

Şimal Yurtsever

LOVE MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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LOVE MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES:
EMOTIONS AS A REASON TO PRACTICE LOVE MAGIC

A Master's Thesis

by

ŞİMAL YURTSEVER

Department of
History
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University
Ankara
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To Coco, Norra and Rüzgar



LOVE MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES:
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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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by

ŞİMAL YURTSEVER

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

Paul Latimer
Advisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

Nil Tekgöl
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

Fatma Özden Mercan
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

Refet S. Gürkaynak
Director

ABSTRACT

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Yurtsever, Şimal

M. A., Department of History

Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Paul Latimer

August 2025

This thesis examines the concept of love magic and its importance in historical studies, mainly within the Kingdom of England and the Iberian and Italian Peninsulas during the Middle Ages as a whole, while placing a particular emphasis on the 11th to 13th centuries. The research also incorporates insights from the History of Emotions with the aim of highlighting the place of emotions in magical studies. Intending to understand the role of emotions for the practice of magic and how it has influenced society, the following chapters analyze the sources, *Picatrix*, *Cligès*, *Tristan and Iseult*, *Corrector sive Medicus*, as well as individual cases where love magic has been used or was assumed to be used, showcasing the importance of love-magic for society, interpersonal relations, and various other aspects of everyday life and politics of the Middle Ages. In light of this, the following thesis aims to contribute to the literature by demonstrating that the use of magic

is closely tied to emotions as motivating factors. Therefore, without a thorough understanding of the relationship between emotions and magical studies, research on love magic would be incomplete. Surprisingly, the analysis of love magic in the Middle Ages not only shows what interpersonal relationships were like during that period but also offers insights into the gender roles and power dynamics of the era. One aspect that is particularly attention-grabbing is that, as examined in this thesis, love magic has been used not only for enhancing personal relationships but also for self-protection and political advantage.

Keywords: Love-magic, History of Emotions, Love, Occult, Picatrix

ÖZET

ORTAÇAĞ'DA AŞK BÜYÜSÜ: DUYGULARIN AŞK BÜYÜSÜ KULLANIMINDAKİ İTİCİ GÜCÜ

Yurtsever, Şimal

Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Paul Latimer

Ağustos 2025

Bu çalışma, aşk büyüü kavramını ve bu kavramın tarihi çalışmalar için önemini incelemektedir. Araştırma, tüm Ortaçağ'ı kapsamakla birlikte, özellikle 11. ile 13. yüzyıllara vurgu yapmaktadır ve Ortaçağ dönemindeki İngiltere Krallığı ile İber ve İtalyan Yarımadaı'ndaki büyüü kullanımına ve sebeplerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu kapsamda, Duygular Tarihi alanından da yararlanılarak duyguların büyüü incelemeleri için önemi vurgulanmaya çalışılmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, ilerleyen bölümler *Picatrix*, *Cligès*, *Tristan ve Iseult*, *Corrector sive Medicus* kaynaklarını incelenirken aynı zamanda aşk büyüüsünden bahseden münferit vakaları da analiz edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda tez, büyüü kullanımının duygular ile güçlü bir bağı olduğunu göstererek literatüre katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışmanın önemli bir noktası, duyguların bu ritüellerin üzerindeki rolünü tam olarak anlamadan yapılan tarihi araştırmaların eksik kalacağına işaret etmesidir. Önemli bir bulgu olarak, Ortaçağ

boyunca kullanılan aşk büyüğü ritüelleri üzerine yapılan araştırma, sadece kişiler arası ilişki dinamiklerine değil, aynı zamanda dönemin toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve güç hiyerarşisine dair önemli bilgiler de vermektedir. Bu çalışmada görüldüğü üzere, aşk büyüğünün dikkat çekici taraflarından birisi yalnızca kişiler arası ilişkiler ile değil kişilerin kendilerini koruma isteğı ve siyasi kazanç sağlama hedefiyle de ilgili olmasıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Aşk Büyüğü, Duygular Tarihi, Aşk, Büyü, Picatrix

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Academic Research on Magic

Trying to understand the mysterious, looking for the unnatural, and attempting to explain the outer world through occult forces is a way of making sense of the world that was and still is a major element of how people engage with their surroundings. Because of this, especially through popular books and stories, professional practitioners, everyday horoscopes, and rituals, magical beliefs are in almost every corner of human existence, shaping people's ideas and beliefs. Consequently, magic, as well as how and why it was utilized by individuals and societies, has increasingly received more and more interest within society and academia due to its complex nature, interconnectedness with different aspects of human life and belief systems, and lastly, its usefulness and established presence in almost every culture known.

