, libera fabulam tuam N[ame] +Dextra [manus] domini fecit virtutem +a+g+l+a+ alpha + et + oo. Anna peperit *Mariam* + *Helizabeth* precursorem + *Maria* + dominum nostrum +*Iesum* +*Christum* sine dolore et tristitia. O infans, exi foras siue viuus siue mortuus quia + Christus vocat ad te ad lucem + agios +agios +agios+ Christus regnat +Christus imperat + Sanctus + Sanctus + Sanctus + dominus + deus omnipotens +qui es et qui eras et qui uerturus es amen. +bhurnon + bhurini+ blutuono + blutaono + *Iesus* + nazareus + rex iudeorum + fili dei miserere mei amen.⁸²

Given its use of Biblical figures and relatively standard liturgical elements, this example seems to confirm Duffy's thesis regarding the role of the liturgy in the construction of charms, but two elements of this charm are problematic. The charm employs a ligature that is medically unnecessary and uses the unknown words "bhurnon + bhurini+ blutuono + blutaono." Had the charm used only orthodox words it would likely have met with approval from Church authorities. While unconventional, without the mysterious words this charm is a plea to saints associated with childbirth, and so would fall within the bounds of orthodox prayer.

Another charm, the seventh recorded in Olsan's corpus, uses vervain to predict whether a sick person will survive their illness:

Take fiue croppes of verveyne with Þi rigt hand & ley in Þi leftte & sey ouer hem .v. pater noster in Þe worschip of Þe .v. woundes of Crist & sey Þus: I coniure yow fiue croppes in Þe vertu of Þe .v. woundes that + Crist suffred on Þe rode tre forto bye mannis soule out of thraldom Þat Þe sik man N[ame] telle me Þe sothe Þoru Þe vertu of God and of yow wheþer he schal leue or dye of Þat siknesse. & blesse hem .v. times & ley hem in Þin rigt

⁸² Ibid., 219-220.

hand agen & tak þe sik be his rigt hand so þat he wete nogt of þe erbes. & what þu axest he schal telle soth of his stat.⁸³

The charm attempts to create magical conditions under which the patient is able to give information about themselves and their condition that neither they nor the leech treating them know. The ceremony of the charm turns the patient into a kind of medium for information about themselves. The charmer blesses the vervain while passing it between their hands before taking the patient's hand. The combination of unknowable information about the future and the ceremony that conjures the vervain makes this charm a form of divination and thus outside of the realm of acceptable orthodox practice.

From the examples above, three important ways that charms moved outside the bounds of orthodox practice can be discerned. The first is the assumption that nonsense words can have an effect on the physical world. Praying for miracles was legitimate, but using nonsense words risked supplication to demons and consequently idolatry. The same was true of the use of ceremonies from outside of the official rites of the Church. The wearing of a ligature in charm nine and the blessing and passing of the vervain in charm seven could also be signals to demons, and at the very least were not part of prayers as recognized by the Catholic Church. Finally, divination that offered knowledge that could not be gained by the senses would have been considered *curiositas*, because through the ceremony the charmer sought to gain knowledge that was proper to God, and may have gained it through demonic intervention.

⁸³ Ibid., 219. Take five crops of vervain with thy right hand & lay in thy lefte & say over them 5 pater noster in the worship of the 5 woundes of Christ and say thus: I conjure you five crops in the virtue of the five wounds that + Christ suffered on the rood tree for to buy man's soul out of thraldom that the sick man [Name] tell me so through the virtue of God and of you whether he shall live or die of that sickness & bless them 5 time & lay them in thine right hand again & take the sick by his right hand so that he wit not of the herbs & what thou asketh he shall tell so of his state.

St. Augustine of Hippo addresses the use of amulets, ligatures, and unknown words to achieve various effects in *On Christian Doctrine*. He argues that “among superstitious things is whatever has been instituted by men concerning the worshiping of any creature or any part of the creature as though it were God.”⁸⁴ He includes among such superstitious things,

amulets and remedies which medical science... condemns, whether they involve enchantments, or certain secret signs called ‘characters’ or the hanging, tying, or in any way wearing of certain significations whether they are occult or manifest.⁸⁵

The reason that Augustine finds unknown words to be problematic is rooted in his theories about communication. For Augustine, there are two overarching kinds of signs: those that naturally indicate something (such as smoke indicating that there is fire)⁸⁶ and signs that are constructed with the intention of specifically conveying an idea to a given audience (such as words that are either written or spoken).⁸⁷ Languages specifically are useful because they are intelligible to more than one person, and so they must be agreed upon by both parties who are involved in the relay of information. Augustine argues from these premises that the use of omens for predicting the future is based on an understanding between a human and demons to gain knowledge that mortals could not otherwise acquire.⁸⁸

While in this instance Augustine only directs his criticism at the use of omens, the logic he employs also informs his stance on the mysterious words that were applied to the body and used for healing and objects that did not serve definable religious or medical purposes but were employed to ward off disease. He argues that an herb hung around the neck to cure an ailment could be effective for one of two reasons: because of an effect that it has naturally, or because it

⁸⁴ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.20.30.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.1.2.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.2.3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2.24.37.

worked as a signal to demons; only in the former case might it be legitimately used by Christians. Because they can only have medical effects if ingested, herbs or other objects hung outside the body cannot be used to cure or prevent disease. There is no way for such a ligature to have an impact on the internal state of the wearer, and therefore no way for it to treat disease naturally. Herbs and objects hung from the body with aim of treating illness or warding off bad luck worked as a signal to demons.⁸⁹

Following Augustine's logic, a pious Christian should avoid mysterious words, like those of charm nine, as they had no way of knowing whether they were signals to demons. Although he only addressed the mysterious words used for ligatures and amulets, the fact that the mysterious words would be spoken rather than written would not change the fact that they were signals to demons. Augustine's objection is not specifically to the writing of the word, but rather that it works through unknown means and can only be understood by a being that is not human, and since it is not a proper prayer the party being addressed is unlikely to be a saint or an angel.

In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine only addresses the use of the stars and natural omens. To address the process involved in the predictions of charm seven, other texts must be explored. Saint Augustine's *On the Divination of Demons* addresses many of the issues raised by charm seven of Olsan's corpus. In the charm neither the patient nor the leech is able to reach a satisfactory conclusion as to whether or not the patient will recover, and they presumably have exhausted all natural methods for acquiring this information. One of the central points of *On the Divination of Demons* is that "through the sense perception belonging to the aerial body, [demons] readily surpass the perception possessed by earthly bodies." In Augustine's construction, demons' bodies are made of air, which allows them to move faster than humans,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.29.45.

whose bodies are made of earth. This speed allows them to gather far more information than humans could hope to. Demons also have extremely long worldly lives, so they have more experience in every area of knowledge.⁹⁰ Because of their ability to acquire knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible to humans and interpret it successfully,

certain individuals think it proper to serve the demons and to render them divine honours. To this service they are prompted especially by the vice of curiosity, because of their desire for a false happiness, and for an earthly and temporal success.⁹¹

In this instance, Augustine is referring to the worship of gods in the traditional religions of the Mediterranean, but the blessing of the vervain and the taking of the patient's hand could also be interpreted in this way, given the specific involvement of demons in predicting the future. Since neither the patient nor the charmer can decide the most likely outcome of the patient's illness, praying for knowledge of the future and using gestures with no clear signification (the passing of the vervain) to gain information from an unknown source would constitute sinful divination. Augustine saw the use of mysterious signs as the basis of an alliance with demons and divination as one of the primary reasons for establishing such contact. The passing of the vervain could easily be seen as a method of communication directed toward a demon.

Another element of Augustine's construction of divination is relevant to charm seven: he notes that demons can cause illness and other afflictions or disasters that affect the lives of humans, and so are also capable of bringing about the events that they have predicted themselves.⁹² A demon might have predicted the death of the patient that the charms was used to treat, and then killed him or her through illness. This would reinforce the charmer's belief in sinful divination practices and draw them further into sin.

⁹⁰ St. Augustine, *On the Divination of Demons*, 1.3.7.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 1.5.9.

It must be noted that knowledge of the future was not sinful *per se* to St. Augustine. Such knowledge could be gained either through the observation of natural signs⁹³ or through the divine revelation of God as it was given to the Prophets of the Old Testament.⁹⁴ In these instances there is no sin because the knowledge is either freely available without doing homage to demons or granted spontaneously by God. Neither case falls into the category of divination as they do not involve interaction with demons.

The theologians of the Middle Ages did not receive St. Augustine's ideas in a vacuum; some of his ideas were modified to allow for common practices like astrology, while others were ignored completely. Augustine died in A.D. 410 and despite his authority many of the practices he condemned were widely used by both clerics and the laity in the Middle Ages. While Augustine's theology was still influential and informed the policies of the medieval Church, scholastic thinkers sought more in-depth answers to the questions he addressed. Practices of medicine and magic had also evolved since Augustine wrote. These changes are reflected in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, who completed his *Summa Theologicae* in 1265. This work informed Catholic orthodoxy for much of the Middle Ages. The *Summa* addressed many of the elements contained in the charms discussed above.

Thomas Aquinas, in fact, allowed for the use of amulets for healing, provided they contained only holy words and under the condition that the amulet had to be worn out of simple faith in God. Licit amulets could not contain any mysterious symbols or words. On the subject of mysterious words, Aquinas states:

In every incantation or the wearing of written words, two points call for caution. The first concerns what is said or written; if it implies invocation of the demonic, it is clearly

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1.6.10.

superstitious and unlawful. Similarly, we should beware, it seems, of strange words we do not understand lest they conceal something unlawful.⁹⁵

Aquinas was wary of mysterious words and acknowledged their potential to act as signs to demons, but he did not limit his caution to the unknown. Even when dealing with known words he states that “one should take care lest a supposedly sacred word contain error, for then its effect could not be ascribed to God, who bears no witness to falsehood.”⁹⁶ For Aquinas, the sacred words like those used in charm seven were a legitimate, but potentially dangerous, source of power. While the invocation of Mary and the wounds of Christ were legitimate, the use of the nonsense sequence “+bhurnon + bhurini+ blutuono + blutaono +” rendered the charm, at the very least, potentially demonic.

Even those amulets that did not have mysterious words could be problematic. While they might be legitimate, these words could be accompanied by

... emblems of vanity, for instance, signs other than that of the cross. Or our confidence may be committed to the style of writing or fashion in wearing them, or to some other such nonsense, which has no connection with reverence for God. All this should be judged superstitious.⁹⁷

For Aquinas, the practice of writing down the names on a ligature and binding them specifically around the right thigh of the woman that charm nine was meant to treat could not have made them any more effective as prayers. Even without the use of mysterious words, putting faith in actions that were not prayers and moving the focus away from the worship of God made any charms that required such behaviours superstitious. In his broader view, Aquinas states that,

⁹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.96. 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Incantations with snakes or other animals, are not unlawful if we attend only to the sacred words and divine power. Incantations, however, often imply unlawful observances, and rely on the demonic for their result...⁹⁸

In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas dealt, for the most part, with the specific elements that made charms unlawful. However, the broader tone of the *Summa Theologicae* is one of caution. Many, or even most, charms may have been harmless, but the practices they contained could easily slip over into idolatry and superstition and for this reason, they should be avoided completely.

Aquinas' theology applies to the divination in charm seven and more broadly in more complex ways. To be sure, he considers most forms of divination unlawful but acknowledges that there are ways of knowing the future that do not rely on aid from angels or demons.⁹⁹

Aquinas argues that “[d]ivination occurs when a man usurps to himself, and wrongly, the foretelling of the future. To claim what belongs to God alone is a sin, and in this sense foretelling the future is a sin.”¹⁰⁰ However, he also argues that revelation from God, the observation of cause and effect, or the understanding of the correlation between a sign and an event were all legitimate ways of acquiring knowledge.¹⁰¹

Aquinas saw many types of prognostication as being legitimate in some circumstances, but he also saw some as open to demonic influence, while others always involved demons.¹⁰²

Aquinas specifically condemns necromancy as sinful because it involves the raising of the dead or summoning of demons and is, therefore, unlawful.¹⁰³ Knowledge of the future through human speech was present in the Bible and so could sometimes be the result of divine inspiration.

However, Aquinas argued that in most circumstances it was likely the result of demonic

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.95.1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. For instance, some one who predicted the changing of seasons through migration of birds could not be considered sinful. They were simply observing the natural world.

¹⁰² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.95.3.

¹⁰³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.95.4.

interference. He states that it was sometimes an omen “ordered by divine providence” but it sometimes came “according to the influence of the demonic.” Aquinas reinforces this assertion with reference to the Old Testament figures Gideon and Eliezer who interpreted dreams and speech respectively.¹⁰⁴

Aquinas summarises his argument on divination by stating that “we should conclude that all such divinations are superstitious and unlawful when they go beyond the limits set by the order of nature and divine providence.”¹⁰⁵ Because Aquinas allows for supernatural knowledge of the future in specific circumstances, a thorough understanding of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a given practice requires an examination of the Biblical stories that he cites. In Genesis 24 Abraham sends out Eliezer to find a wife for his son Isaac and in verses 12-14 he prays:

O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. Let the girl to whom I shall say, ‘Please offer your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.¹⁰⁶

Unlike the ceremony for determining if the sick man will live or die, Eliezer makes a request to God in the form of a prayer with no elaboration, and the request is granted; the woman who answers with the appropriate phrases is Rebekah who eventually marries Isaac.

Gideon, the other figure mentioned by Aquinas, receives knowledge of the future from God in a dream. However, this knowledge is also granted spontaneously and without ceremony. Of equal importance is that Gideon had been previously and spontaneously addressed by God

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.2.95.7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 27:12-14 NRSV.

and appointed as the leader of Israel.¹⁰⁷ In other words, it is at least implicit that God's designates could reasonably be assumed to have (or have been given) the gift of discerning the truth in such things. Given the nature of these instances of divination and Aquinas' opinion of unorthodox ceremonies, it is likely that he would have considered the ceremony in charm seven to be unlawful. Although the charm did not specifically invoke demons, there was a chance that the ceremony could be addressed to them, potentially as worship, because it attempted to access hidden knowledge through an unorthodox use of vervain.

Of the twenty-one charms recorded in Olsan's corpus, nine can be seen as moving outside of traditional orthodoxy in one of the specific ways outlined by Augustine and Aquinas. This is problematic for Duffy's thesis about the relationship between the liturgy and the use of powerful words and objects in the practice of charming. Equally problematic is his treatment of charms from outside of the theological limits set by Augustine and Aquinas, since over a third of the charms that Olsan found to be consistently circulating in medieval English leechbooks were unorthodox in one or more respects. These violations of the limits set down by theologians were not outliers but an integral element of medieval magical medicine during the period covered by Olsan.

Two important reasons that charmers stepped outside the bounds of orthodoxy can be found in examining Olsan's corpus. The first is that the charmers relied on traditions that had no precedent in Church ceremony and so engaged in the vain ceremonies that Aquinas condemned, for instance the ligature tied around the thigh of the woman in labour. Other charms took sacred elements of the Mass and applied them in lay situations, as Duffy suggests was the case, and in the way that Thomas Aquinas specifically condemns. The second way charms stray into

¹⁰⁷ Jdgs 7:1-13 NRSV.

unorthodoxy and superstition is observed in the same charm, which relied on the use of mysterious words to achieve its effects. While the ceremonies of the medieval Church informed those used by charmers, these ceremonies were used in ways that were considered idolatrous by important theologians like Aquinas and Augustine, or they impinged on the clergy's privileged access to supernatural power.

Even if the Laity could access divine power directly in an orthodox conception, the automatic nature of charms pushed them beyond what could reasonably be asked of God. In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas argues that prayer is a petition to God. In a petition “a person requests someone not subject to him, either an equal or a superior, do something for him.”¹⁰⁸ Prayer was also unable to change the mind of God, which was already fixed on the highest possible good. Instead, prayer united the will of a mortal with the unchangeable and ultimately correct will of God:

Although man of himself does not know for what he should pray, *The Spirit*, as the same passage states, *helps us in our infirmity*, since by inspiring us with holy desires he makes us ask for what is right. Hence our lord said, *true adorers must worship in spirit and in truth*.¹⁰⁹

In the conception of Aquinas, a leech could pray for healing using holy names and words, but the result of this prayer would be entirely up to God. In this construction, prayer might lead the physician and his patient to accept what God had ordained, but not change it.

Prayer could be answered in Aquinas' conception but the qualifications for receiving God's assent were rigorous. For instance, St. Paul's prayer that “the sting of the flesh be removed from him” was not granted. God would grant to the person praying what was best for them, not necessarily what they prayed for. Supplicants may also receive the object of their

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.83.1.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.83.5.

prayers but on a timeline set out by God, not the one the person praying would prefer. Some prayers are granted, but Aquinas lays out strict qualifications for this:

Thus four conditions for effective prayer are laid down: namely, to ask for oneself, to ask for things necessary to salvation, to ask piously, and to ask perseveringly; if these four conditions concur we always obtain what we pray for.¹¹⁰

When discussing how long a prayer should be Aquinas argues that the Lord's Prayer is phrased as it is in order to ensure that the mind of the one praying remained fixed on the desires expressed in the Lord's Prayer.¹¹¹ Aquinas also carefully lays out what the Lord's Prayer asks for and argues that it focuses primarily on spiritual benefits. Any and all earthly benefits it asks for are meant to be useful to salvation.¹¹² With this borne in mind, even prayers to the saints that contain no tangibly unorthodox words or nonsense and no attempts to predict the future could still fall outside of the limits set by Augustine and Aquinas. The charms that promise to treat illness and give knowledge of the future use the power of words just as the prayers imagined by Augustine and Aquinas did, but the internal logic that surrounded the power of the words, while not different enough to make them non-Christian, would have set them apart from conventionally orthodox prayers. Aquinas' construction of prayer precludes mechanical effectiveness of divine names and holy words as they are used in charms. The promises of healing and protection in charms make their use of divine names and prayer seem closer to commands to subordinates than petitions to superiors. This difference in tone would have been perceptible to Robert Reynes, and troubling to theologians. Charms, like those Reynes used, employ sacred names, figures, and narrative in an instrumental fashion. If this did not render them unorthodox outright, it put them into a category that Reynes would have been aware was uncomfortably ambiguous.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.83.15.

¹¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.83. 14.

¹¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.83.9.

Duffy constructs charms as lay expressions of core elements of medieval Christianity. He also recognizes that charms could stray beyond the strict limits of what was considered orthodox and that Augustine, Aquinas, and other such keepers of orthodoxy would not have approved of these charms. Implicit in his argument is the assumption that charmers did not have access to the details of high theology. At the same time, he insists that the charms flow from an understanding of the core mysteries of the Church and its rites. Here lies a basic tension in Duffy's arguments. If the medieval laity were sophisticated enough to produce intelligent lay emulations of basic Christian mysteries, were they not sophisticated enough to know that it was a problem? Duffy's arguments rely on reading charms as individual units, considered independently from texts that appear in the same volume. Duffy also chooses charms which mirror Christian practice in superficial ways, but disregard important elements of Augustine and Aquinas' teaching. When we explore charms not as free-floating units but as part of texts assembled by real individuals that reflect the frequently contradictory worldview of the medieval charmer, we will find such charmers collecting catechetical material, defensibly unorthodox charms, and clearly transgressive magic in the same volume. As we shall see, a closer examination of the ragged realities of medieval charmers will show that treating charms as a mildly unorthodox extension of the liturgy oversimplifies the nature of magic by overlooking both the catechetical and clearly transgressive material that appear in the same texts as charms. It will also show that there is good reason to believe that those who used charms understood where the broad boundaries of orthodox Christianity lay and knew when they crossed them. The next two chapters do this by examining one such charmer, what we know about his religious life, and what he probably knew about the boundaries of conventional religion.

CHAPTER 2: THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD OF A LAY CHARMER

The complex condemnations of charms and other magic by Augustine and Aquinas were available only in Latin, and most people who copied and/or used charms may not have had access to these texts. Instead, by the late middle ages most lay readers relied on vernacular texts and other catechetical methods like sermons and morality plays. In order to explore the interface between those who established orthodoxy and common people and in order to know what lay charmers might have read or have been told about magic, we must begin with an examination of a representative lay, peasant charmer. The best available example is Robert Reynes, who wrote his commonplace book in the later fifteenth century, likely between 1470 and 1500.¹¹³ Reynes' commonplace book represents the most complete sketch of the life of a peasant charmer available to modern historians. Other commonplace books are available, but they frequently represent a more prosperous stratum of medieval society.

Eamon Duffy describes a laity who understood the core mysteries of the medieval Church. Their charms were thus products of late medieval religious practice. Robert Reynes was just such a layperson whose work, interests, and religious devotions are all recorded in a surviving commonplace book. This reveals a curious and intelligent person interested in history, science, medicine, and travel. Robert Reynes was able to interact with vernacular catechetical material prepared by clerics for the laity, and seems to have done so with great enthusiasm. He also collected charms and other magic. This chapter will describe what we can tell about Reynes' intellectual and religious world, the charms and magic he copied, and how these were problematic according to conventional theology. It will make clear that his commonplace book included charms which were unorthodox according to the standards of conventional medieval

¹¹³ Robert Reynes *The Common Place Book of Robert Reynes of Acles: An Edition of Tanner MS 407* Ed. Cameron Louis (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980), 25.

theology. These charms would have been treated as superstitious, but not explicitly demonic by the keepers of orthodoxy. However, Reynes recorded his charms in the same text as a work of overt spirit conjuring. To consider Reynes' religious worldview, we must examine all of the potentially dubious material that he collected. This will reveal what he was comfortable recording and his relationship to the limits of orthodoxy as imagined by Augustine and Aquinas.

It will be necessary to examine Reynes' commonplace book systematically. This will begin with a summary of the scientific and devotional material in Reynes' commonplace book to give insight into his knowledge of, and ability to interact with, conventional science and religion. With this information, it will then investigate the charms that Reynes recorded. Instead of being presented in the order in which they appear in Reynes' commonplace book, they will be arranged into broad categories. First to be addressed will be next-to-medical charms that seek to treat illness but do not rely on humoral theory. Instead they seem to treat the illness as an unwelcome entity, similar to a demon. The next set of charms will be those that were used for physical protection and spiritual salvation. These charms promised to grant safety from natural, human, and spiritual dangers using divine names, saints, and other symbols drawn from orthodox Catholicism. The last charm in this section, "the woman recluse and the wounds of Jesus", will require a discussion of the theology of indulgences in the middle ages, but will show that even prayers with the most orthodox goals can contain unorthodox elements. Finally, this chapter will address prognostication and divination. It will establish that Reynes' prognosticatory material was not based in any systematic understanding of natural philosophy that would give him insight into future events, but instead was more closely related to the use of omens which Augustine and Aquinas argued were signs from demons. This section will also address the "procedure for divination," an explicit text of spirit conjuring in Reynes' commonplace book.

Reynes was a “peasant villager” and the son of a local carpenter, who received a respectable and pragmatic education.¹¹⁴ Reynes could read and write in the vernacular and knew some Latin relevant to his work as a reeve. He likely learned “the drafting of deeds and charters, the conveyancing and composition of other legal records and the keeping of accounts” but is unlikely to have been able to obtain, read, and understand texts like those by Augustine and Aquinas directly.¹¹⁵ Reynes had enough literacy and education to hold the offices of church-reeve¹¹⁶ and alderman of the guild of St. Edmund, both of which were prominent positions in the village of Acle.¹¹⁷ As the alderman of a religious guild, Reynes would have been responsible for overseeing payments in cash and in-kind for the maintenance of lights, the provision of funerals, and the distribution of alms to the poor. This would have involved direct interaction with the clergy to hire priests for funeral masses or to maintain a light in the local church, and so brought Reynes into direct contact with the clergy.¹¹⁸ The alderman of a religious guild was explicitly the position of a layperson in the service of a religious institution . Several entries in his book show Reynes interacting directly with the lord of the manor, an abbot, usually by keeping records of what was owed. On three recorded occasions, Reynes met with the abbot.¹¹⁹ The entry devoted to him in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* offers a good summary. It describes Reynes as “a scribe and local official” who “probably lived his whole life in the Manner of Acle.”¹²⁰

What follows will argue that we might will add ‘magician’ to his list of titles.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 34,

¹¹⁶ This is synonymous with “church warden.” I use it here because it is used by the editor of Reynes’ commonplace book.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁸ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 142-143.

¹¹⁹ Cameron Lewis “Robert Reyns” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brain Harrison Oxford University Press, 2004 [Accessed 19 August 2017
<http://www.oxforddnb.com.cyber.usask.ca/view/article/93682>]

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Robert Reynes was literate, pious, and curious and his commonplace book reflects how he accessed elite knowledge through informal channels. For instance, Reynes copied “the orders of angels as explained by Dionysus the Pseudo-Areopagite in his *Celestial Heirarchy*.”¹²¹ Reynes not only had access to rudimentary information about his faith, but had the opportunity to record knowledge from a variety of scientific and religious texts. Such access was not limited to religious texts either. Entry forty-five records the “distance between celestial bodies” and the information that it records seems to have its roots in *De imagine mundi* written by Honorius of Autun around 1122.¹²² Robert Reynes made a concerted and successful effort to engage with and understand his religion, even if he did not attend university, and he had an interest in knowledge far beyond what was necessary to be considered a Christian.

Along side this interest in intellectual traditions concerning the natural world, Reynes’ devotion is amply attested. In Cameron Louis’ edition of Reynes’ commonplace book, roughly 141 pages are devoted to recording information that did not concern Robert Reynes professionally. Of these, approximately 88, or 61%, are devoted to recording devotional material. Some of this material, like a prayer invoking St. Bryde of Sweden (discussed below) contained implicit breaks with important elements of Church doctrine. Other items, like the “Speech of Delight,” were removed from their original context and reinterpreted. The “Speech of Delight” seems to have come from a morality play in which it warned about the dangers of carnal pleasure.¹²³ It is conceivable that he transcribed it for the aesthetic value of its poetry, but even if this were the case, the presence of the speech nonetheless illustrates that Reynes interacted with the preaching and teaching aimed at the non-Latinate laity of later medieval Europe. Reynes also

¹²¹ Louis, notes to *Common Place Book*, 502.

¹²² Louis, notes to *Common Place Book*, 402 Although there are some disagreements between the texts, this can be attributed at least in part to errors in recording.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 467.

put a great deal of effort and resources into recording these lessons, devoting expensive paper and ink to the cause.

Other entries in Reynes' commonplace book are devoted to recording information like a list of the seven sacraments of the Church, in entry 38.¹²⁴ Similarly, entry 61 contains "miscellaneous Biblical names".¹²⁵ The book also contains scattered short texts on how a Christian ought to behave. Entry number 66 is titled "The Christian Life" and tells in verse of the value of reflecting on the passion for overcoming temptation:

Drede God and alle thing shall drede 3ow
Loue that Lord, and nothyng schal nede 3ow
Remember 3oure deth, and thynk on Christis Passion
And Thanne schal 3e ouercome Þe devyll temptacion¹²⁶

Another entry titled "Flee Sin and be Merciful" exhorts the reader to acts of mercy.

Ffor loue of God and Drede of peyne
Ffro dedly synne Þiself restreyne
A man schall haue mercy Þat merciful ys,
And he Þat ys withowte mercy, mercy schall he mys.¹²⁷

Intriguingly, entry number 37 of Robert Reynes' commonplace book, a short piece of religious poetry, is found in no other manuscripts and may be original to him.¹²⁸ The text is extremely brief: "Lord Ihesu, Goddes Sone on lyve, Haue mercy on vs for Thy woundes five."¹²⁹ Reynes may not have gone to university, but it seems he could produce original poetry and was certainly engaged with the local church. Reynes understood himself to be a Catholic and was committed

¹²⁴Reynes, *Commonplace Book*, 180.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 249. Dread God and all things shall dread you / Love that Lord, and shall need you / Remember your death, and think on Christ's Passion / And then shall ye overcome the devil's temptation

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 246. For love of God and Dread of pain / From deadly sin thyself restrain / A man shall have mercy that merciful is / And he that is without mercy, mercy shall he miss

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

not only to learning about his religion but also to ensuring that he applied what he knew in his own life.

Despite his education and demonstrable devotion, Robert Reynes recorded a number of items that are magical to modern eyes and that were of questionable orthodoxy to medieval theologians. His commonplace book contains the three items devoted to divination, two of which would not have passed as orthodox according to most theologians, but reflect popular practice in the late Middle Ages. These entries attempt to predict the what will happen in a given year using the month in which thunder first sounds and the dominical letter as indications of events to come.¹³⁰ The other procedure, which appears earlier in the manuscript than the other two, claims to summon an angel using a combination of prayer and mysterious letters.¹³¹ The divinatory material is accompanied by a number of marginal charms for healing or protection that will be discussed below.

Robert Reynes was educated enough to thoroughly understand the Biblical and Liturgical figures who gave charms power and pious enough to believe that they could do what the Church promised. At the same time, he used these holy symbols for charms in ways that could not have been considered orthodox. The conflict between Reynes' piety and use of charms problematizes Eamon Duffy's "resonant symbolic house" because, despite being a devoted and educated Christian, he recorded charms of dubious orthodoxy as well as instructions for bare-faced ritual magic. Reynes' use of charms exceeds the limits set out by Augustine and Aquinas but was not the result of ignorance as both Thomas and Duffy imply. Reynes' commonplace book shows that he actively sought religious and secular knowledge and that he was able to understand and

¹³⁰ Ibid., 312-314.

¹³¹ Ibid., 169.

interpret what he found. Reynes chose to record charms he knew to be unorthodox because they reflected his worldview and addressed concerns that Church ceremonies did not.

Thomas Aquinas himself noted that it was unfair to expect the laity to understand the finer points of Christian theology and to act in accordance with them. Such simple people could be saved by believing in what they could not understand through their implicit faith in the Church.¹³² This leads to two important conclusions. First, the simplest of Christians could be easily corrected and forgiven if they occasionally practiced incorrectly. At the same time, charmers, who relied on elements of the liturgy and scripture to give their charms emotional force, were not the simplest of Christians.

Not all of the exclusive knowledge Reynes recorded grew out of simple curiosity. Some of it served very practical ends. For instance, entry twenty-one records elaborate instructions for bloodletting that rely on an understanding of the zodiac and humoral theory. The instructions state that

In Marche, Apryl, and May reynyth blood, and he arn hote and moyst. In the monyth of Iune, Iule, and August reynyth red colour, and it arn note and drye. In the monyth of Septembyr, Octobyr, an Nouembyr reynyth black colour, and it arn drye and colde. In Pe monyth of Decembyr, Ianuar and Ffeuer3er reynyth fleume, and he arn colde and moyste.¹³³

This information is followed by a discussion of Galenic humoral types, instructions for fasting, what astrological conditions are favourable to blood letting, and potential consequences of doing so under adverse conditions.¹³⁴ Even though he was not a trained physician, Robert Reynes was

¹³² Norman Tanner and Sethina Watson, "Least of the Laity; the minimum requirements of a medieval Christian," *Journal of Medieval History* 32 no. 4 (2006): 396-423.

¹³³ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 157-158. In March, April, and May reigns Blood, and he is hot and moist. In the month of June, July, and August reigns red collar, and it is hot and dry. In the month of September, October, and November reigns black collar, and it is dry and cold. In the month of December, January, and February reigns phlegm, and he is cold and moist.

¹³⁴ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 158-161.

interested in medical theory and may have been involved in treating illness in some capacity.

While bloodletting instructions were not as obscure or exclusive as other forms of knowledge, it still required a certain level of literacy and access to information to understand. Robert Reynes was not the uneducated parishioner with no avenue into understanding his religion that Thomas and Duffy construct.

Robert Reynes' search for religious knowledge led him to texts of dubious orthodoxy, many of which could be considered magic or at least only semi-religious. His commonplace book contains many charms, all of which require investigation to understand where he strayed into unorthodox practices.

Next-to-Medical Charms

The first charm contains a relatively standard narrative of St. Peter complaining to Jesus that he has a fever and Jesus casting the illness out. This is preceded by a list of invocations aimed at binding the fever. In this text, the fever is addressed as Seven Sisters and given seven names: Ylia, Zicalia, Valecta, Suffocalia, Sineya, Geneya, Emica.