Related to the occult's significant place for understanding history and the past societies, the study of magic has also gained recognition among historians in the last few decades as seen in the works of prominent researchers, such as the studies of Richard Kieckhefer (1946 –) who has produced immensely valuable texts such as *Magic in the Middle Ages*, which gives a comprehensive summary of magical practices of the Middle Ages, and *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*

(*Magic in History*), an invaluable work on necromantic texts.¹ Likewise, Keith Thomas (1933 -), with his deep understanding of the relationship between magic and religion, which he has conveyed through books such as *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, made considerable contributions to the field and is still being read as one of the premier historians of the topic.²

Needless to say, various other historians and researchers have made invaluable additions and given input about the way magical beliefs and practices shaped the societies and human relationships, such as Carlo Ginzburg (1939 -), who discussed the life and belief system of the *Benandanti*, a group of people in Italy who thought that they were appointed to fight against witches, in his work *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. According to Ginzburg, the Benandanti, who was thought to fight against witches, “did so with the consciousness that they were locked in a struggle ‘out of love for the crops’, to assure their community abundant harvests, a plenitude of food, of small grains, and of the vineyards, in fact, ‘all the fruits of the earth.’”³ Ginzburg’s discovery of this fascinating group highlighted the significance of supernatural beliefs in local culture and how many individuals relied on these beliefs for crucial matters. According to Ginzburg’s findings, the community of the *Benandanti* thought evil witches were trying to harm the crops

¹ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., Canto Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139923484>, Richard Kieckhefer, *A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, USA: Penn State University Press, 1998), <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/9780271065441>.

² Keith Vivian Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic : Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*. (Penguin, 1971), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat00040a&AN=bilk.154207&site=eds-live>.

³ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (London: Routledge, 2011), 41.

and destroy the harvest, leading to possible famine. In contrast, the Benandantis were protecting the community's well-being against these *evil* witches.⁴ Ginzburg's discovery highlights that there is a distinction between "good" and "bad" magic, apparent in the battle between the Benandantis and evil witches. This suggests that not all practitioners of the occult were viewed as evil, which is a distinction that will become important throughout this research. Further, by showing that there was a large group of people who were thought to be special and were destined to fight the witches, Ginzburg's study was a work that stirred up excitement and controversy among the enthusiasts of magical studies as much as, perhaps even more than, the previously mentioned works. His findings once again stressed how magical beliefs were not only a distinct part of the culture but were intertwined with people's everyday problems and wishes. Not only Ginzburg, but the literature written up until today on magic has highlighted the same matter: that the study of magic could easily become the study of religion, emotions, belief systems, human relationships, politics, and gender roles.

What makes the examples given above grab attention and have significance for understanding the field of magical studies and its history is that each of these scholars has published their work quite recently and remains active in the field. Related to this, it is commonly acknowledged that the research into magic is still relatively new and open to development, with the research done up until this point still trying to define the terms and understand the concepts, rather than going into an in-depth analysis on how or why the society used magical rituals. This is vital to emphasise and remember when writing about and researching magic and the history of magical rituals. Most concepts,

⁴ Ibid, 6.

terms, and technicalities in the field continue to be vague, and researchers still discuss how these rituals were utilized. Why was magic used? What magic is, and what is its difference from religious beliefs and practices? What could magic tell us about past societies? All of these questions have been discussed many times, and while some scholars have attempted to answer them in their own way, the discussions still go on to find an answer that encompasses all definitions. What is now understood is that the belief system behind these rituals is so deep and complicated that the research of magic is not only about understanding how these rituals were used, but also why they had such importance for the society. In other words, studying how magical rituals helped people connect, express their feelings, and protect themselves enables researchers to highlight how individuals experienced and reacted to their surroundings. This also reveals how they responded to the problems they encountered, which is one of the main reasons magic studies have become an increasingly popular topic for research.

1.2 Aim of the Research and Sources

The study of magic is still an exciting yet understudied field, which gives this research an opportunity to delve into areas that have not been studied in detail and try to understand the complicated relationship between magic and society in the Middle Ages. In light of this, the following pages will be looking into the works *Picatrix*, *Cligès*, *Tristan and Iseult*, and *Corrector sive Medicus*, as well as other specific individual examples of where love-magic was utilised, to understand and track how emotions were

reflected, used, or influenced by these magical rituals. As mentioned above, the complete understanding of how these rituals shaped people's lives and why they were utilized remains a distant goal. In this sense, this work does not aim to offer a definitive explanation of what magic is, but intends to stress key reasons individuals thought magic was helpful for, especially in the field of love.

One of the most important steps to take before delving into what love is, or its relationship to magic, is to highlight a fundamental question: Why put effort into understanding what love is and its relationship with magic, and what is its importance for history? A roundabout answer to this question is given by Wayne Cristaudo as stated in his book *A Philosophical History of Love*: "The evolution of the West is, inter alia, a synthesis of three main loves: love of wisdom (philosophy), love of God (the church), and romantic love, which eventually becomes the basis of the modern family."⁵ While it is crucial to remember that love itself has many different elements other than the three mentioned here, what is vital about the above quote is that Cristaudo points out a very noteworthy aspect of the emotion: love is not only an important part of people's daily lives and interactions, but it could also be viewed as one of the main factors that have shaped societies as they are now. With this in mind, this research will be looking primarily into love magic and how such rituals were used in order to receive, initiate, and create the illusion of love and its significance for tracking down societal values and gender dynamics of the period. While the examples given in the following pages are in no way the only cases nor the only reasons why love magic was used, the selection of

⁵ Wayne Cristaudo, *A Philosophical History of Love* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 9, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315083315>.

examples was carefully chosen to give an overview of how love and love magic held a prominent place in the everyday life of the Middle Ages.