In nomine Patris et Fillii et Spritus Sancti, amen. Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui dedisti manum beato Petro apostolo tuo, fac huic famul tuo +, familie tue +, N.+ . Coniuro uos febres quod estis viitem sorores. Prima vocatur Ylia+ Secunda Zicalia+, tercia Valecta +, quarta Suffocalia +, Quinta Sineya +, sexta Geneya +, septima Emica +. Coniuro vos febres de quocunque iiii et in quacunque nacione estis +, per partum +, per Fillium +, per Spiritum Sanctum+, per potestatem +, per Aduentum Christi +, per Natiuitatem Eius +, per Sanctam Circumcisionem +, per Baptismum+, Per Ieiunium +, per Crucem et Passionem +, per mortem et sepulturam +, per Sanctam Resurreccionem et ad mirabilem Ascencionem Eius +, per gloriam Sancti Spiritus paracliti, +, per Mariam Sanctam et omnes Sanctos angelos et archangelos Dei +, per thronos et dominacones +, per cherubyn et seraphyn, per xxti iiiior seniors qui ante thronum Dei sunt +, per Sanctum Iohannem Bapstitam +, per xii Apostolos +, per iiiior Euangelistas, per martires et confessors +, per omnes sanctos et sanctas virgines et celo <commorantes> +, per totam terram +, per solam et lunam +, per stellas et omnis <que> Deus fecit in celo et in terra, ut non amplius habeatis potestatem super hunc famulum tuum vel famulam tuam +, N. +,

de cotidianis +, biduanis +, tercianis +, quartanis +, quintanis +, sextanix +, septanis et de omnibus aliis usque in xii+

Ante portam Galilee Sanctus Petrus iacebat, et veniens Ihesus interrogauit eum dicens “Petre, quid hic iaces?” Respondit Sanctus Petrus “Domine, pacior infirmitate a febribus.” Et Dominus tangebatur et sanabat eum. Iesus ambulabat et Petrus sequebatur eum. Reuersus Iesus Petro dixit, Petre, Quid petis? “Domine peto ut quicumque vel <quecunque> hec uera super se portauerit uel super infirmi legerit, non habeat febres.” Et dixit illi Dominus Noster Ihesus Christus, “Petre, fiat tibi sicut petisti.” Respondit Sanctus Petrus “Amen.”

+Aglā+, +lauda+, alpha +, et ∞ + Primus et nouissimus +, Passio Domini Nostri Ihesu Christi, sit tibi in remedium, amen.¹³⁵

It is unconventional to combine the St. Peter narrative (which is relatively common and can be found in Olsan’s corpus) with the invocation of stars and planets, which are usually found in exorcism, more explicitly transgressive ritual magic or astrological image magic.¹³⁶ This combination of specific medical results, named antagonistic entities, and the invocation of Christ and other elements used for ritual magic underscore Duffy’s point that medieval charmers saw themselves as battling the demons that caused illness. Although not conventional, this charm is unlikely to have drawn heavy condemnation from Church authorities.

The charm against fever invokes various divine names, Biblical figures, saints, martyrs, and even stars and planets, to drive away the named seven sisters causing the fever. These are followed by a narrative of Jesus casting a fever out of Saint Peter. The exorcism-like structure of the first part of the charm and the list of names and objects invoked to help bring about the cure is anomalous. Lea Olsan has noted that in many charms “the patient’s symptom is linked to the motif of the narrative or *historiola* of the charm.”¹³⁷ The latter part of this charm, in which Jesus casts a fever out of St. Peter and agrees that such prayers will be effective cures in the future, is

¹³⁵ Ibid., 167. Discussion of the charm can also be found on page 384.

¹³⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 137.

¹³⁷ Lea T. Olsan, “Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice,” *Social History of Medicine* 16 no.3 (2003): 361.

relatively standard and fits this pattern.¹³⁸ However, the invocation of the various events in Christ's life, religious figures, as well as the earth, sun, moon, stars, and planets does not. Invoking things created by God was not in and of itself unorthodox, but objects like the sun and moon had no direct power over the fever being addressed. This invocation seems more likely to have emerged from a tradition other than charming to which Reynes had access.

Olsan points out that charms usually follow a central narrative. While the other elements of the charm can change, the central motifs such as *historiola* and saints invoked are usually stable.¹³⁹ The problem with Reynes' use of the stars and planets is that they are not mentioned as charming motifs by Olsan, and seem to have been drawn from ritual magic or exorcism. In *Forbidden Rites* Richard Kieckhefer compiles a non-exhaustive list of entities used to bring the conjured demons to heel in a text of ritual magic.¹⁴⁰ Many of these, such as events in the life of Christ, the sun, moon, stars and planets, appear in Robert Reynes' charm against fever. These entities may appear in both standard exorcism and ritual magic.¹⁴¹ Reynes, or an earlier charmer, seems to have felt that traditional verbal motifs for charms against fever were inadequate, and found additional material in a text of ritual magic or an exorcism. In either case, a charmer was actively combining traditions of magic and shaping charms as they recorded them. The text of the charm against fever shows that Reynes engaged with traditional charming and its motifs, but also that he was not afraid to add new sources of numinous power to charms he did not think were up to the task of curing illnesses, nor was he particularly concerned about the potentially transgressive nature of these texts.

¹³⁸Olsan, "Latin Charms of Medieval England," 130

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 135-137

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 144-146.

The next charm follows immediately in entry twenty-two and is meant to ward off epileptic fits:

Iasper fert mirram, thus Melchizar, Baltazar aurum
Hec tria qui secum portabit nomina regum,
Soluitur a morbo Domini pietate caduco
Angele, qui meus es custos pietate superna

Like the charm recorded in Olsan's corpus, this charm invokes the three Magi and their gifts and contains a single-line narrative implicitly comparing the three kings falling at the feet of Jesus to the falls induced by epilepsy.¹⁴² Because this charm invokes Biblical figures for the purposes of healing, a relatively standard goal of prayers, it cannot be considered unorthodox. This is followed by another charm aimed at epilepsy consisting of a single Latin line calling upon the user to bless the person who has been "captured" by the epilepsy by saying the word "Ananizapta."¹⁴³ This is relatively simple, but its orthodoxy is difficult to pin down for reasons discussed below.

The final medical charm in Robert Reynes' commonplace book seeks protection against toothache, and in many contexts, it could be considered a prayer. Entry 104 asks St. Apollonia to protect against a variety of misfortunes including toothache but also mentions gout and worms:

Sancta Appolonia fuit virgo inclita cuius dentes pro amore Domini Nostri Ihesu Christi fuerunt abstrati. Que deprecate est Deum ut quicumque nomen sum super se portauerit vel dixerit, vermen, guttam, et dolorem dencium destruat, quod concessum est ei. In Nomine Patris +, et Filii +, et Spiritus Sancti +, amen. Medicina pro dolore dentum¹⁴⁴

There is almost nothing unorthodox about this except for the fact that it travels with the more marginal material mentioned above.

¹⁴²Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 169.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

The Ananizapta charm (Entry 59) presents a particularly difficult problem. The word “Ananizapta” is meaningless, and therefore would fall into the category of mysterious words that both Augustine and Aquinas condemned. However, Reynes was unlikely to have believed that it was nonsense. Ananizapta was supposedly the last word spoken on the cross by Jesus, and Lea Olsan notes that it was consistently used against epilepsy. A charmer like Reynes may have seen it as part of a tradition of unorthodox prayers.¹⁴⁵ Cameron Louis asserts that in the minds of those who employed this charm and others like it, Ananizapta is an acronym spoken by Jesus as he was being crucified. In this conception, it would be entirely legitimate when used by the charmer to gain numinous power over poison and sickness.¹⁴⁶ Robert Reynes was faced with a dilemma; given his education he might well have had suspicions about a blessing that was never used in the liturgy, but he would have also known and taken comfort in the “Ananizapta” because of its connection to a tradition in which he participated. Whether or not they recognized it as orthodox, Reynes and others like him used “Ananizapta” as a source of healing and protection, much like the prayers they heard in Church.

The next-to-medical charms cannot be considered unorthodox. They use no mysterious words and invoke only recognizably orthodox figures. However, a problem arises when we consider the automatic access such prayers establish between the charmers and God or Jesus through the invocation of names, the reciting of *historiola*, or simple nonsense. Aquinas even argues that it is legitimate to adjure irrational creatures provided the prayer is directed toward “the one by whom the irrational creature is moved and controlled.”¹⁴⁷ However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Aquinas was wary of unnecessary ceremonies. While they contain no

¹⁴⁵ Olsan, “Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice,” 360.

¹⁴⁶ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 443.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.90.3.

unorthodox names, the set verbal formula and use of narratives mean the next-to-medical charms cannot be included alongside the Pater Noster or Ave Maria. While elements of these charms are borrowed from the liturgy, they are certainly not part of official Church ceremony. Perhaps more than any of Reynes' other charms, these fit with Duffy's claim about charms being a "lay liturgy."

Charms for Protection and Salvation

This section will address charms meant to ward off misfortune and ensure salvation, and explore the theological problems that come with them. The first two are apotropaic and invoke relatively common themes. The first claims to be a letter received by two Popes and sent to Charlemagne at the battle of Roncesvalles and offers a wide variety of protections. The next is a combination of an amulet and a prayer, the user is required to bear the measurement of the nails used to crucify Jesus on their person and say specified prayers. Both charms use names of God and events of the Bible to ensure good fortune for the bearer.

The third charm in this section promises salvation in exchange for the recitation of a specific set of prayers. Like the prayer of the nails, it uses the wounds from the Crucifixion as the source of its power. However, because it promises salvation rather than earthly benefits it presents a different set of problems than the first two charms. These are considered together because they offer protection in exchange for piety in ways that can be identified as unorthodox. At the same time, Reynes seems to have preferred the power of names and prayers familiar from Church ceremonies.

Charms for protection and salvation are fewer in number but considerably longer than the healing charms. The first such charm is the most elaborate and invokes both Pope Gregory and Pope Sylvester, who are stated to have,

reseyved Þis writyng and sayd ‘Hosoeuer bere Þis writing abowte hym, he thar not dred hym of non enmy ner sodyen deth, ner fyer, ner watyr, ner poison, ner preson, ner thunder, ner levyn, ne Þe feuers, ner noon other wykkyd evyll. And he schal be loued of his soueryan. And if he be owte of hys wey, he schall sone fynde hys way agayn.¹⁴⁸

While marginal in ways that will be discussed below, the goals of the letter are not outside the realm of orthodoxy, but its promises of automatic effectiveness certainly are.

The next paragraph of the charm recounts how an angel delivered the letter to Charlemagne and promised that it would help him overcome his enemies, aid women in childbirth, prevent him from dying outside of the grace of God, and prevent thieves or spirits from overcoming the bearer:

And an angell toke Þis writing to Kyng Charllys in a batayle and seyde, “Hosoeuer bere Þis writyng abowte hym, he schal ouercome his enmyes withowten fayle. Also, a woman tauelyng of a chylde do rede Þis writyng ouer hyr or put Þis writing abowte her, and sche schal sone be delyuered be Þe grace of God withowte peril. And hosoeuer bere Þis writyng abote hym, he schall not pace out of Þis worlde in myscheue, but he schall have Þe sacramentis of Holy Chirche be Þe grace of God. Ner he schal not be robbyd with non thevys be nyght ne by day, ne he schal not be ouercome with noon sprytys by the grace of God and the vertu of Þese names.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 247. Received this writing and said “Who so ever bears this writing about him, he need not dread of none enemy nor sudden death, nor fire, nor water, nor poison, nor person, nor thunder, nor lightning, nor the fever, nor none other wicked evil. And he shall be loved of his sovereign, and if he be out of his way, he shall find his way again.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. And an angel took this writing to King Charles in a battle and said “Who so ever bear this writing about him, he shall overcome his enemies without fail. Also, a woman travailing with a child reads this writing over her or put this writing about her, and she shall soon be delivered by the grace of God with out peril. And who so ever bears this writing about him, he shall not pass out of this world in mischief, but he shall have the sacraments of the Holy Church be the grace of God. Nor shall be robbed with by a thieves by night of by day, nor shall be overcome with no evil spirits by the grace of God and the virtue of these names.

The next and final section is a list of holy names that are evoked to bring about the promises of charm:

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, amen. Tretragrammaton, Adonatos, Ananapta, Anazapta, Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudeorum, Fili Dei, miserere mei, amen. Messias, Sother, Emanuel, Sabaoth, Adonay, Eleyson, Iesus Nazarenus etc. Agnus Dei, qui tollis in peccata mundi, miserere nobis, amen. Christus vincit, Christus regnat +, Christus superat. Adonay, El., Agla, Iesus Nazarenus, etc. Ecce crucem Domini. Fugite, partes aduerse. Vicit Leo de tribu Iuda, radix Daudi, alleluia. Adonay, Eleyson. <Ego> partitor istius littere vado et vos, per hec sacra sancta nomina Dei Patris Omnipotentis, et per humanitatem Christi et Marie Virginis, per fidem Sancti Pauli Apostoli et Passionem, et per hec tria nomina regum: Iasper, Melchior, Baltazar, et virginitatem Iohannis Euangeliste et nouem ordines angelorum, per Passionem, per merita et <orationes> omium sanctorum et elector Dei. Salua <baiulum>[sic] istius, heu, de omni malo presente, preterito et futuro, post vitam huius, gloriam sempiternam, amen. ++++++++

These names are drawn, for the most part, from Church ceremonies and invoke God the Father, Jesus and events in His life, and Mary, as well as the angels, apostles, and John the Baptist.¹⁵⁰

Both Christ and God the Father are referred to by multiple names. Jesus, for instance, is called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and Lamb of God, as well as “Messias, Sother, [and] Emanuel”. While God the Father is referred to as “Sabaoth, Adonay, Eleyson” and “Agla.”¹⁵¹ Although he would have recognized the words themselves from the liturgy, the precise meaning of the Greek and Hebrew words was likely unknown to Reynes.¹⁵²

This amulet is in fact part of a highly traditional genre of amulets commonly referred to as a “heavenly letter”. These texts appear in a number of contexts throughout the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period, but had roots several centuries before Christ in the Middle East.¹⁵³ This version of the letter quotes a series of names drawn from the *Alma chorus Domini*, a

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 248.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Specifically, Reynes would have recognized them from the *Alma Chorus Domini*, which was said on Witsunday and Weddings in the Sarum Rite.

¹⁵³ Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 97.

hymn that was read out at least once a year in the Sarum Rite and influenced the shaping of the heavenly letter as it appears in England. In Reynes' version the text of the amulet is recorded in English, while the names invoked are entirely in Latin or transliterated Greek and Hebrew. Lea Olsan, Eamon Duffy, and Frank Klaassen have all recorded versions of the heavenly letter that contain a more complete version of the *Alma chorus Domini*.¹⁵⁴

Robert Reynes' copy of the heavenly letter uses divine names and prayers recognizable from Church ceremonies. For instance, it references the prayer *Ecce Crucem Domini*, which was an antiphon and prayer for exorcism that was popular in Scandinavian amulets.¹⁵⁵ It also contains portions of the *Agnus Dei* prayer that was adopted as part of the Mass in Western Europe by the year 700 at the latest.¹⁵⁶ These prayers would have been familiar to Reynes from his Church attendance. Both the *Agnus Dei* and *Ecce Crucem Domini* would have called to mind the salvation offered in the liturgy and the power of the Crucifixion over demons. Borrowing these ceremonies for his heavenly letter granted ostensible power over demons in language that was familiar and comforting, but traditionally reserved to clergy in the context of the mass.

Entry number ninety-three of Robert Reynes' commonplace book invokes the nails used to crucify Jesus, and reads:

Pope Innocent hath grauntyd to euery man Þat beryth the length of the iii nayles of Oure Lord Ihesu Criste vpon hym and wurschyp them dayly with V Paternoster and V Aves and Crede, he schal haue vii gyftis grauntyd hym: the first, he schal not deye on no sodeyn death; the secunde, he schal not be slayn with swerd nor knyff; the iiiide, his enmyes schal not ouercome hym; the iiiite, he schal haue sufficient goodis and honest lyvyng; the Vte, Þat poyson nor fals witnesser schal greue hym; the vite, he schal not deye

¹⁵⁴ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 274; Olsan. "Latin Charms of Medieval England," 128;

Anonymous *Oxford, Additional B1* Ed. Frank Klaassen Entry (Pennsylvania University Press, Forthcoming).

¹⁵⁵ Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magical Objects* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 134.