While the works and examples analysed were generally used on the European Continent, especially regions corresponding to modern-day Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, and the British Isles during the Middle Ages, they were not always written in these regions. In the majority of cases, magical texts and manuals were written in the Islamic lands of the period but were then transferred to other parts of the world and gained popularity in different cultures. In this sense, pinpointing the works given in the following pages to a specific region and to a specific culture is extremely risky and difficult. This is why the thesis will also refrain from attributing these works to a specific culture or location. However, it is known that certain works were popular in certain regions, such as *Picatrix's* popularity in the Iberian Peninsula and Italy, which had a considerable amount of contact with the Islamic world, especially from the eleventh century onwards, offering insight into the general belief systems and significance of these texts for the said communities. Therefore, a general overview about where these works were utilized will be given throughout the research, but the extent to which the work was used or known among the general populace, as well as the text or rituals' significance for the public, must always be approached with caution to prevent misleading conclusions about the place of these sources in the Medieval society.

For the purpose of this research, various genres of primary sources will be used to compare how different texts discuss love magic, allowing for a better understanding of its different usages. In light of this, one of the most important sources that will be used is *Picatrix*, a magic manual written in the eleventh century with the purpose of

offering guidance to magic practitioners. The version of *Picatrix* used in this work is the English translation, translated by Dan Attrell and David Porreca, based on the Latin version.⁶ Due to the existence of multiple translations of the manual, the research process incorporated other versions of the book translated and prepared by Christopher Warnock and Hashem Atallah.⁷ The intention behind this inclusion was to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the work and to prevent misunderstandings that could arise from inconsistencies in translation. However, since Dan Attrell and David Porreca's translation uses simpler language than many other translations available, and their language is fairly easy to understand, the quotes used in this research were taken from Dan Attrell and David Porreca's version.

Going further, another important genre of sources for this study is romances, specifically *Cligès* and *Tristan and Iseult*, both of which use love magic as a vital element of the story. Above all, they are excellent tools to study the mindset of the period and understand the dynamics between genders and classes, as these are often echoed within the stories. However, needless to say, the reliability of romances as historical sources is quite questionable. Therefore, it must be remembered that such stories often have no claim of describing each incident and relationship in detail or truthfully transferring the period's beliefs and events. Nevertheless, what is significant about these stories is that they reflect the values and narratives that the audience of that time wanted to hear and read. Therefore, the love stories and the themes of love magic

⁶ Maslamah ibn Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī, *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*, trans. Dan Attrell and David Porreca (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

⁷ *Picatrix: The Goal of the Wise*, trans. Hashem Atallah, ed. William Kiesel (Seattle: Ouroboros Press, 2002); *The Picatrix: Selected Translations Edited with Commentary*, ed. Christopher Warnock (n.p.: n.p., n.d.)

included in the stories must have resonated with the society in which they were created, making them relevant to the listeners and readers of the period. Thus, through reading and analysing romances, it is possible to understand the reactions towards love magic, how often they were used, and for what purpose.⁸ In light of this, the first romance that will be used for this research is the version of *Cligès* provided access by Project Gutenberg, translated by L. J. Gardiner. This version was translated directly from the Old French of Chretien De Troyes to English in 1966 by L. J. Gardiner.⁹ Gardiner's translation remains an accessible and easy-to-read version of the text, allowing researchers to engage deeply with the story.

Finding a comprehensive and accurate translation of *Tristan and Iseult* proved to be more challenging than the previously mentioned sources, as there are countless translations of the story and no one specific writer, which led to many different versions of the story being published throughout the centuries. Among these versions, Joseph Bédier's translation, published in 1910, was chosen to be used in this research. Bédier's role as a translator and historian has been the main reason his translation was considered more reliable. His version remains accessible on the Internet Archives.¹⁰ As there are multiple versions of the story of *Tristan and Iseult*, Bédier utilizes various manuscripts and interpretations, bringing them together in his work. More specifically, the versions of Thomas of Britain, Eilhart of Oberg, Beroul, and Gottfried of Strasburg have been

⁸ Karen Jolly et al., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 3 : The Middle Ages*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe (The Athlone Press, 2001), 61.

⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Cliges: A Romance*, trans. L. J. Gardiner (The Project Gutenberg, 2009), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2414/2414-h/2414-h.htm>.

¹⁰ Joseph Bédier et al., *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult*, with PIMS - University of Toronto (London : William Heinemann ; Philadelphia, PA : J.B. Lippincott Company, 1910), <http://archive.org/details/romanceoftristra00bdie>.

used throughout Bédier's *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult*. To give a chronological background, Beroul is recognized as the first poet to document the story in the twelfth century, and his version had a significant influence on the following adaptations. As Beroul is the earliest poet to document the story in written format, his story continues to be, possibly, the most noteworthy version. To be more specific about the timeline, Beroul's version, who was a Norman poet, is believed to have been written between 1176 and 1202, "with most critics favoring a date after 1191."¹¹

Dating from a similar period, Thomas of Britain's version of the story was written in the twelfth century and is considered one of the "most influential works of Anglo-Norman literature. Thomas's preface dedicates his poem to Queen Eleanor of England and Aquitaine. The legend on which he based his poem was developed on the Celtic fringes of the British Isles, in Ireland and also Wales."¹² Two other German poets used in Bédier's version, Eilhart of Oberg and Gottfried of Strasburg, wrote their stories in the thirteenth century, a bit later than Thomas of Britain and Beroul. To be more specific, Bédier provides a detailed overview of the versions and poets he utilizes for each chapter of his work:

I have not encumbered my work by the innumerable footnotes which would have been necessary had I indicated in the text the many sources from which I have drawn the materials for this little book. But I owe the reader certain general indications. Chapter I of our romance is an abstract, very much compressed, of the various poems dealing with Tristram's childhood, but more especially that of Thomas in its various versions Chapters II and III follow Eilhart of Oberg (Lichtenstein ed. Strasburg, 1878) Chap. IV is based on the general body of tradition, notably Eilhart's version, while certain features are peculiar to Gottfried

¹¹ Tamara Atkin and J. R. Mattison, "A New Witness to Bérout's Tristan," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 117, no. 1 (2023), 8, <https://doi.org/10.1086/723696>.

¹² R. North et al., *Thomas of Britain's Tristan*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2012, 1st ed., 835, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003072539-81>.

of Strasburg (ed. W. Golther, Berlin and Stuttgart, 1888). Chap. V is from Eilhart. Chap. VI: in the middle of this chapter, Beroul's fragment begins with Iseult's arrival at the tryst under the pine-tree, and this I have faithfully preserved throughout Chapters VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, interpreting it here and there by Eilhart's poem and some traditional variations. Chap. XII is a very free abridgment of the fragment which follows Beroul's poem. Chap. XIII is an interpolation from a didactic poem of the thirteenth century, "Le Domnei des Amanz" Chap. XIV is from Gottfried of Strasburg. Chapters XV-XVII: the episodes of Karaido and of Tristram's disguise. are borrowed from Thomas; the rest is taken in the main from Eilhart. Chap. XVIII is an adaptation of a little episodic French poem. Chap. XIX is translated from Thomas; certain episodes are borrowed from Eilhart, and from the French prose romance, MS. 103 in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.¹³

As can be seen, each chapter of Bédier's book uses a different version of the story. Accordingly, the diversity of sources used in Bédier's work is another reason why his version is rich for analyzing the story, as he employs different variations and manuscripts.¹⁴

Lastly, this thesis examines two significant figures in the history of magic, such as Roger Bacon (1219-1292) and Burchard of Worms (950-1025), to better understand the role of magic in society. With this purpose in mind, the following pages include excerpts from Burchard of Worms' penitential, *Corrector sive Medicus*, along with analyses of Roger Bacon's views on magic. Why these two figures were specifically included in this research is connected with their prominent place in the religious and scientific research sphere. Both Bacon's and Burchard of Worms' attitudes toward magic help us understand the diverse ways the concept has been approached by individuals across various fields. More specifically, Burchard of Worms, the bishop of

¹³ Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult*, trans. Hilaire Belloc (London: William Heinemann; Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1910), ix-x, <https://archive.org/details/romanceoftristra00bdie>.

¹⁴ Ibid., 45.

Worms, was an influential religious figure, and his approach to love magic offers great insights into how society and religious authorities responded to magic. Likewise, Roger Bacon was also an incredibly valuable scientific researcher, philosopher, theologian, and thinker, and whether he and others distinguished magic from science is another critical aspect to define what magic is. Regarding the analysis on Burchard of Worms, the extracts used in this research were taken from a variety of secondary sources that provided the translations due to the limited availability of translated or original versions of his penitential.¹⁵

Overall, as can be seen, a number of sources are used in the thesis, namely, romances, manuals, and penitentials. This selection of sources was chosen purposely, since these diverse genres of texts will provide a foundation for comparing and examining the various reasons why love magic was used and offer different perspectives on love magic. Such an approach would both add to the literature and serve as a valuable approach since much of the research done until this point has touched upon what love is and why these rituals have been practiced in detail, but only a few works have deeply acknowledged the opportunity of analysing how love as an emotion was felt and experienced by individuals during the Middle Ages through the analysis of love magic usage. Therefore, using different types of sources and cases from different individuals

¹⁵ Roger Bacon, *Roger Bacon on the Nullity of Magic*, with Internet Archive (New York : AMS Press, 1982), 18, <http://archive.org/details/rogerbacononnull0000baco>; Burchard of Worms, *Corrector sive Medicus*, DB 19.5–61, quoted in Leonardo De Freitas and Anna Lyth, “Pagan, a Blurred Category? A Comparative Analysis of the Discourse on Magic in the *Corrector sive Medicus* and the *Decretum*,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 239, no. 3 (2022); Burchard of Worms, *Corrector* in PL 140:975, quoted in Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 September 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199282227.001.0001>.

would enrich the understanding of why and how magic was used, and its deep connection with different aspects of society.