¹⁵⁶ John Harper *Forms and Orders of the Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1991), 20.

withowte the sacramentis or the Chirche; the viite, he schall be defendyd from alle wykkyd speritis, feuers, pestelens and alle evell thyngis.¹⁵⁷

Like the heavenly letter, the nails of Christ had a long pedigree in the Middle Ages. The nails used in the Crucifixion of Christ were invoked in a variety of contexts to secure benefits for those who felt insecure in a world full of violence and disease. The benefits offered by Reynes' version of the nails of Christ are automatically provided to the user. This forces God's hand, which makes them unorthodox, even if they do not invoke the mysterious names that Thomas Aquinas condemns. Both the heavenly letter and the nails of Christ as recorded by Robert Reynes thus moved beyond what most theologians would have considered acceptable for orthodox prayers.

The last spell for protection or salvation to be considered here is entry number 84, listed as "The Woman Recluse and the Wounds of Jesus." In this charm, a woman living on her own wishes to know the number of wounds suffered by Jesus in his passion. After a great deal of prayer, Jesus appears to her and tells her to "Sey euery day be an hooll yeer xv Paternoster and xv Aue Maria, and at the yeeris end thow schalt have han wurcheped euery wounde and fulfilled the noumbre of the same." Jesus also promises that for every person who performs this ritual for an entire year, fifteen of the souls of his relatives will be freed from purgatory, and fifteen "ryghtful men of his kynrede schull be kepte in good lyfe." Grace and perfection are also promised to the person completing the regime of prayer.¹⁵⁸ Christ's promises continue in the next

¹⁵⁷ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 295. Pope Innocent has granted to every man that bears the length of the 3 nails of Our Lord Jesus Christ upon him and worships them daily with 5 pater nosters and 5 aves and a creed, he shall have 7 gifts granted to him; the 1st, he shall not die a sudden death, the 2nd, he shall not be slain by sword or knife, the 3rd, his enemies shall not overcome him, the 4th, he shall have sufficient goods and honest living, the 5th that poison nor false witness shall grieve him, the 6th, he shall not die without the sacraments of the Church, the 7th he shall be defended from all wicked spirits, fevers, pestilence and all evil things.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

section of the prayer. Fifteen days before their death, the reciter will receive the sacrament and be led personally by Jesus and the Virgin Mary into heaven. Additionally, if the person saying the charm has committed any sins in the last twenty years, and from their childhood until the completion of the prayer, they are forgiven. The supplicant will also be kept away from temptation by Jesus, “kepe his v wyttes,” and be defended from a sudden death.¹⁵⁹ The promises above, while they impinge on the prerogative of the clergy, are fairly standard. However, in the same paragraph Jesus also promises that “[a]nd 3if he schulde deye tomorwe, his lyffe schall be leng’t’hed.” The charm later promises forty days of pardon for saying the oration three times.¹⁶⁰ The desire to extend one’s life is not problematic, but the idea that a charm could automatically extend a person’s life is what Augustine and Aquinas would have found troubling.

After Christ’s speech, the charm recounts how the woman recluse passed her charm to a holy man, who gave it to an abbess, who instructed her nuns to complete the gamut of prayers with pious intent. When this was complete the holy man heard a great roaring from a nearby possessed forest. The holy man asked a passing demon what the significance of the great roaring was, and the demon informed him that,

In this wode woneth an olde woman ful of many holy wordes and seyth an orison so plesyng to God of heuene wherthrowgh we taken ful often gret harme. For with that orison sche getyth to God ful many soules þat were in oure power fast befor. And it plesith so moch God Almyghty that it is graunted to hym that seyth these orisouns that 3if he were in time of his leuyng in the weye of euerlestyng dampnacion, Oure Lord God schulde chaunge euerlestyng peyne into the peyne of purgatorye. An 3if he were in the state of the most peyne of purgatory, Oure Lord schuld chaunge it into the peyne of this werlde and bryng his soule to heuene. It is tolde that this womannys name is Sent Bryde, the Quene of Swethe, þat ful many reuelaciouns and gret grace had of God.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 265.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 266-268. In this wood lives an old woman full of many holy words, and [she] said an oration so pleasing to God of Heaven [that through it] we take [very often] great harm. For with that oration she gets to God full many souls that were fast in our power before. And it pleases so much God almighty that it is granted to him that says these oration that if he [was in his life time] in the way of ever lasting damnation his, our Lord God should change everlasting pain into the pain of purgatory. And if he was in state of the most pain of purgatory, our Lord should

There are a number of problems with this charm from an orthodox perspective, the most obvious being the extreme remission of sin that it offers without naming a specific clergy person who was granting the indulgence offered by St. Bryde. While the charm invokes a saint, a holy man, and an abbess, confession is not mentioned anywhere. Confession was a sacrament through which a person was absolved of sin and the exclusive right of the clergy in medieval orthodox conception. The nature of indulgences was contentious even in the Middle Ages, but they were generally understood as removing the spiritual payment necessary for sins that had already been forgiven through the sacrament of confession.¹⁶² Robert Reynes both usurped the power of the clergy and pushed beyond the limits of what the Church could offer in terms of remission of sins.

Indulgences grew out of the commutation of the harsh penances imposed for many sins during the early Middle Ages.¹⁶³ Before the advent of official indulgences offered by the Church, long and difficult penance meant that those who confessed would frequently die without having completed the penance required for them to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Lengthy penances were exacerbated by the fact that in many cases, imposed penance (such as fasting on bread and water for a period of years on end) would weaken those who were already sick beyond the point of survival. Because of the risk of death before the completion of the penance, bishops would allow the confessed sinner to reduce the penance either through prayers or good works.¹⁶⁴

Indulgences differed from these remissions of sin in that they declared the penance remitted. Even in this new method, absolving sin required confession, contrition, and some good

change it into the pain of this world and bring his soul to heaven. It is told that this woman's name is saint Bridget Queen of Sweden, that full many revelations and great grace had of God.

¹⁶² J.A. Minnis, "Reclaiming the Pardoners." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. 33 no. 2 (Spring 2003): 312, 311-334.

¹⁶³ Robert W. Shaffern *The Penitents' Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom, 1175-1375* (Scranton, University of Scranton Press, 2007), 45.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

works (these often took the form of a pilgrimage or the giving of alms).¹⁶⁵ Pope Urban even required that only those who had confessed their sins could be granted the plenary indulgence for going on a crusade.¹⁶⁶ During the Later Middle Ages, catechetical teaching and prayer would become the good works more frequently associated with indulgences, and a penitent had to fully confess their sins to a member of the clergy to receive even these.¹⁶⁷ Indulgences were also granted by popes or bishops within a given parish.¹⁶⁸ All legitimate indulgences required endorsement from the higher clergy. A copy of an indulgence invoking St. Bridget praying over the wounds of Jesus claims Clement V issued it, so that the reciter might know their prayers were not in vain.¹⁶⁹

Robert Reynes' version attributes its authority to a holy man and an abbess, and of course to Saint Bryde of Sweden.¹⁷⁰ No specific clerical authority is mentioned, nor is any diocese mentioned where an issuing bishop might have presided. Given that indulgences were a specific function of the power of the keys, the lack of a specific attribution not only leaves the official nature of the indulgence Robert Reynes recorded in doubt, but also means that no specific person with the power to do so was taking responsibility for binding or loosing Reynes' sins. Instead he relies on his direct connection to Jesus to remit his sins. At the very end of Robert Reynes' version of the indulgence of the woman recluse, a demon evicted from the possessed forest informs the holy man that those living in a state of sin that would otherwise merit damnation can have their punishment remitted to purgatory, while those destined for purgatory can have their punishment changed into worldly suffering. As discussed above, the indulgence does not

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 63-64.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 266.

mention that confession is required for this remission of spiritual punishment. As such, the person performing this charm is granted access to God's power outside of the sacraments.

Spells for Prognostication and Divination

The final group of magical entries in Robert Reynes' commonplace book are those devoted to learning the future through natural phenomena or the summoning of an angelic or infernal entity, and come from outside the tradition of charming. Two of these texts appear sequentially; entries 106 and 107 record "[p]rognostications according to the Dominical Letter" and "[p]rognostications according to thunder" respectively.¹⁷¹ The Dominical letter assigns one of the first seven letters of the Latin alphabet to each day of the week, the day on which New Years Day falls is marked as "A." The letter corresponding to Sunday was the dominical letter, and the first such letter in the year indicated the nature of the coming year. If, for instance, the day after new years, which was marked as B, was a Sunday, then for the remainder of the year the Dominical Letter would be "B". Robert Reynes' commonplace book used the Dominical letter to make predictions about the weather, crops, and events that would take place in a given year. For instance, Reynes' book states that,

Qwanne the Dominicall lettyr ffallyth vpon the A, than schall be a warme winter and peryng somer, corne in the felde, but resonable frute in the same wyse, been in the same wyse also, pestelence of Jonge pepyll and deth of bestys, but most of neet, gret apklynge and fytyng of pelouris, and newe tydynggis of kyngis etc.¹⁷²

If the dominical letter was E then the prediction was considerably more dire for agriculture but left young people in better health:

Whanne the Dominicall letter fallyth vpon the E, Ðan schal be a stowte winter of wyndys, a good somere, a good heruest, and plente of corn, a gret Ʒer of frute, but they schall sone

¹⁷¹Ibid., 495-496.

¹⁷² Ibid., 312. When the Dominical Letter falls upon the A, then shall [there] be a warm winter and a peryng summer, corn in the field, but reasonable fruit in the samewise, beans in the same wise also, pestilence of young people and death of beasts, but most of [cattle], great apklynge, and perilous fighting, and new tidings of kings etc.

rotyn, deth of fleysse, gret plente of been, deth of bestis, a good yeer aftyr, and peas among the pepyll, and gret flodys of freysse watyris etc.¹⁷³

The next entry is more problematic and records *Prognostications According to Thunder*.¹⁷⁴ The predictions are based on the month in which thunder is heard for the first time. In other texts, the day of the week, hour of the day, or even the canonical hour are also used in predicting the events of the year. In Reynes' case, the predictions are not nearly so complex. For instance, thunder sounding in January signifies that there will be winds and a bumper crop of fruit and herbs, but there will be a reduction in the humour of blood.¹⁷⁵ However, when thunder sounds in April it signifies a generally good year in which thieves will die.¹⁷⁶ Given that thunder does not occur regularly enough for Reynes' entry to establish a systematic method of measuring the astrological influences that thunder may have indicated, it is difficult to consider this entry orthodox. . Astrology was controversial in the Middle Ages, but those who argued for its legitimacy usually pointed to works of science like Al-Kindi's *On Stellar Rays* to justify their activities. Reynes does not seem to have understood thunder as occurring as part of larger, predictable natural systems.

Here Augustine and Aquinas diverge on whether it is legitimate to use natural signs to gain knowledge of the future. Augustine allows for this to occur if the person observing the sign has some knowledge of what it may mean. For instance, an experienced sailor can legitimately predict storms at sea.¹⁷⁷ Aquinas is more specific, and argues that using natural events to predict

¹⁷³ Ibid., 313. When the Dominical letter falls upon the E, then shall be a stout winter of winds, a good summer, a good harvest, and plenty of corn, a great year of fruit, but they shall soon rotten, dearth of flesh, great plenty or beans, death of beasts, a good year after, and peace among the people, and great floods of fresh waters etc.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 314.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. This likely means that the humour "blood" would be less prevalent during where thunder first sounded in January.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. These are not necessarily the same by definition, but thunder sounding in April indicates that both would occur.

¹⁷⁷ St. Augustine, *On the Divination of Demons*, 1.4.8

the future was legitimate as long as they were connected to the events being predicted by “physical laws,” as occurred with the use of the stars to predict the outcome of human events when they were not seen as the sole determining factor. In the case of astrology, Aquinas even allows for the stars and planets to influence the temperament of any given person.¹⁷⁸ The ambiguous position of using astrology to predict the future forces us to investigate how Robert Reynes’ prognostication material fit into a broader theological context.

Cameron Louis notes that prognostication by the dominical letter was relatively common in the Middle Ages and that it forms a kind of almanac, which if accurate, would be of great utility in an agricultural society. These texts have been argued to form the genre of *bauernpraktik*, and given that these sorts of calculation have been found in multiple texts, Reynes was not alone in using this type of calculation.¹⁷⁹ While divination was not considered orthodox, astrological prediction occupied a more ambiguous position and was at the centre of theological and scholastic controversies throughout the Middle Ages. Despite this, astrology was widely practiced throughout medieval society. . . Even Thomas Aquinas acknowledged it could be acceptable if the motions of the planets and stars were seen to be the signs (which indicate the presence of conditions under which events occur, and indicate likelihood) of events to come rather than the causes (which lead directly to the events themselves).¹⁸⁰

Given the regularity of the change in the Dominical Letter, each letter should appear once every seven years. This entry could be interpreted as laying out in brief the astrological conditions for the year. Robert Reynes also recorded some information about the zodiac in entry 58, which lists astrological signs that occur during a given season and the traits that those born

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.95.5.

¹⁷⁹ Louis, notes on *The Common Place Book*, 494.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae.95.5.

under each sign will possess.¹⁸¹ In the case of the prognostication according to thunder, if he had the correct texts, Reynes could make a direct connection between the astrological conditions for the year (which Aquinas acknowledged could influence human events in a non-deterministic way) and the weather for a given year. Astrology and weather were related in the cosmology of the Middle Ages. In the article “Astrometeorology in the Middle Ages” Stuart Jenks described how a number of manuscripts used the positions of planets and signs of the zodiac to predict the weather for a given year.¹⁸² Astrometeorology involved observing the position of the planets and stars, considering their natural influences, and calculating which of these influences would hold sway over a given period. The combination of these influences would strongly affect, but not determine, the course of human events in a given year.¹⁸³ Because the positions of planets at a given time of year could vary from year to year, even the simplest works of astrometeorology generally offered a new set of calculations for every year.¹⁸⁴ Robert Reynes’ prognostication using thunder does not offer any insight into the relationship between the time of the thunder and the events of the year. Reynes’ prognostications have no indication of systematic natural inquiry like astrology, and so the thunder is more likely to be an omen brought about by demonic influence than a useful indicator of astrological conditions.

Thomas Aquinas does not address the use of weather phenomena for prognostication directly, but discusses augury, using the flights of birds to predict future events. The behaviour of birds can be used to predict only “matters which in some way relate to the brute animals under consideration.” While birds can be used to make predictions about rainfall and other weather

¹⁸¹ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 240-241.

¹⁸² Stewart Jenks, “Astrometeorology in the Middle Ages,” *Isis* 74 No. 2 (June 1983): 185-210.

¹⁸³ Jenks, “Astrometeorology in the Middle Ages”, 190.

¹⁸⁴ Bruce Scofield “A History and Test of Planetary Weather Forecasting” (PhD Diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2010), 23.

phenomena, they cannot predict specific human events. In cases where the behaviour of animals has “spiritual cause.” Aquinas notes that it is equally likely to be the result of demonic activity as from the work of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas adds a condition that if the actions of animals may be representative of specific astrological conditions, which can legitimately affect the course of events on earth.¹⁸⁵ Another example comparable to Robert Reynes’ divination is found in Aquinas’s treatment of lots as a means for decision-making. The casting of lots was practiced in the old and new testaments and relied on a chance event, such as the rolling of a dice, to make predictions about matters to which the lots themselves did not pertain , for instance if the dice land on “three” then it will rain. Lots, Aquinas argues, can either be the result of chance or of “some directing spiritual cause.” Aquinas sees lots as legitimate in cases of “urgent necessity” and if “due reverence” is observed.¹⁸⁶ Aquinas believed the weather could be predicted by using the stars without the risk of sin, because it is subject to physical laws.¹⁸⁷

If Reynes had a reason to see thunder sounding in April as signifying conditions that might kill thieves or demonstrate how thunder sounding in January would naturally lead to a bumper crop or why a dominical letter A would kill off the young, then his prognostication would have been entirely legitimate. However, Reynes’ texts include no prayers for guidance nor do they provide any explication on how the Dominical letter or thunder might connect to the astrological conditions for a given year or month.

The most problematic entry in Robert Reynes’ commonplace book by far is entry number twenty-nine, a “procedure for divination.”¹⁸⁸ The spell needed to take place in the light of the sun and required that a child be seated between the legs of the person performing the ritual. Once in

¹⁸⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.95. 7.

¹⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae.95.8.