One of the researchers who touched upon the importance of love and emotions for the study of magic is Professor Catherine Rider, a leading scholar in her field, who wrote *Women, Men, and Love Magic in Late Medieval English Pastoral Manuals*, indicating that:

Pastoral manuals and *exempla* describe the use of magic for a variety of purposes connected to love, sex, and reproduction. Most often they discuss the use of magic to arouse love or sexual desire between two people, or to impede it by causing hatred or sexual impotence.¹⁶

Explaining how love magic could lead to hatred or love, Rider has been one of the most important scholars to focus on the relationship between emotions and magic. Likewise, Dr. Jacqueline Borsje, in “Love Magic in Medieval Irish Penitentials, Law and Literature: A Dynamic Perspective,” defines love magic as “verbal and material instruments by means of which erotic and affectionate feelings are believed to be aroused or destroyed in a supernatural way,” once again linking how magic was used in a way that influenced emotions.¹⁷ As seen, both of these studies have touched upon how emotions have a strong relationship with magic. However, one key aspect of both these works is that they focus on a specific genre of sources, and while this focus permits them to do a deep analysis of the sources at hand, a comparative approach has not yet been explored as to why love magic was used, which incorporates different kinds of

¹⁶ Catherine Rider, “Women, Men, and Love Magic in Late Medieval English Pastoral Manuals,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7, no. 2 (December 2012): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mrw.2012.0016>.

¹⁷ Jacqueline Borsje, “Love Magic in Medieval Irish Penitentials, Law and Literature: A Dynamic Perspective,” *Studia Neophilologica* 84, no. sup1 (June 2012): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2011.646433>.

sources in the study. In light of this, specifically, this thesis aims to fill in this gap and to compare different types of sources with the aim of showcasing diverse reasons why love magic might have been utilized as seen in manuals, penitentials, and romances.



CHAPTER II: DEFINITIONS

2.1 But, what is Magic?

Understanding how magic has been defined is extremely crucial before going into what love magic is and how it has been utilized. Therefore, as a major source, the Oxford English Dictionary's description becomes valuable to understand magic's definition, as it writes "The use of ritual activities or observances which are intended to influence the course of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge; sorcery, witchcraft."¹⁸ The given description of the Oxford English dictionary is a current definition, but the ways the term has been described in previous centuries are quite similar, as, for example, the 1884 definition shows "Magic, which means the unnatural interference with nature," revealing the parallel between the way the term has been defined throughout centuries.¹⁹

While each of the terms (sorcery, witchcraft, ritual activities, occult) deserves a definition of their own and Oxford English Dictionary's entry is rather an overly broad one, what is important here is the remark about magic being the practice of using various objects, rituals, or words to control, understand, or demand something from forces not visible or known to ordinary mortal beings. This specific definition helps, while not

¹⁸ "Magic, Adj.," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed May 15, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/magic_adj.

¹⁹ Hargrave Jennings, *Phallicism: Celestial and Terrestrial, Heathen and Christian, Its Connexion with the Rosicrucians and the Gnostics and Its Foundation in Buddhism*, Part II, 8, quoted in "Magic, Adj.," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed May 15, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/magic_adj.

fully, to understand what is considered to be magic. A critical point about the definition given is that the Oxford English Dictionary, OED only draws from definitions and words in English. Connected with this, definitions and etymological background of the word *magic* in Latin, Italian, Catalan, Spanish, Arabic, and Hebrew would undoubtedly add to the understanding of how the term is used and defined. However, this research will not offer a detailed definition or an etymological background of the term, due to the ambiguity of existing descriptions of what magic is and the word's complex nature. Therefore, while it might be useful for future studies to include variations of different languages in their research, this thesis will primarily focus on the English definition of the term to provide a general understanding of how magic has been defined in popularly used sources. This insight will help establish a foundation for the rest of the study regarding how magic was perceived. To continue, magic is often associated with "involving dealings with supernatural or occult forces, to invoke such a generic definition for the later Middle Ages is to obscure an entire spectrum of ideas, principles and practices that is rich in particularities and nuances."²⁰ In this sense, it is quite crucial to consider that "magic" is only an umbrella term that brings together different forms and styles of occult practices and is in no way a definite term that could be fully defined, nor could the definition encompass each of these practices fully.

To make things clearer, Sprenger explains the term occult quite briefly by writing it is the pursuit of "the essence of things is hidden to and invisible from the outside," similarly to OED's description of "Not disclosed or divulged, secret; kept

²⁰ Simon A. Gilson, "Medieval Magical Lore and Dante's 'Commedia': Divination and Demonic Agency," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 119 (2001): 28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166612>.

secret; communicated only to the initiated,” which is, as can be seen, quite similar to how magic has been defined in sources given above.²¹ The similarities in the explanations of these terms are also among the reasons that make their distinction difficult. To emphasize this similarity between the way they are described and to look further into the origin of the term, “magic” is derived from:

Late 14c., *magike*, “art of influencing or predicting events and producing marvels using hidden natural forces,” also “supernatural art,” especially the art of controlling the actions of spiritual or superhuman beings; Old French *magique* “magic; magical,” from Late Latin *magice* “sorcery, magic,” from Greek *magike* (presumably with *tekhne* ‘art’), fem. of *magikos* “magical,” from *magos* “one of the members of the learned and priestly class” from Old Persian *magush* ... “to be able, have power.”²²

The word “Magi” could be traced as far back as the Bible, as seen in Matthew 2:1-12: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”²³ The Three Wise Men, the Magi, seen in this excerpt, are not only significant for tracing back the word’s background but also for showing the significant place that stars and astrology held in religious teachings as well. Related to this, it is still a debatable matter whether astrology could be classified as magic. While astrological knowledge is often used for magical practices, as will be seen in the following pages, strictly classifying it as magic could be

²¹ Florian Sprenger, “Insensible and Inexplicable - On the Two Meanings of Occult,” 2015, 3, <https://doi.org/10.7275/R5RV0KM3>, “Occult, Adj. & N,” Oxford English Dictionary, accessed July 29, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/occult_adj.