¹⁸⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae.95.5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

position, the child's thumb was to be wrapped in a red silk thread three times before the thumbnail was scraped clean. At this point the letters O, N, E, L, and I were to be written on the child's thumbnail in oil. The child then said his Pater Noster, after which the diviner would say a short prayer that any angels summoned would tell the truth and not give false answers to questions that were asked of them. When this brief ceremony was completed an angel would supposedly begin to appear in the child's thumbnail. The child would then address the angel, invoking God the Father, the Virgin Mary, and John the Evangelist, and ask the angel to tell the truth in all matters about which the celestial being will be examined. The child could then ask the angel what the diviner wished to know.

This procedure is clearly unorthodox, as noted in the last chapter. Augustine saw divination that invoked spirits as a ruse by demons to lure humans into worshipping them, and saw mysterious words and letters as a sign of a demonic presence, and so would certainly have condemned Robert Reynes' use of divination. Aquinas goes even farther and makes a distinction between divination that risks contact with demons and divination that summons demons explicitly for the purposes of gaining knowledge, the latter being considerably worse.¹⁸⁹ In summoning an unidentifiable numinous being, Reynes was crossing a line set explicitly by both Augustine and Aquinas. This procedure for divination is clearly unorthodox in both the conception of Augustine and Aquinas.

While Robert Reynes may not have had access to the *Summa theologiae*, and while entry twenty-nine claims the creature it summons is an angel. The procedure Reynes used was discussed in *Handlyng Synne*, specifically the condemnation of summoning unknown beings into basins, swords, or other reflective surfaces.¹⁹⁰ With regard to the use of mysterious letters, a case

¹⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.95.3.

¹⁹⁰ See chapter Three.

of a witch who stole milk using an enchanted bag is illustrative; when a bishop attempts to perform the magic, it does not work because he does not believe in the power of the words.

In conclusion, a good deal of what Reynes copied was unorthodox. Whether they grant healing, protection or salvation, the problem that runs through almost all of Reynes' charms is that their effects seem to be automatic. The Ananizapta charms for instance, seems to dispel the epileptic fits consistently and without issues, the heavenly letters that Reynes copied implicitly guaranteed that God would act in the material interest of the person who bore it. The charm for remission of sin also offers a mechanical forgiveness of sin without the sacrament of confession. In most cases, Robert Reynes' prayers avoided unorthodox words or symbols and sought legitimate ends, but given their seemingly automatic nature it is far from certain that Aquinas would have considered them appropriate. More significantly, sections of his book include procedures which were clearly unorthodox. His prognostics were problematic because the futures they predict are not related to broader natural systems. They resemble lists of omens more closely than a useful almanac. The procedure for divination not only works automatically but uses letters with no known meaning to summon an otherworldly being, a hallmark of necromancy.

CHAPTER 3: CHARMS AND THE LIMITS OF ORTHODOXY

Our exploration of Robert Reynes' commonplace book reveals an intelligent and literate middling peasant from a small village in England who was a deeply pious Catholic, and intimately involved with the activities of the Church. He was also, evidently, a charmer, a diviner, and a would-be magician. Reynes did not have direct access to the main Latin theological authorities of the Middle Ages and this, in the view of Thomas and Duffy, could explain how he might have seen no conflict between a life of piety and collecting spells. Closer examination of his collection suggests that he probably knew enough about the Church's position on magic to have steered clear of these materials and that he evidently made the decision to collect them in knowing opposition to this advice. His commonplace book includes materials drawn from exempla collections and other catechetical materials. Using these as trace elements, we can examine the sort of literature that he would have had access to, and how the construction of orthodoxy in the exempla conflicted with charms, prognostications, and explicit ritual magic that Reynes recorded.

Investigating Reynes' knowledge of orthodoxy will be a multistep process. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the English and Latin catechetical material available to literate lay people like Reynes and the clergy who guided their religious development. It will then proceed with identifying material in Reynes' commonplace book that can be traced to contemporary exempla collections. Within these collections, we will look for material that illustrates proper behaviour in the same areas of life covered by Reynes' charms. For instance, because Reynes' heavenly letter focuses on bringing God's protection to the bearer, we will look for exempla that offer guidance to those seeking similar protection that occur in the same texts as the stories from Reynes' commonplace book. We will also examine exempla that cover magic more generally.

This process of tracing exempla that Reynes recorded will not result in any conclusive knowledge about what he read. Instead, it will give us a general sense of the library that he drew from and that imparted the values of the Church in broad strokes. This investigation will show that Robert Reynes most likely knew that the charms he was recording were unorthodox.

Robert Reynes and the Catechesis

Within the parameters laid out by Augustine and Aquinas, there was room for a range of opinions on magic. This variation can be seen in the Latin literature designed to assist parish priests, and in the preaching orders in the guidance of the laity. For instance, the pastoral writer John Bromyard gave one of the strictest interpretations: a person who used words to heal others was required to have taken Holy Orders and, even then, to have displayed sanctity beyond that of other clerics.¹⁹¹ By contrast, William of Rennes was far more lenient and allowed for nearly anyone to employ verbal healing so long as they used only Christian symbols and prayed directly over the patient. William was careful to exclude such practices as praying over objects and the use of mysterious words or symbols.¹⁹² Although William of Rennes wrote before Aquinas, both employed similar logic that was heavily influenced by St. Augustine.

The writers of pastoral manuals understood magic as punishable under the First Commandment because, implicitly or explicitly, it involved the worship of demons. For instance, a treatise owned by the Worcester Cathedral asked if a penitent had “shown undue worship to a demon or creature.”¹⁹³ Many of the penitentials drew an intelligible distinction between prayer and magic. Pastoral texts were aimed largely at the educated clergy, who had a limited amount of time to deal with magic as it was only one potential sin among many and by no means the

¹⁹¹ Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England*, 65.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

worst.¹⁹⁴ However, the authors of these texts worked to establish and communicate the difference between magic and prayer, and it was made clear to clergymen that an important element of pastoral care was ensuring that Christians did not use magic.

Nor were prayers necessarily orthodox. Certainly, a prayer in itself was likely to be legitimate, provided the supplicant put their faith in God, but if they were to put faith in the practices surrounding the prayer it moved outside the bounds of orthodoxy. For instance, if a healer used a prayer that was accompanied by a certain motion to cure a toothache, and the words spoken or the charmer's action (rather than the will of God) was believed to have had any effect on the ailment, this would have been considered magical by William of Rennes. Importantly William of Rennes was also suspicious of prayers that made broad promises like Reynes' heavenly letter and prayer of the nails.¹⁹⁵ Even repeating prayers could be problematic, given that reciting a prayer multiple times (usually three or five, reflecting sacred numbers like the Persons of the Trinity or wounds of Christ) would not make it any more effective. In the most extreme cases, even a standard prayer for benefits that a given writer considered excessive would have been viewed as magic, notably by William of Rennes.¹⁹⁶ Magic and prayer were not discreet categories in the medieval Church and the same practice could move between the two depending on the practitioner's beliefs, goals, and actions. The criteria used to establish whether a given practice was magic were nuanced, but an intelligent and literate lay person like Reynes could certainly have known when a given practice strayed beyond the broad limits of orthodoxy.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 147.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 56. At least one physician, Thomas Chobham, believed words could have a natural effect on the body of a sick person. This was not a widely-held belief but the belief that words could have an effect on the physical world was generally accepted, as this was the foundation of both the Mass and prayers.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 60.

From the High Middle Ages onward, English clerics produced vernacular works to inform lay people with limited education about the nature of their faith in simple terms. The early fifteenth-century tract *Dives and Pauper* consists of a dialogue in which a poor monk (Pauper) explains some of the finer points of the Ten Commandments to a member of the emerging merchant class of England (Dives), who is confused about some of the less intuitive elements of Catholic practice. The text was copied well into the sixteenth century.¹⁹⁷

One of the more interesting points to emerge in the dialogue concerns the legitimacy of keeping images of the four Evangelists in a house to ward off evil spirits, which Pauper supports. When Dives asks why the images can be kept in such a way, Pauper responds:

For þe same skyl and for deuocioun and knowelechyng of his heye lordshepe, þat al we han of hym and noo good wytouten hym. Also aȝens tempest and wyckydde spirits þat qhanne þei seen hem set þere in þe maner of a cros þey moun been ashamyd and abashyd for þe cros and þe passioun of Crist, thorw qhech þey weryn dyscunfytyd, and, for his lordshepe, sparyn hese seruauntys and þe place.¹⁹⁸

The images work not because of the depiction of the Four Evangelists, but because the viewer's mind is fixed on God in general and, specifically, on the Crucifixion of Jesus. To the Christian faithful this brings good fortune, but to demons it is a reminder of their humiliation and remorse. *Dives and Pauper* also addresses practical matters with theological sophistication and treats them in an accessible way. Dives asks whether it is proper to pay homage to an earthly king despite statements in Matthew 4:10 and the First Commandment to worship God alone. Pauper makes a distinction between worship that is due to God alone (*latria*) and worship that can be given to

¹⁹⁷ Priscilla Heath Barnum, Introduction to *Dives and Pauper: Volume one Part one* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), ix-xi.

¹⁹⁸ *Dives and Pauper*, Chap ix. 68-75. For the same reason and devotion and knowing of His high lordship, that all we have of him and no good without him. Also against tempests and wicked spirits that when they see them set there in the manner of a cross they must be ashamed and abashed for the cross and the passion of Christ, through which they were discomfited, and, for his lordship, sparing his servants and the place.

any rational creature (*dulia*). Pauper gives a number of ways of rendering *latria*, among them are loving God as “souereyn wysdam & souereyn trewth,” swearing in the name of God, and by praying in the correct manner. Pauper then notes that a person saying their prayers before images or idols and speaking to the idol is committing idolatry even if they are reciting an Ave Maria or a Paternoster.¹⁹⁹ Pauper extends this distinction to kneeling with both knees (an act reserved for God) to the priest at Mass. In this situation, the parishioner is not kneeling before the priest but rather God as represented by the priest.²⁰⁰ Kneeling before the priest is not idolatry because the worshipful action is directed towards God. Unconventional prayers using divine names were not problematic because they were unconventional: such prayers could be orthodox if the person saying the prayer was directing the worship to God and properly rendering him *Latria*. Prayers with mysterious words or that worked automatically were not granted by God and risked rendering *Latria* to the words themselves or to demons, and so risked becoming idolatrous.

Handlyng Synne, a popular English catechetical poem, also contains a story of an enchanted bag used by a witch to steal milk from farmers’ cows. This practice constituted idolatry because to effectively use the bag, one had to believe in the power of the mysterious words being spoken:

And so hyt ys of oure lawe:
 Beleue ys more Pan sawe
 For Pou mayst seye what Pou wylt
 But Pou beleue hyt, ellys ys al spylt.²⁰¹

In other words, if one only had faith in God, the magic would not work and the milk would be spilled.

¹⁹⁹ *Dives and Pauper*, Chap.xi 15-76.

²⁰⁰ *Dives and Pauper*, Chap xiv, 15-16.

²⁰¹ *Handlyng Synne*, Lines 550-554. And so it is of our law: / Believe is more than saw / For you may say what you will / But you [must] believe it, [or] else is all spilt

Handlyng Synne also explicitly condemned popular practices similar to those Robert Reynes recorded in his common place book. *Handlyng Synne* addresses the summoning of a spirit into a crystal or other reflective surface.

Ȝyf Þou yn swerde or yn bacyn
Any child madyst loke Þer yn
Or yn Þumbe or yn crystal
Wycchecraft men clepyn hyt al.
Beleue noght yn Þe pyys cheteryng
Hyt ys no trowþe but fals beleuyng.²⁰²

Reynes' procedure for divination is accurately, if crudely, described in this passage. *Handlyng Synne* reduces this common practise in learned magic (and the angel scrying found in Reynes' collection) to the category of common witchcraft. The very same verse also argues that interpreting the chatter of magpies to predict the future is false belief. This is arguably very similar to Reynes' divination by thunder and dominical letters.

Vernacular tracts like this were accessible to men like Robert Reynes and outlined the acceptable beliefs and practices of a Christian in the late Middle Ages. In its discussion of the images of the four evangelists, *Dives and Pauper* presents a coherent logic for the orthodox use of images that would have been available to Robert Reynes. The story of the magic bag in *Handlyng Synne* explains how the use of magic words was idolatrous. Finally, it explicitly condemns several of the practises Reynes recorded in his book. With a significant level of sophistication, these texts communicated the basic elements of orthodox theology. Robert Reynes could access them either through standard catechetical interactions with the clergy or by reading them himself. Through them he could learn how the first commandment applied to his daily activities and the to charms he recorded.

²⁰² *Handlyng Synne*. Lines 351-356. If thou in sword of in bacyn / Any child made [to] look there in / Or in thumb of in crystal / Witchcraft men call it all / Believe not the in the [mag]pies chattering / It is no truth but false belief

Such passages in *Dives and Pauper*, *Handlyng Synne*, and other medieval devotional texts do not provide proof that all charmers knew that they were stepping outside of the boundaries of the First Commandment as interpreted by the medieval Church. However, religious texts do demonstrate a concerted effort by the medieval Church to make the non-Latinate, whether clerical or lay, aware of the limits set by Church Fathers like Augustine and Aquinas. These tracts allowed the informally educated to understand general concepts like idolatry and more specifically why the use of mysterious or unknown words was problematic. If Reynes did not learn about the limits of orthodox practice in confession, sermons, or spiritual counselling from priests and friars, he certainly had access to it in religious literature which he read and copied.

What Texts did Robert Reynes Read?

It cannot be established with certainty which books Robert Reynes had access to, either through his personal collection (if he had one) or other clerical or lay book owners. However, if the sections of texts he copied are any indication, Robert Reynes had access to information and ideas that, at the very least, travelled with both anti-magic material and material that illustrated the proper use of Christian piety in battling demons and preventing disasters. The larger works from which Reynes' texts derived contained sections that condemned ritual magic and laid out the ways in which holy words and actions could be used legitimately as weapons against the devil. Just this sampling of devotional and proscriptive literature suggests that Reynes should have been aware of the dangers that surrounded the practice of ritual magic and the acceptable methods of using widely available sacred words and objects to battle demons that caused misfortune. All of this suggests that, at the very least, exempla made the Church's position on the marginal magic they practiced, and especially the Church's condemnation of magic that involved

the summoning of otherworldly beings, clear to Robert Reynes and other moderately educated charmers.

Exempla are brief stories which are meant to illustrate proper Christian behaviour. Frequently, they are derived from collections assembled by authoritative Catholic figures such as Gregory the Great. Exempla were usually written in Latin and meant to be delivered to the laity as stories told in vernacular sermons, but were also translated, copied, and read by the non-Latinate. They were not limited to the collections in which they were initially written, but could be combined with stories from other collections or recounted as free-floating units. However they reached the laity, exempla were meant to influence the behaviour of parishioners, and assist clergy in clarifying the values of the Church to simple people who could not access theological texts.

The advantage of using the exempla for a modern scholar is that they allow us to see what values the Church hierarchy expected the average parishioner to have absorbed. Most people in the late Middle Ages could not access the Latin theological texts that laid out why a given action was sinful. The exempla allowed illiterate lay people to understand *how* they were meant to behave if not *why* they were meant to behave that way. In studying the exempla that Robert Reynes may have had access to alongside his charms, we can gain an impression of how the Church thought he should access God's healing and protective power, and how charms violated the norms set out by Church authorities. For instance, Robert Reynes records a charm that promises salvation without confession or penance, but the exempla make clear that the only way to access God's grace was through liturgical ceremonies and the clergy. This was true for a number of benefits charms offered.

The simplest of the exempla Robert Reynes records are two miracle stories centred around Marian devotion.²⁰³ The first of these stories is of a man who took orders and attempted to learn the Ave Maria but could only speak the first two words. When the man died, a rose grew from his grave with “Ave Maria” written on every leaf. Local skeptics asserted that the rose was a fraud but in response, the faithful dug to the root of the rose and found that it was growing from the crown of the man’s head.²⁰⁴

The second story concerns a knight who allowed thieves, who robbed those who passed through the surrounding area, to stay at his castle. Despite this failing, the knight would say five Ave Marias every day.²⁰⁵ When St. Bernard passed through the knight’s territory he was robbed by some of the knight’s henchmen. When Bernard had a private council with the knight, he requested permission to deliver a sermon.²⁰⁶ The knight quickly “consentyd therto” and ordered all of his men to attend at the request of the holy man. However, when St. Bernard sought to deliver his sermon, the knight’s chamberlain was found to be missing. Ultimately, the chamberlain was forcibly brought to the sermon where St. Bernard invoked Christ’s Passion and forced the chamberlain to explain his reluctance to attend. The chamberlain answered, “I can no more say. I must do as Þu byddyst me, I cannot sayn nay. I am aknowe to alle men in this castel that I am no man, but a fynde of hel.” The demon then goes on to explain that they had tempted the knight into the crimes that he had committed. The demon continues:

Þat ʒif [the knight] had fayled onys on day on Aue Maria at Þe lest for to say. And for þat he seyde euery day his Aue Mary[sic] Fforthi of hym I myght ‘noth’ han non maystry. Ffor ʒif that he þerof on day fayled, Sodenly, forsothe, he schulde a be ‘a’sayled, and sodeynly a be ded and gon to helle. Trowe Þis tale for for trewe as ony Gospelle. By

²⁰³ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 235.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 228-230.