²² “Magic (n.),” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed December 7, 2024, https://www.etymonline.com/word/magic#etymonline_v_2180.

²³ “Bible Gateway Passage: Matthew 2:1-12 - New International Version,” Bible Gateway, accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1-12&version=NIV>.

faulty, and the topic of astrology should be approached with caution. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that astrology is closely related to magic and is sometimes referred to as magic; however, it is not always magic.

To continue, what is significant about both the modern definition and the etymological background of the term is that magic has often been associated with inexplicable matters in general, whereas occult is directly linked with using and/or controlling invisible powers and, more specifically, secret knowledge, which indicates the usage of a more complex system. Seeing the similarity between the way these two terms are described, it is not surprising that magic and those who practiced it were met with suspicion throughout the centuries. This negative response was largely due to the fact that it was difficult to differentiate between magical practices and the occult rituals associated with dark magic. Such connotations repeatedly led to fear and resulted in magical practitioners becoming targets of hatred. Various forms of esoteric practices and their practitioners elicited diverse reactions from the public, who often had little to no direct interaction with the practitioners. While an astrologer could be seen as a respectable man, a necromancer would have received a much more negative attitude from both the religious authorities and the public in most cases.

One reason for this difference between the way practitioners were perceived would be the distinction made between dark and natural magic, which also aligns with the categorization observed in Ginzburg's study mentioned previously. As can be understood from their names, dark magic essentially drew its power from dark powers,

possibly the devil and malevolent forces.²⁴ However, in contrast, natural magic included the activities of healing and curing and thus was ‘useful’ rather than destructive and dangerous. Of course, these distinctions between the categories of magic were not always crystal clear, since “the same people who might proclaim their special knowledge or power to work beneficial spells were sometimes suspected by their neighbors of possessing more malevolent power as well.”²⁵ As mentioned above, the distinction between magical, useful, and benevolent magical activities was so vague that if a person showed the ability to perform useful magic, they could also be suspected of using malevolent powers.

To further describe this distinction between useful and benevolent magic, “useful magicians,” Tabitha Stanmore states, were “relatively homely magicians who offered simple spells to their neighbours, or travelled the country offering quackery dressed up as something more impressive.”²⁶ The term for “useful” magicians has likely evolved over time and was more prevalent during the early modern period rather than the Middle Ages. However, in all ages, natural magic was typically easier for the general public to access compared to learned magic, making the distinction made by Stanmore quite vital. Related to Stanmore’s description, these practitioners of learned magic possessed advanced knowledge of complex practices and had, in most cases, formally studied magic and related topics. In contrast, the use of natural magic was typically confined to addressing specific problems from daily life and aiding those in need with

²⁴ Anne Lawrence-Mathers Escobar-Vargas Carolina, *Magic and Medieval Society* (London: Routledge, 2014): 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315777474>.

²⁵ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 82.

²⁶ Tabitha Stanmore, “Magic as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *History* 106, no. 370 (March 2021): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13106>.

natural remedies. In this sense, dark magicians, “ritual magicians” in Stanmore’s words, were “learned practitioners, almost exclusively male, who used complex rituals to summon and control spiritual entities, either demonic or angelic.”²⁷ As a note, Stanmore’s description would exclude most of the so-called witches, who were suspected to be women in most cases and did not necessarily need a formal education to practice witchcraft. Dark magic or ritual magic had subcategories within itself as well, namely, theurgic texts which “tend to be oriented to the pursuit of knowledge”, necromancy “that works by conjuring and binding demons” and image magic that relies on “astrology and stellar correspondences in the creation of talismans or images, which trap and focus the power of heavenly bodies.”²⁸ Each of these definitions deserves its own research, as they have unique practitioners and motives for their practice. However, what these categorizations show is that the field of magic is incredibly complex and has many layers to it, and categorizations of these practices must be made with extreme caution.

2.2 What is Love?

As mentioned, this thesis will be focusing on love magic, and thus, being able to understand what love is or was, and how it has been described, is a crucial part of the research. While it may seem quite simple to describe what love is at first sight, it proves

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Claire Fanger, “Christian Ritual Magic in the Middle Ages,” *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (August 2013): 610, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12068>.

to be a much more complicated task than it first appears to be. Connected with this, the authors Damien Boquet, Didier Lett, and Siân Reynolds excellently remind us that, while many historians and researchers today have started to speak about emotions and acknowledge that emotions are mostly socially constructed, they still have a tendency to:

See them as based in some kind of universality, forgetting the tautology represented by this presupposition, which remains the basis of contemporary views of emotion. The answer is not to give up on the attempt, but on the contrary to make strenuous efforts to denaturalize emotions while never losing sight of the overall unity of the subject.²⁹

Taking this into account, it will be tremendously important to keep in mind that emotions are rarely universal and have been defined and experienced quite differently throughout time and different cultures. This makes the attempt to identify the emotions behind the motives of using magic quite a daunting endeavor. This complexity highlights the fact that while a general framework could be developed to understand the popular tendencies of why magic has been employed in relation to love, it is almost impossible to explain each individual's unique emotional experience and the motive behind using magical rituals.