²⁰⁵ The text is careful to establish that ‘of al day after þat, ded he no good dede.’

²⁰⁶ Reynes, *Common Place Book*, 230-231.

Mary, modyr and may, she is our ful enmye, bothe nyght and day. Ffor alle þe folk that her may plese, we may on no wyse do hem desese.²⁰⁷

Once the demon had been found out, the knight and his entourage confessed their sins and prayed with St. Bernard to the Virgin Mary, and all present took vows that they would venerate the Virgin Mary. St. Bernard then banished the demon to the wilderness, forgiving the knight and his entourage for all the sins they committed.²⁰⁸

One final entry in Reynes collection can be found in other late medieval books and reflects the somewhat mechanistic assumptions of the charms. It recounts the prayer of St. Bridget concerning the wounds of Jesus, how she drove demons from the forest, and promises salvation to anyone who recites it diligently.²⁰⁹

By tracing these entries to manuscript collections that contain them or to their source texts, we can gain a general impression of the wider set of devotional material that Robert Reynes read and drew his own copies. It has not been possible to identify any specific manuscript as his source, but if material from a given manuscript appears in Reyne's commonplace book it is not unreasonable to imagine he had access to material similar to the stories that accompany it. This sort of investigation can give us insight into the perspective on magic that Robert Reynes was likely to find in his reading material and allow for a rough sketch of the attitude that the Church thought Reynes ought to have toward charms and ritual magic.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 233. That if [the knight] had failed once on a day one ave Maria at the least to say. And for that he said every day his Ave Mary Fforthi of him I might have not have no mastery. For if that he thereof one day failed, suddenly, forsothe, he should be assailed, and suddenly be dead and gone to hell. Believe this tale for true as any Gospel. By Mary, mother and [maiden? Kinswoman?] she is our full enemy, both night and day. For all the folk that her may please, we may in no wise do them disease

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 232-234.

²⁰⁹ Louis traces the exemplum of the monk who could only learn the first two words of his *Ave Maria* to entry 427 of the *Index exemplorum*, while the story of the demon in the knight's retinue is traced to entry 1558. While the story of the "Woman recluse and the wounds of Jesus" can traced to Tubach's entry 205, The *Index Exemplorum* does not give specific points of origin but rather list manuscripts where these texts can be found.

²¹⁰ Some of the devotional stories in the *Common Place Book of Robert Reynes* that can be traced to Tubach's collection can also be traced to the *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*

These make clear that Robert Reynes probably interacted with material that condemned magic (like his spell for summoning an angel) as unorthodox and took a dim view of unorthodox prayers even when they borrowed from the liturgy and had legitimate aims.

Exempla That Travelled With Reynes' Reading Material

The tale of the rose that grew with the words “Ave Maria” is found in three manuscripts in the British Library and travels with other cautionary or edifying tales that give insight into Robert Reynes' world. For instance, a copy of *Les Vie des Ancien Pères*, contains two stories that, while not anti-magic in the strictest sense, serve as warnings against idolatry more broadly.²¹¹ In one instance a newlywed man places a ring on the finger of a statue of a pre-Christian goddess. He is then “haunted” until the ring is removed with help from the Virgin Mary.²¹² The second tale from the manuscript describes how a man is tricked by a Jewish astrologer into renouncing God to seduce a widow. However, the man continues to worship the Virgin Mary. When the widow sees that a statue of the Virgin Mary bows to her suitor, she consents to the marriage.²¹³ These two stories do not explicitly portray the practice of magic, but they do illustrate the power of orthodox worship. If simple piety was enough to overcome the demons that were associated with pre-Christian deities, and which Duffy implies were blamed for minor disasters (like a stuck wedding ring) as well as more life-threatening events like fire (discussed below), then all of the charms recorded in the *Common Place Book of Robert Reynes*

(hereafter *Catalogue of Romances*). For instance, the story of the knight who could only learn the first two words of his *Ave Maria* can be found in entry 607 number 14; 614 number 111; 638 number 4; 679 number 43; and 708 number 1. The story of the knight saved from demonic attack by his daily recitation of the *Ave Maria* can be found in the *Catalogues of Romances* in the following locations: entry 53 number 78; entry 85 number 29; entry 357 number 80; entry 336 number 1; entry 395 number 377; 504 number 8; entry 522 number 7; entry 537 number 2; entry 551, number 141; entry 566 number 94; entry 638, number 5; and 685 five number 48. Finally, the story of St. Bridget praying to the wounds of Jesus can be found in entry 552 number 150.

²¹¹ J.A. Herbert. *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in British Museum* (London: Longmans and Company, 1910), 337.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 340.; London, British Library, Additional 32678, Fol. 21 col. 2

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 340; Additional 32678, Fol. 17.

were unnecessary ceremonies that Aquinas and other theologians warned against. Since God's power could be accessed simply by living a devoted life, reciting a list of obscure Greek and Hebrew names put more faith in texts and the sounds of the words than it did in God. Witnesses to entry eighty-four of Robert Reynes' commonplace book (the indulgence invoking St. Bryde) may be found in a number of different locations.

In Arundel 506, which combines stories from the *Dialogus Miraculorum* of Caesarius of Hiesterbach with miscellaneous religious stories, Reynes' entry eighty-four is accompanied by multiple other *exempla*, many of which reflect devotion to either the Virgin Mary or the Cross.²¹⁴ Other entries feature warnings against various sins, and still other stories emphasise the importance of making regular confession. In one instance the devil records the sins of a lady and her entourage as she enters a church. Because the list is so long, he runs out of space on the parchment he is using, and when attempting to stretch it loses his balance, to the amusement of a nearby saint.²¹⁵ In another story the Devil appears behind the altar of a church writing down the sins committed there. When sinners begin to weep with remorse as their sins are read aloud, the list is miraculously erased.²¹⁶ A few of the stories recorded in this manuscript also deal with magic: item 56 tells of a student who agrees to worship the devil for gold, but is rewarded only with stones. In another story, two scholars also seeking riches conjure the devil and agree to worship him. They are saved from their apostasy when the devil kneels before a consecrated host being carried to an ill parishioner.²¹⁷ The third story in Arundel 506 strikes a markedly different tone. In it, an old woman believed that she was a witch until a priest disabused her of this

²¹⁴ Ibid., 541.; London, British Library, Arundel 506

²¹⁵ Ibid., 547.; London, British Library, Arundel 506, Fol. 20.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 548.; Arundel 506, Fol. 22.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 545.; The student who worships the Devil can be found in Arundel 506, Fol. 12 col 2. The scholars saved from devil worship is found in Arundel 506, Fol. 14.

notion.²¹⁸ The two tales above present magic as a very real threat to greedy men with a university education, while Arundel 506 entry 189 seems to treat the woman as foolish. However, the presence of the three entries regarding magic does show that the *exempla* literature aimed at the laity contained clear anti-magic material. This material included clear warnings about the problems of trying to access wealth or knowledge through diabolic ritual. The final story encourages the laity to seek out counsel from priests if they are in doubt.

Arundel 506 also seeks to establish the worldly power of simple faith. Entry number 120 is the story of a prisoner sentenced to the mines who was kept alive by the Masses said by his devoted wife.²¹⁹ In another entry, the miracle is performed in a more indirect way. A glutton in Lombardy asks his cellarer to help him fast once a week to honour the Virgin Mary. A man in the “rich glutton’s” household who could not speak but honoured Mary with a similar fast, is given the power of speech on his deathbed so that he (the mute man) can confess.²²⁰ The story of a knight who paid his tithes diligently and who received a double harvest as a reward is also found in this manuscript.²²¹ These stories establish that miracles are possible, but do not come with verbal formulas, as they are instead granted as a reward for faith and conventional engagement with the Church.

Another collection of religious tales assembled in Harley 268 in the British Library, contains the story in entry fifty of Robert Reynes’ commonplace book and features material similar to Arundel 506.²²² Entry number 124 of the manuscript records a story from the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great wherein a nun eats a devil sitting on a piece of lettuce and

²¹⁸ Ibid., 555. Arundel 506, Fol. 45.

²¹⁹ Ibid., Citation of Arundel 506 549, Explanation on P. 85; Arundel 506, Fol. 23.

²²⁰ Ibid., 542. Arundel 506, Fol. 2 b.

²²¹ Ibid., 550. Arundel 506, Fol. 24 col. 2.

²²² Ibid., 559. The stories come from a number of sources including Gregory the Great’s *Homilies* and *Dialogues*, and the *Lives of the Fathers*.

becomes possessed. The manuscript also includes a multitude of ways for pious people to resist temptation.²²³ The anti-magical material it contains includes the story of a man who did homage to the devil and whose hands were turned black but were restored to their natural colour when he confessed to a bishop five years later.²²⁴ The most intriguing entry in Harley 268 from the perspective of this thesis is described briefly in the catalogue: “Simple rustic, finding that his lord cannot cure him, vows henceforth to serve none but God.”²²⁵ While it is not clear whether the lord used natural or magical means to cure the rustic, the power to effect a lasting cure is reserved for God as mediated through the church. This parallels a story from the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great in which local pagan healers attempt to cast a demon out of a woman, only to invite more in. Ultimately the woman is cured by the intercession of a local bishop. Whatever the case, in entry 103 of Harley 268, the church seems to have guarded its privileged access to the supernatural carefully. Laypeople attempting to defeat demons in these exempla exacerbate the problem, while clergy are easily able to defeat even the most persistent demons.

In Harley 268, laypeople can access the power of God in times of need.²²⁶ A knight in item 24 diligently stops to say a Pater Noster for the dead every time he passes through a cemetery, even dismounting on one occasion when his enemies were pursuing him. When his foes catch up with him, the dead “thrust forth their arms to protect him.”²²⁷ Entry number 36 in Harley 268 tells of a rich man who is converted and donates all his money, including £200 he had borrowed, to the poor. When his creditor learns in a vision that the £200 donated by the convert is the only merit he (the creditor) can claim for his salvation, the debt is forgiven.²²⁸

²²³ Ibid., 568-569. London, British Library, Harley 268, Fol. 32 b.

²²⁴ Ibid., 570. Harley 268 Fol. 38.

²²⁵ Ibid., 567. Harley 268. Fol. 29 b.

²²⁶ Ibid., 423.

²²⁷ Ibid., 561. Harley 268, Fol. 7 b.

²²⁸ Ibid., 562. Harley 268, Fol. 9 b.

Miracles and salvation were accessible to everyone in the Middle Ages, but relied on faith and good acts rather than being guaranteed through a set formula. Witnesses to entry fifty of Reynes' common place book may be found in a collection of religious tales drawn from sources like Gregory the Great and the *Lives of the Fathers* assembled in Additional 18364.²²⁹ These narratives are accompanied by the story of a farmer who is accused of witchcraft but attributes his success to the regular payment of his tithes.²³⁰ This story makes clear it can be difficult to distinguish miracles from magic, but reinforces the idea that supernatural power lies with the church and can be accessed through obedience to it, rather than the use of specific verbal formula, as was the case in charms. Entry 55 contains the story of the demon on the lettuce. The story of the man who could only learn two words of the Ave Maria appears in multiple other contexts without anti-magical stories to accompany it.

The story recorded by Reynes of the devil in the service of a knight is also common among medieval *exempla* collections, and is frequently accompanied by anti-magical material. For instance, Additional 11284, which takes a great deal of its material from the *Vitae patrum*, the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, and other saints' lives,²³¹ contains the story of a magician who attempts to perform for King William of Scotland but is stymied by a monk murmuring the opening of the Gospel of John in Entry 540.²³² Entry 537 is a dire warning of the consequences of magic in the afterlife: devils break open the coffin of the witch of Berkeley and carry off her corpse.²³³ Other entries, notably 152 and 153, serve as warnings of the temporal dangers of magic. In entry 152 a Hospitaller Knight seeks to know about the future of England and consults

²²⁹ Ibid., 606.

²³⁰ Ibid., 621. London, British Library, Additional 18364, Fol. 82 b.

²³¹ Ibid., 371.

²³² . Ibid., 403; Additional 11284, Fol. 82 b.

²³³ Ibid. Additional 11284, Fol. 82.

a magician to gain this forbidden knowledge. A disembodied head tells him that there will be seven years of war between the king and his barons. However, the head can only make its predictions after the knight has covered up the crosses on his cloaks. Entry 153 tells of a magician who strayed outside of his protective circle and was nearly dragged to hell. He was only saved by the sight of the cross. Entry 154 of the manuscript strikes a different tone. It is the story of a notary (a profession shared by Robert Reynes) who is tempted to use magic by a council of devils but refuses to abandon Christ and banishes them with the sign of the Cross. On his next visit to church the Crucifix follows him with its eyes.²³⁴ The story of the magician thwarted by the monk's chanting also occurs in entry sixty-nine of a collection of tales about Mary and other saints largely based on the *Golden Legend* with a few miscellaneous entries along with other anti-magical material.²³⁵ In still other manuscripts, the story of the knight with the devil in his service is found with anti-magical materials. One also contains the *Dialogus Miraculorum* of Caesarius of Heisterbach which includes a diverse range of dire warnings about magic, and some material that is more ambiguous. The fourth entry in the manuscripts is the story of a man granted a magic stone, through which he can see hell. He repents of his sins and idolatry before his death.²³⁶ This story establishes a strong connection between magic and the infernal, and that vague and potentially mendacious knowledge about the future was not worth such a risk. The next entry is the story of a clerk who sees the torments of hell through magic.²³⁷ In entry 77 of the text, a bishop uses necromancy to uncover how two heretics are able to endure tortures of fire and water. He is then able to find and remove pacts with the devil sewn into their

²³⁴ Ibid., 382. Additional 11284, Fol. 22.

²³⁵ Ibid., 521-525 the shelf mark for the manuscript is Harley 2385.

²³⁶ Ibid., 350; London, British Library, Additional 18346, Fol. 5.

²³⁷ Ibid., 350; Additional 18346, Fol. 5 col. 2.

skin.²³⁸ If these stories are not explicit condemnations of magic in and of itself, they construct those who perform magic as people in contact with demons.

The stories above can be easily contrasted with others where divine protection from disaster is granted as a result of prayer and pious living. Entry 139 of the manuscript discusses a priest who attempted to steal the Eucharist to create a love charm, but found himself unable to leave the church.²³⁹ Entry 128 of tells of a bishop who used his tongue to clean the nostril of a leper, revealed to be Christ in disguise.²⁴⁰ Entry 161 contains the story of a widow who saved her house from being burned by praying. She asks God to be merciful to her because she has always dealt honestly with the Church.²⁴¹ Even without specific prayers, God could work miracles, as in a collection of religious tales. Additional 18346, entry eight contains the story of a crippled woman who is healed by her pious desire to hear a preacher.²⁴² A second copy of the *Dialogus miraculorum* is found in Arundel 407 and another is found in Additional 28682 which contains the story of a husband and wife who resolved to commit suicide by hanging themselves and, having agreed to a last drink, make the sign of the cross over the cup. They are cured of their suicidal mania immediately upon drinking the wine.²⁴³ The *Speculum laicorum* contains the story of St. Dominic who was protected from the rain by the cross.²⁴⁴

When considering Robert Reynes', or any medieval person's, relationship to the stories in the exempla, the role of the Church in writing them must be borne in mind. Virginia Reinburg's 1985 PhD thesis argues that anti-charm authors of the French Counter Reformation preserved medieval anti-charm arguments that reserved curative rituals for priests, or limited lay practices

²³⁸ Ibid., 357. Additional 18346, Fol. 24 col. 2.

²³⁹ Ibid., 362. Additional 18346, Fol. 38 col. 2.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 361; Additional 18346, Fol. 36.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 364; Additional 18346, Fol. 42 B, col. 2.

²⁴² Ibid., 607; Additional 18346, Fol. 6.

²⁴³ Ibid., 85; London, British Library, Additional 28682, Fol. 234 col. 2.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 382; London, British Library, Additional 11284 Fol. 21 b.

to approved prayers.²⁴⁵ In the minds of authors of counter-reformation polemic and the creators of late medieval devotional texts like *Dives and Pauper* or *Handlyng Synne*, lay people who developed and distributed their own prayers risked falling into idolatry, especially if those prayers relied on divine names, images other than the cross, or historical narratives to achieve their results.²⁴⁶ The French Church carefully maintained the proper method of praying because non-standard prayers (from what Reinburg calls a “devotional underground”) “could easily be perceived as challenging the Church’s authority to mediate between God and the Faithful.”²⁴⁷ Although Reinburg writes about the French context, the prayers that she includes in the “devotional underground” are in some cases remarkably similar to those that Robert Reynes records. One invokes relics that Charlemagne brought to France from Constantinople in a Golden Cross,²⁴⁸ others invoke the body and wounds of Jesus. The Prayers also promise benefits similar those found in Reynes’ common place book like protection from fire, water, wicked judges and evil spirits.²⁴⁹

This concern to maintain ecclesiastical privilege in the face of charms remarkably similar to Reynes’ allows us to reconsider some the stories from the exempla described above. The woman whose broken leg was healed by her desire to hear a preacher, or the woman whose house was spared from fire because she had never given false measure, were blessed not simply because of their faith, but because they had expressed their faith in the proper way. They were saved from misfortune because they did not attempt to use charms and instead trusted faithfully in God and his official representatives on earth, the Clergy. Even if Robert Reynes did not

²⁴⁵ Virginia Reinburg “Popular Prayers in Late Medieval and Reformation France” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1985), 338.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 322-323.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 289.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 287-288.

understand himself to be in the same category as the ritual magicians in the *Dialogus miraculorum*, he at least knew that he was using ceremonies created and performed by non-clerics and that the Church looked upon these with suspicion.

Catherine Rider addresses the role that exempla played in forming the implicit boundaries of legitimate prayer and magic. Her study of the exempla of Stephen of Bourbon illustrates that his stories recount superstition in both the upper and lower classes of medieval society and that he believed that people of any class of society could be credulous enough to be deceived by demons.²⁵⁰ Rider also observes that the ones deceived by demons in Stephen of Bourbon's exempla were never described as clerics.²⁵¹ In other words, it confirms the picture painted by our survey of what Reynes might have read. The exempla literature should have driven any who had access to them, by reading the texts or hearing the stories told, to avoid idolatry and access God's miraculous power through humble and committed piety and let the Clergy select the verbal formulae that granted access to numinous power.

What can we reasonably expect Robert Reynes to have known?

Robert Reynes did not read every book of *exempla* or pastoral manual discussed above, and we have no way of determining which texts accompanied the ones he did read. However, the material we have examined allows us to sketch out both what the church thought he should know and, given his active copying from devotional literature, what he probably did know. The most overt treatments of magic in the pastoral literature establish clearly that summoning of otherworldly beings was beyond the scope of orthodoxy. *Handlyng Synne* and the numerous tales

²⁵⁰ Catherine Rider, "Elite and Popular Superstitions in the Exempla of Stephen of Bourbon" *Studies in Church History*, 42 (2006), 82.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

about summoning demons to bring wealth or knowledge, all of which resulted in disappointment or penitential return to the church, ought to have been enough to convince Reynes that his procedure for divination fell outside of what could be considered orthodox. The second point that can be firmly established is that Reynes knew that there were proper and improper methods of worship. Even if he did not encounter a text that condemned the use of mysterious words, Reynes would have known that the most effective verbal formulae in a time of crisis were standard prayers like the Pater Noster. The story of the knight saved from his enemies by the dead rising from their graves or of the widow who preserved her house from fire illustrate that prayers could have spectacular and immediate effect in times of crisis. The only requirement for access to this power was that the prayers were directed towards God and came from a pious person. Both the knight and the old woman behaved piously in the past, and so did not invoke God's name in an explicitly instrumental fashion (as in the mechanical use of a charm) but did so trusting in the infinite wisdom of their creator and saviour. Even if the *exempla* never explicitly condemned charms, they certainly contained material meant to guide those who read or heard the stories away from charms and toward the protection offered by a life of committed piety.

In a similar vein, the story of the disembodied head that could not divine the future in the presence of a cross, and that of the magician who is prevented from working his magic by the Gospel of John, also illustrate the superiority of piety to magic in a context that is more directly connected to explicitly transgressive magic. The implication of the stories around this relatively common theme is that orthodox piety was more effective in providing preternatural help during times of crisis than specific verbal formulae. A Pater Noster said piously on its own was effective in healing wounds and ensuring good fortune. No mention is made of the value of things like divine names from the liturgy being repeated or written without devotion or

understanding. If certain core elements of Reyne's charms were legitimate, the message was quite clear that many others were not.

The final concept Reyne should have understood from the devotional literature was that repentance, rather than the rote recitation or a certain number of prayers, was the key to achieving forgiveness of sins. The story of the miraculously erased list of sins read out by the devil in Church and of the fasting glutton who restored his servant both illustrate the importance of personal piety in ensuring salvation. This point about humility and piety is especially evident in the story of a bishop who used his tongue to clean the nostrils of a leper who is revealed to be Christ in disguise.²⁵² The story of the rich glutton is also important as it specifies that even the mute servant is able to confess. The story of the £200 credited to the pious debtor also reflects the idea that more than the recitation of fixed formulae was required for salvation. Reyne's charms offering automatic results through the invocation of Christian symbols had a superficial similarity to conventional piety. However, they fell short of the requirement of humility, pious devotion, and contrition clearly outlined in the above exempla.

Overall, the picture presented by the *exempla* clearly forefronts the power of orthodox prayers uttered by pious supplicants who tithed regularly as the best path to protection from evil, illness, and damnation, rather than charms and amulets. The avoidance of magic (usually portrayed as homage to the devil and the performance of necromancy) also forms a relatively consistent portion of *exempla* literature and Robert Reyne must have had some level of awareness of the Church's position on his spell for divination. In the story of the heretics with a pact with the devil sewn into their skin, amulets like the heavenly letter employed by Robert Reyne are associated with the enemies of Christianity. Even without access to the texts of

²⁵² Hebert, *Catalogue of Romances*, 361; London, British Library, Additional 18346, Fol. 36.

Augustine and Aquinas, catechetical works like those of John Bromyard and William of Rennes, or even vernacular texts like *Dives and Pauper* and *Handlyng Synne*, the *exempla* to which he had some access, clearly outlined how a properly orthodox Catholic accessed numinous power.

These were the texts aimed directly at people like Robert Reynes. Even if he could not read Aquinas and Augustine, Reynes was aware of the Church's largely negative stance on the sort of charms that he recorded. The entry in Reynes' common place book that records the two miracles of the Virgin Mary not only illustrates Robert Reynes' participation in late medieval Marian devotion, but also that he had access to the texts that defined the limits of such devotion. Miracles of healing and protection came as a result of simple Catholic faith and proper tithing, not the use of words like "Ananizapta" which wrought cures automatically. They also firmly establish that miracles are to be dispensed by members of the clergy, not charmers who relied on potentially idolatrous prayers.

The central idea that Reynes was meant to take away from the *exempla* was that piety (expressed through orthodox prayers and pious devotion to the Church) was the surest way to ensure physical safety and good fortune in this life, and salvation in the next. He would have understood that only the clergy could access God's power directly, and, even then, only for specific purposes. If Robert Reynes did not know the Church's position on mysterious words, or could not articulate the difference between *Dulia* and *Latria*, he knew that orthodox prayers and the institutional Church were the only reliably orthodox ways of ensuring his safety and salvation. Everything beyond these risked being hollow words or demon worship.

In more specific terms, Robert Reynes may not have known that the word "Ananizapta" was a nonsense word and according to Augustine and Aquinas a potential signal to demons. What he almost certainly did know was that it was not the sort of prayer that fit within the

parameters laid out by the *exempla*, and Reynes would have known the Church saw the charm that included it as a suspicious practice rather than a reliable cure worth recording. Similarly, while he may not have known about the interaction between the names in the heavenly letter and their automatic function, he did know that the most effective way to ensure his safety from fire, water, and enemies of all sorts was to pray piously and regularly.

Reynes was not alone in his cavalier approach to recording prayers, charms, and spells. While not common, such charms and ritual magic occur together in enough texts to merit discussion. Charms, ritual magic, and the liturgy all relied on the effect words could have on the physical world. What separated them into categories was the purpose for which the power of these sacred words were used, the effect they had on God or other numinous powers, and who could employ the power contained in the words. In prayers, known words in human languages were used to supplicated God for salvation. In both charms and ritual magic, the words and names used could be both known and unknown. In the former case the names used brought healing and protection in mechanical fashion, while in the latter they bound demons to do the will a necromancer. Of these three, only prayer could be considered orthodox. Reynes does not seem to have cared how the material he recorded related to orthodoxy. All of the religious and catechetical texts, from the complex Latin works of great theologians to the *exempla* stories which Reynes could access, condemned ritual magic and urged Christians to rely on simple faith and the image of the cross rather than mysterious words and historical narratives when seeking protection. Some of the stories in the *exempla* are more ambiguous. For instance, the story of the priest who uses necromancy to discover the amulets worn by the heretics. Even in this situation magic was performed by the clergy in the service of the Church. This *exemplum* presents us with an usual and ambiguous case where magic was performed by the clergy, but still portrays

interaction with spirits as the domain of the clergy. When the laity used magic they risked being dragged to hell by devils like the magician who strayed outside his circle in Additional 11284. Even magic used with the best intentions risked intercourse with the devil, who was active in the world and always ready to ensnare the ignorant. Duffy took great pains to demonstrate, and is quite correct to assert, that Robert Reynes and people like him were pious Catholics who understood their religion. Reynes occupied Duffy's "multifaceted resonant symbolic house." However, texts that allowed him to be such an occupant extolled the virtues of simple and conventional piety, deference to priestly authority, and caution with respect to unusual sources of supernatural power. They also included explicit condemnation of divinatory and conjuring practices. Reynes recorded magical and quasi-magical material along with these devotional texts. Two conclusions are possible. Either Reynes was not intelligently engaged despite all the available evidence, or he was actively collecting materials which he *knew* stood outside the fold of orthodox religion. In short, Duffy's suggestion that we consider charms as part of lay liturgy cannot really be sustained. They were magic, and Reynes knew it.

CONCLUSION: MAGIC AND THE BOUNDARIES OF GENRES

Robert Reynes' commonplace book presents us with a problem. The charms for healing, protection, and deliverance that it contains, which rely on divine names as well as biblical figures and narratives, fall within Duffy's "multifaceted resonant symbolic house". However, the fact that they functioned automatically prevents them from being fully orthodox. Moreover, these charms are accompanied by material that was clearly unorthodox because it combined the above resonant elements with mysterious words or attempts to predict the future. Reynes was educated and intelligent enough to make a distinction between what was orthodox and what was not. Despite this, Reynes included prayers, charms, and ritual magic in his commonplace book with little or no distinction. Duffy acknowledges the problems that the Reynes spirit conjuring causes for modern scholars who want to study Reynes in particular and lay piety in general, stating that "Reynes knew the Ten Commandments, but had evidently not internalized the standard comments on the First Commandment, which prohibited quasi-magical practices of this sort."²⁵³ In an earlier section of his discussion of Reynes' commonplace book, Duffy argues that while he interacted with the Church's "official programme" it was in a "fairly elementary" way.²⁵⁴ This is at odds with Duffy's well-supported argument about the late medieval laity's sophisticated understanding of their religion. In his chapter "How the Ploughman Learned his Pater Noster," Duffy argues that the Church could communicate the complexity of Catholic doctrine well beyond a basic understanding of the Ten Commandments.²⁵⁵ Reynes not only participated in a transgressive tradition of charming, but also seems to have interacted with ritual magic. Reynes

²⁵³ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 72.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-87.

recorded charms and his procedure for divination knowing they were unorthodox. He recorded transgressive material not because he was mimicking the ceremonies of the Church, but because it responded to anxieties about his fate in this life and in the next in a compelling fashion. Most importantly, he could distinguish between what was orthodox and what was not, and chose to record material he ought to have known was magical, or at least superstitious, because it addressed his worries in a way that the liturgy did not.

Robert Reynes was an active agent in the construction of his own religious world view, and this is reflected in the magic recorded in his commonplace book. He chose magic and devotional material that met his needs, regardless of what he was told by any clergymen he may have known, or what he had read in *exempla* and catechetical literature. Robert Reynes had a clear idea of how he could access God's power himself. Reynes believed in the power of Jesus and ceremonies of the Catholic Church to protect him, but he was confident enough in his religious understanding to determine for himself which ceremonies could protect his physical and spiritual safety. He was not, as Thomas and Duffy argue, enthralled by and uncritical of Church ceremonies, but thought about the physical and spiritual worlds he lived in and was not afraid to record material that spoke to his religious experience rather than that of the Church.

If we treat Reynes as a prototypical charmer, then any given charmer may have had access to ritual magic, even if they did not choose to record it. How did they decide which spells were worth recording and which were too unorthodox for their magic collection? Reynes' procedure for divination is tame compared to some of the spells recorded in necromantic manuals like CLM 849. If Reynes had access to ritual magic texts, he eschewed more transgressive material that explicitly invoked demons. By contrast the scribes who wrote the Antiphoner Notebook and Rawlinson D. 252 specifically chose to include demonic magic for the

purposes of treasure hunting. Further study of works that mix charms and ritual magic may not be able to determine why a given scribe copied a given spell, but it can bring to light the factors that weighed on their conscience. A literate charmer, armed with a general knowledge of the limits of orthodoxy available in the *exempla*, and confronting a text like the Antiphoner Notebook, would have a choice to make. Did they wish to record only the unofficial indulgence, the charm to staunch blood that they knew the Church would frown upon but that probably would not endanger their soul, or did they wish to fully embrace unorthodoxy and record the spell for treasure hunting or divination that risked demonic contact? If it cannot give a definitive answer, research into texts that combined ritual magic and charms can give insight into the factors that such charmers like Reynes weighed when considering whether or not to write down and potentially perform a spell they knew to be unorthodox

Texts like Reynes' commonplace book, where charms and ritual magic are recorded together, are rare, but comparing such texts together shows that an educated and intelligent lay person like Robert Reynes could see the similarities and decide what level of unorthodoxy they were comfortable with. The Antiphoner Notebook, a collection of charms and eclectic ritual magic from the late sixteenth century, shows a clear inclination towards collecting charms that fell roughly within the bounds of medieval Catholic orthodoxy, but it also includes magic that explicitly addressed a spirit. Such spells fell well outside of what could be considered orthodox and seem to have been beyond what Reynes was comfortable recording. Additionally, the manuscript Rawlinson D. 252, a Latin treasure hunting manual from the High Middle Ages, contains unorthodox material that is accompanied by texts quoted from the Psalms and used for protection in a way that is similar to Robert Reynes' use of standard prayers. These texts do not indicate that all charmers practiced magic or thought of themselves as necromancers. However,

the Antiphoner notebook, Rawlison D. 252, and Reynes' commonplace book illustrate that no hard boundary existed between charms and ritual magic in the minds of literate charmers. Reynes and charmers like him made choices about the material they recorded, and future scholarship on charms should investigate how and why they made these choices.

The text of the Antiphoner Notebook "contains an unusually complex set of archeological layers extending back centuries into the late Middle Ages."²⁵⁶ Much of the material that the text uses comes from the late medieval Catholic perspective that Robert Reynes shared. Indeed, some entries can be found in the Antiphoner Notebook, Reynes' commonplace book, and Lea Olsan's corpus of charms. For instance, entry number four contains the narrative of St. Peter, ill with fever or toothache, and Jesus offering to cure him.²⁵⁷ Entry number twenty-nine of the Antiphoner notebook is the prayer to St. Apollonia that can be found in the Reynes' commonplace book as well as Lea Olsan's corpus of charms.²⁵⁸

Robert Reynes' charm for epilepsy that uses the word "Ananizapta" is found in a slightly altered form in entry number thirty-four. Of the differences, a few are notable, the most obvious being that in this instance the charm is accompanied by three Paternosters, three Ave Marias, and one Apostles' Creed. Other important differences include the changing of the word of power from "Ananizapta" to "Anamazapta" and the recitation of the word of power three times.²⁵⁹

The prayers for protection found in Reynes' commonplace book also have parallels in the Antiphoner Notebook. For instance, it contains two versions of the heavenly letter. The first is in entry thirty-six and states that,

Sainte Leo Y^e pope of Rome wrote y^{es} names to kinge Charbis of fraunce when he went to the battaile of rownliuale & say what man y^t bareth these wordes vpon him y^t day shall

²⁵⁶ Frank Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England* (Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming).