Among different topics, the changeability of how emotions are experienced, described, and approached is also a major focus of studies on the History of Emotions. Going back to Lucien Febvre (1875–1956), History of Emotions is a fairly new field of study that focuses on emotions, the changes they went through, the complexity of the term itself, and how emotions influenced or even shaped communities, historical events,

²⁹ Damien Boquet, Didier Lett, and Siân Reynolds, "Editorial: Emotions and the Concept of Gender," *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 47 (2018): 19-20.

and belief systems of different periods. More specifically, it deals with questions such as “What is emotion? Who has emotion? Do emotions have a history? Assuming that they do have a history, how does the discipline of history deal with this history?”³⁰ Such questions have been gaining increasing attention in recent years due to the vital place of emotions in human history. In other words:

Emotions have a ‘history’ in the sense that we find their place in the record of life inextricably entangled with factors of historical difference, across time, place, and culture. To say that they have a cultural history is basically to say that they are generated, experienced, expressed, shared, understood, and later observed and interpreted within cultural contexts, amongst many others. Emotions both help to make up these cultural contexts and are made within them in an endless, always fluid, interactive process.³¹

Understanding the focus of the History of Emotions and the multifaceted role of emotions is crucial for this study. It suggests that emotions are likely to be central to magic and related rituals, just as they are in every other aspect of human social life.

Before going any further, it would be useful to note that the term “emotion” was not always used to define concepts such as “love”; instead, the term “passions” was widely used up until the 1800s. This change in vocabulary is also a topic of research and discussion, as it shows how our understanding of these feelings has evolved as:

A wholesale change in established vocabulary occurred such that those engaged in theoretical discussions about phenomena including hope, fear, love, hate, joy, sorrow, anger and the like no longer primarily discussed the passions or affections of the soul, nor the sentiments, but almost invariably referred to ‘the emotions’. This transition is as striking as if established conceptual terms such as ‘reason’ or ‘memory’ or

³⁰ Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions : An Introduction*, First edition, Emotions in History (OUP Oxford, 2015), eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), 30.

³¹ Susan Broomhall and Andrew Lynch, *A Cultural History of the Emotions in the Late Medieval, Reformation, and Renaissance Age*, vol. 00003, *A Cultural History of the Emotions* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), 1.

‘imagination’ or ‘will’ had been quite suddenly replaced by a wholly new category.³²

As can be seen, the way emotions are described and perceived has changed over time, even in linguistic terms. The changeability and flexibility of these terms are also crucial factors to keep in mind when thinking about *emotions*. In relation to this, while this thesis will be using the term “emotions” for descriptive purposes, it should be noted that the term itself has undergone a major change in the past decade. Therefore, what is understood by the term “emotion” might differ from what “passions” did. However, since this difference is a topic on its own, this research will not go into detail regarding their usage.

To now focus on love itself, it is no secret that it is one of humankind’s most central and prominent emotions that affects individuals’ daily lives. Accordingly, looking into the link between love and magical rituals would not only give the researcher a chance to investigate the link between them but also to understand how people have been dealing with and reacting to this essential emotion throughout the years. On this, Berscheid, a prominent scholar in the field of psychology and the study of love as an emotion, also states, “As evidenced by ancient human artifacts, it is clear that love, in one form or another, has always been on people’s minds,” once again highlighting the central place of it for both historical studies and understanding human behavior.³³

Starting with a modern perspective from psychological studies, David M. Buss states that “From an evolutionary perspective, love is an adaptation, or more accurately

³² Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions : The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) (120374), 4.

³³ Ellen Berscheid, “Love in the Fourth Dimension,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 61, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100318>.

a complex suite of adaptations, designed to solve specific problems of survival and reproduction.”³⁴ To put it differently, explaining love by biological explanations, Buss considers love to be a mechanism that helps human beings reproduce, keep the society intact, and connect with one another, sometimes with the unconscious purpose of reproduction. Of course, while reproduction often triggers hormones that may create feelings of love, it is important to note that not every experience of love is related to reproduction.

To continue, in contrast with Buss’s ideas, there were also cases of love being depicted as the ultimate goal, the one thing that is worth risking one’s life for, when it came to courtly and platonic love. The difference between love as a biological process and as a valuable emotion worth taking risks for highlights the varying approaches people might have towards the emotion. To exemplify, it is seen that during the twelfth century, the troubadours’ description of love was as something “sacred” and “self-sacrificing.”³⁵ The troubadour, being a “poet by profession”, was a person whose “whole life history ... is one long chain of romance,” though it is important to note that the term romance would not have been used with the same connotations back then.³⁶ Romance can also refer to “A medieval narrative (originally in verse, later also in prose) relating the legendary or extraordinary adventures of some hero of chivalry” or the “vernacular language of medieval France, as opposed to Latin.”³⁷ Before going further,

³⁴ David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Love in Humans*, 42, <https://labs.la.utexas.edu/buss/files/2021/08/LoveinHumans.pdf>.