²⁵⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B.1. Fol. 11.

²⁵⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B.1. Fol. 16v.

²⁵⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B.1. Fol. 17v.

he haue no dread of his enimies to be overcome in battaile, nor he shall never be burnd wth fyre, nor drowned wth water nor shall he never dye in strife & hatred nor he shall never dye suddaine death, nor ther shall never no wicked spirit hurt him...²⁶⁰

The charm goes on to make a number of other promises for protection from men, women, thunder and lightning, epilepsy, and hanging. It then states that “Tresilion y^e iustice of Londuen” had proved the charm effective.²⁶¹ The divine names invoked to deliver on the promises the charm makes are perhaps the most interesting part of the text. In addition to the divine names (many of which are borrowed from the *Alma chorus Domini*), Old Testament figures, angels, and apostles are invoked. The charm invokes so many figures in part because it contains the text of another charm used strictly against epilepsy and copied by accident.²⁶²

The second version of the heavenly letter found in the Antiphoner Notebooks is borrowed from the *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, an anti-magical and anti-Catholic work composed by the pamphleteer Reginald Scot in 1584.²⁶³ Despite its clear anti-magical argument, the scribe of the Antiphoner Notebook treated Reginald Scot’s screed as a grimoire and extracted its spells to suit their purposes. The copy of the heavenly letter borrowed from the *Discoverie of Witchcraft* does not specifically invoke Charlemagne (*Kinge Charbis* in the version quoted above) but it does call upon God to protect the bearer against “ill-will, perplexity, and dangers, of all my enemies visible and invisible. That these names protect me from every adversity, plague, and infirmity of body and soul.” The names invoked by the charm include those from the *Alma chorus Domini*,

²⁶⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B.1. Fol. 18r. Saint Leo the Pope of Rome wrote these names to King Charles of France when went to the Battle of Roncevaux & Said what man that bears these words upon him that day shall he have no dread of his enemies to be overcome in battle, nor he shall never be burned with fire, nor drowned with water nor shall he never die in strife & hatred nor he shall never die sudden death, nor there shall never wicked spirits hurt him...

²⁶¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B.1. Fol. 18r.

²⁶² Frank Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England* (Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming).

²⁶³ Frank Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England* (Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming).

the names of the four Evangelists, and the Three Magi, as well as divine names from other textual and liturgical sources.²⁶⁴

Even when they were not being put to the same use, the scribe of the Antiphoner Notebook and Robert Reynes could agree that certain symbols held a specific power. For instance, where Reynes used the nails of Christ as a protection against sin, the Antiphoner scribe used them in an amulet to staunch blood and cure illness. In this context, a piece of lead invoking the wound of Christ as medicine, was placed on the patient's wounds after a prayer. Once the lead plate was applied, a second prayer was recited.²⁶⁵ Even while Robert Reynes and the Antiphoner Notebook scribe used the Nails of Christ for different ends, both saw them as a source of healing and protection. This speaks to a larger point about the intellectual worlds of Robert Reynes and the Antiphoner Notebook scribe: despite recording their works nearly two centuries apart, they shared a belief in a set of recognizably Christian symbols that could be universally accessed by lay people in ways that strayed outside the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy.

Much like Reynes' commonplace book, the Antiphoner Notebook contains spells that fall well outside the limits of what could be considered orthodox. However, in the Antiphoner Notebook these spells explicitly address demons, where Reynes' procedure for divination hedges its bets and claims to summon angel. One spell uses the names of the four Evangelists written in a stylized letter O to begin a long conjuration that invokes many elements of the Christian canon. The ultimate purpose of the spell is to bind a spirit into bringing treasure to the summoner.²⁶⁶ The spell that precedes it is a spell for divination that requires nine Masses to be said over a

²⁶⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1. fol. 18v.

²⁶⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1. fo1. 9v-20v.

²⁶⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1. fol. 4v-10v.

crystal in which an angel will appear to reveal hidden information. The crystal must also be sprinkled with holy water, set under gilded wood in the appropriate astrological conditions, and kept in a clean place. Finally, the person performing the spell can “ask no fylthy or vnlawful thinges” and must be clean in body.²⁶⁷

Both Robert Reynes and the scribe of the Antiphoner Notebook believed in the power of holy words and things to protect them from misfortune and spiritual as well as physical enemies. The scribe of the Antiphoner Notebook seems to have been more confident in the power of his divine names, or less nervous about trafficking with demons, and used the Evangelists and other figures to force a spirit to do his bidding. Reynes and the Antiphoner scribe encountered a tradition of magic that used similar symbols often for similar ends, but the Antiphoner scribe seems to have had fewer scruples about trafficking with demons, or else greater access to texts that gave instructions for necromancy. Reynes and the Antiphoner scribe both participated in traditions of charming and ritual magic, but they came to these traditions with different values and levels of comfort in performing explicitly necromantic magic. This difference in values profoundly influenced the content of the texts which they produced.

Turning to older manuscripts of ritual magic, we find that clearly necromantic magic was occasionally accompanied by charms. As mentioned above the treasure hunting manual found in Rawlinson D. 252 contains a number of entries that are similar to what Reynes and the Antiphoner scribe recorded. One such entry states that “[t]hes namys be goode to bere upon a body ffor many causes” and lists a number of names, most of which are meaningless, that will protect the person wearing such an amulet.²⁶⁸ The entry that immediately follows this is in Latin and promises protection against more specific calamities like visible and invisible enemies, and

²⁶⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1. fol. 3r-4r.

²⁶⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson D252, Fol. 95r.

illness. Like the heavenly letters recorded by Reynes and the Antiphoner Notebook scribe, the text invokes Charlemagne receiving the letter from an angel before it lists a group of letters that do not form any word in the order in which they are presented.²⁶⁹

The spells above, while laudable in their goals and familiar in their claims, would not meet the definition of orthodoxy laid out by Thomas Aquinas. Another set of spells later in the same manuscript invoke specific Psalms to treat specific illnesses. For instance, eye troubles are treated by writing Psalm 37:2.²⁷⁰ Another promises protection from enemies using Psalm 36:1.²⁷¹ The Psalms used to treat the illnesses are not specifically related in any way, and the words of the Psalms seem to be directed against the demons that cause the illnesses. Three verses from the Psalms are used to ensure that the bearer wins favour from a judge, specifically Psalm 112:4, 116:1, and 117:10.²⁷² These Psalms invoke God as an authority over all nations of the world and fall more or less in line with the linguistic connection between words and specific problems that Olsan argues for. The charmer invoked God as an authority over the authorities that will judge them.

This use of Psalms to bring about good fortune is roughly in line the use of the four Evangelists outlined in *Dives and Pauper* and the use of holy names in Reynes' heavenly letter. Taken on their own, these texts seem to fall quite nicely into Duffy's "multifaceted resonant symbolic house." However, in all cases discussed above, the surrounding material would not fit into Duffy's prototype of asking for benefits based on the promises made by the Church. Treasure hunting, divination, and the summoning of otherworldly beings were not parts of the liturgy that could be appropriated into the everyday lives of the medieval laity.

²⁶⁹ Rawlinson D. 252, fol. 95v.

²⁷⁰ Rawlinson D. 252, fol. 125r.

²⁷¹ Rawlinson D. 252, fol. 126r.

²⁷² Rawlinson D. 252, Fol. 125r.

This combination of necromancy and charming in individual works by people who seem to have had the knowledge to understand the difference between official Church ceremonies, charms that were more liminal, and ritual magic that was clearly not only unorthodox but unabashedly transgressive is jarring to the modern mind. The spells for treasure hunting in Additional B.1 and Rawlinson D. 252 seem to be giving *Latria* as discussed by *Dives and Pauper* to the demons used to seek the treasure, just as Robert Reynes' procedure for divination gave it to the (ostensible) angel revealing hidden truth.

An examination of the construction of charms and ritual magic and their relationship to the official liturgy shows that magicians and charmers of the Middle Ages may not have drawn as clear a distinction between charms and necromancy as modern scholars do. Eamon Duffy notes that charms are couched in apotropaic Church ceremonies, and these arguments are worth revisiting in light of our discussion. Duffy argues that rogationtide processions were meant to drive demons away from a given parish, while baptism was meant to evict them from an individual infant.²⁷³ Other Church ceremonies were meant to give the laity power over the demons that caused misfortune and havoc in their daily lives.²⁷⁴ Duffy argues that charms can be seen as a kind of lay liturgy that allowed everyday people in medieval Europe to feel that they had some control of their world. However, a charmer like Reynes, who should have been aware from the *exempla* that charms which worked automatically or used mysterious words were unorthodox, could have seen that necromantic texts in which these names were used to bring demons to heel were similar to his charms.

In his book *Forbidden Rites*, Richard Kieckhefer notes that “the terms ‘conjunction’ and ‘exorcism’ are essentially interchangeable in medieval usage, regardless of whether the intent is

²⁷³ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 279-280

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

to summon or dispel the evil spirit.”²⁷⁵ The overall tone of the formulae for necromancy is quite different from that of many charms, but Kieckhefer notes that necromantic conjurations were similar in many ways to the liturgical curses.²⁷⁶ Despite the clearly transgressive nature of their activities, necromancers still borrowed from liturgical ceremonies for the structure and power sources of their spells.

Both repentant sinners and necromancers would invoke the name(s) of God, Christ, or other holy figures to attain their desired ends. However, the way in which they did so was very different. The *Obsecro Te*, a prayer from the Little Office of the Virgin, invoked events where Mary and Jesus were both present so that she would remember her feelings about her son and the mortals he died for and have compassion for them. Kieckhefer argues that the names have “Psychological force” and, unlike the names invoked in ritual magic, attempt to make Mary act of her own volition. In contrast, the holy names invoked by the necromancer “serve as powerful but impersonal weapons in a contest of wills” which are used to “gain the upper hand on an unwilling spirit.” Richard Kieckhefer compares the role of holy words in necromancy to that of electricity, powerful and capable of running a variety of devices for a variety of purposes.²⁷⁷ The automatic nature of the forgiveness granted by Reynes’ Prayer of the Woman Recluse seems to align it more closely with the magic texts, but its aim of attaining salvation is perfectly orthodox.

Kieckhefer’s comparison to electricity is illustrative. The *exempla* present demons as tricksters who could deceive humans easily, and the narratives the *exempla* contain imply that the most effective way to defeat demons was to trust in the Church and the clergy to drive them away. Both Reynes’ prayer for salvation and texts of ritual magic, which bound demons with

²⁷⁵ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 127.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

holy words, claimed to function automatically with recitation of a given set of words in a sphere that *exempla* construct as the prerogative of the clergy. If nothing else, Reynes should have noticed the presence of the clergy and automatic nature of the ceremonies as similarities between the charms he recorded and any ritual magic he came into contact with.

Pressing his examination further, Kieckhefer notes that most exorcisms (whether or not they were sanctioned by the Church) can be broken into three distinct sections: the declaration which states the intent of the necromancer; the address, which directs the declaration towards a specific spirit or group of spirits; and finally the invocation, which used holy words and objects to force the spirit into obeying the necromancer. This structure was relatively flexible and these elements could appear at any point in any given spell. Necromantic spells could vary a great deal in their complexity, but the three elements above were always present.²⁷⁸

In other words, charms that worked against the demons that caused illness and misfortune, ritual magic invocations that bound demons to do a necromancer's bidding, and even the prayer of the woman recluse and the wounds of Jesus, all held to a pattern that Reynes might have recognized and known was unorthodox. A charmer educated enough to see the similarities between charms and the liturgy could also see the similarities between charms and ritual magic. If he encountered any magic like the treasure hunting spells in Rawlinson D 252 and the Antiphoner Notebook, Reynes did not record it. Given that ritual magic tends to survive in large volumes that contain multiple spells, and Reynes had access to at least one text which recorded ritual magic, it seems likely that he encountered demonic magic and chose not to record it. Texts where charms and ritual magic appear together would be fertile grounds for investigation. Such texts could help to establish if Reynes worked from texts similar to those of the Antiphoner

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 128.

Notebook scribe, and if this was the case, why Reynes did not copy the explicitly demonic spells like the one for treasure hunting. This process is unlikely to lead to clear-cut answers, but will produce a richer understanding of Reynes and other literate charmers. Although charms were shorter and left considerably less space for variation, many nonetheless display the elements that Kieckhefer discussed. Consider the following charm against “bitters” in women found in Additional B1: “Bitters + Bitters + Bitters + Three + the black bitter hath bitten the + In the name of God the Father + God the Sonne + God the Holy Ghost blesse thee + Amen + Catton.”²⁷⁹ The bitters are addressed, and the names of all members of the Trinity are invoked to ensure that the bitters obey the instructions of the person performing the charm. Two of Kieckhefer’s elements (the address and the invocation) are both clearly present. The third element, the declaration, seems to be tied up in the blessing of the bitters; implicit in blessing an illness was the desire that it be cured.

A more complex charm, number sixteen of Lea Olsan’s corpus, contains a much clearer declaration. The charm addresses a wound and states that,

Iesu Y bisek Þe & it be Þi wil Þat Þis wound mote be ho lot Þis sor & neuer aftir Þis time it ake nogt ne swele ne fester ne blede ne rancle Þoru Þe vertu of al Þin holy passioun.

This section of the charm is preceded by a gory description of the Crucifixion of Jesus as well as his return on Judgement Day to reign over the world.²⁸⁰ Although the invocation is brief, and much of the text is taken up by the Crucifixion narrative, this charm contains all three elements that Kieckhefer articulates in necromantic magic: the wound is addressed, told that it will not swell or fester, and the passion of Jesus is invoked to ensure this does not occur. This charm

²⁷⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional B.1. fol. 45v.

²⁸⁰ Lea Olsan, “The Corpus of Charms in Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books,” 222-223. Jesus I beseech the & it be thy will that this wound may be whole this this sore & never after this time it ache nothing nor swell nor fester nor bleed nor rankle through the virtue of all thine holy passion.

clearly displays the overlapping conceptions about how the words operated to bring about the desired result for both charmers and necromancers.

Robert Reynes actively chose to record charms and ritual magic that he ought to have known were not orthodox. The *exempla* made clear that any prayer for healing that worked automatically was suspect, and no Church ceremony endorsed the procedure for divination. Instead of passively absorbing and imitating Church ceremonies, Reynes recorded charms that reflected the anxieties he felt about his earthly and spiritual life. Charms like the heavenly letter, the prayer of the nails, and those against various illnesses met concerns for physical safety that Church ceremonies did not address. Unofficial indulgences, like the prayer of St. Bryde of Sweden, addressed concerns about spiritual salvation upon which the Church imposed strict limits. Finally, the material for prognostications and divination promised valuable knowledge of the future which the Church had no avenue to access. The *exempla* argued that God could perform miracles for the pious, and that the best way to ensure safety was to trust in Him and His Church. However, Reynes wanted guaranteed protection and for that he knew he had to go beyond what was offered by conventional piety, and to knowingly record magic that fit into the religious outlook he constructed for himself.

Duffy's "multifaceted resonant symbolic house" has not been demolished. As he argues, charmers were educated and drew upon Christian symbols that appeared in the liturgy. However, they did not passively receive and recite these symbols. The way these symbols were employed by people like Reynes could overstep the boundaries of orthodoxy laid out in detail by prominent theologians like Augustine and Aquinas and summarized in the catechetical texts and the *exempla*. Reynes and other charmers made their own decisions about the best use of Christian

symbols in their day to day lives. Charms are not the result of peasants passively aping the Church as Thomas suggests, nor are they an appropriation of Christian mysteries essentially compatible with mainstream orthodoxy as Duffy argues. They contain too much material that could be identified as unorthodox by Robert Reynes and others like him to be pious imitation. Instead, Reynes and other charms created and maintained unorthodox practices that fit their anxieties and their world view from the powerful symbols offered by the Church.

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