³⁵ Ibid., 254; Melvin L. Wilkinson, “Romantic Love and Sexual Expression,” *The Family Coordinator* 27, no. 2 (April 1978): 141, <https://doi.org/10.2307/581829>; Marguerite La Caze, “Love, That Indispensable Supplement: Irigaray and Kant on Love and Respect,” 2024.

³⁶ C. J. Tabor, “The Troubadours,” *Folklore* 40, no. 4 (1929): 346, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1256242>.

³⁷ “Romance, N. & Adj.,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed July 29, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/romance_n.

it is also important to note that *romance* did not necessarily mean the relationship or love between two people during the Middle Ages. However, in William M. Reddy's words, "Twelfth-century "courtly love" can thus be identified as an early version of the typical Western configuration of "romantic love," which today is still seen, in certain Western and Western influenced areas (and nowhere else), as standing in sharp contrast to sexual desire and yet mastering and purifying desire."³⁸ Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the various connotations of romantic love as understood in the modern sense, with courtly love, while also being aware that courtly love may not have always referred specifically to romantic love.

To go back to troubadours, what made these poets special in most instances was their "sensuous but not erotic" poetry, which glorified love but often refrained from linking it with sexual feelings and thoughts, detaching the feeling completely from the biological system of humans.³⁹ It is worth noting that although many troubadours steered clear of sexual themes in their poetry, some, like Guilhen de Peiteu, did not. Therefore, it would be misleading to assume that all troubadours wrote their works in the same manner. To illustrate, Guilhen de Peiteu writes, "I shall die, by the head of St. Gregory,/unless she kisses me in her room or under a tree/What good will it be to you, beautiful dame,/if your love parts me from you?/You seem to intend to become a nun!"⁴⁰ In this poem, Guilhen de Peiteu, recognized as the first known troubadour, proves that

³⁸ William M. Reddy, *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia, and Japan, 900-1200 CE*, University of Chicago Press, August 30, 2012, University Press Scholarship Online (edsups.9780226706283.001.0001), 45.

³⁹ ³⁹ Tabor, "The Troubadours," 346.

⁴⁰ Guilhen de Peiteu, "Farai Chansoneta Nueva (I Shall Write a New Little Song)," *Baroque Forms of Poetry*, accessed July 2, 2025, http://trobar.org/troubadours/coms_de_peiteu/guilhen_de_peiteu_08.php.

troubadour poetry can also contain sexual themes. However, it is still widely acknowledged that troubadour poetry often addressed themes of pure love. For this reason, this thesis will proceed with that assumption as troubadours prove to be an excellent contrast to the belief that love could only be the outcome of biological needs.

To even go further back in history to emphasise the change love went through and its changeability, Plato would be a highly valuable source due to his utilisation of various approaches to love in his work, the *Symposium*. Through his descriptions of different kinds of love, Plato provides a strong foundation for further discussions on the various kinds of love that exist. To start with his first representation, Phaedrus, one of Plato's characters, takes Love, with a capital L in his case, to be a God, the oldest of Gods to be exact, and suggests it has the power to shape humans' actions by leading them to virtuous deeds.⁴¹ According to him, humans achieve such happiness by seeking the possession of what is *good*. While a relatively simple explanation, it prepares the ground for more complex discussions in the remainder of the book. What is key regarding Phaedrus's explanation is that his ideas are fairly similar to those of the troubadours. This similarity may be intentional, as troubadours could have been influenced by Plato's ideas, which have impacted nearly every thinker, writer, and philosopher since. Considering this, it is possible to see that both troubadours and Phaedrus believe that love, as an emotion, has the power to change people's actions and encourage behaviors that are primarily positive.

Taking the conversation further, Pausanias then argues that there is no single "Love" and links the emotion to Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love. According

⁴¹ Plato, *Symposium* (e-Kitap Projesi & Cheapest Books, 2019), 65.

to Pausanias, there are two different forms of love: the one connected with “Heavenly Aphrodite”, pure love, and the one connected with Common Aphrodite, physical love.⁴² In this sense, Pausanias creates a common ground for the contrasting ideas of self-sacrificing love, “pure” love, and physical love. This intersection of physical love and self-sacrificing love is also mentioned by Keats in his poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn* as he writes, “Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,/Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;/She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,/For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!”⁴³ In these few lines, Keats talks about two lovers who are yet to come together, constantly being drawn to each other without ever getting to unite. The time has stopped, and they are stuck in a state of wanting to get together but being unable to. With the last lines of poems being: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know,” *Ode on a Grecian Urn* proves to be a Platonist poem, which considers the truth and beauty as aspects of the *good*.⁴⁴ Thus, Keats’ poem shows a new aspect of the emotion love by merging Platonist ideas with both “pure” love and physical love, as discussed by Pausanias as well.

To go back to the *Symposium*, Eryximachus, then, argues love is a force, an element that is essential for the balance of the body, and good love helps regulate the system, whereas bad love disrupts its balance. While modern medicine has greatly developed the theories on the effect of emotions on the body since Plato wrote the *Symposium*, it is indeed valuable to see that love, or any other emotion’s influence on

⁴² Ibid., 67-68

⁴³ John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” Poetry Foundation, accessed May 25, 2025, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the body and health, has been discussed and elaborated extensively in his work. The idea that the emotional state of a person was tied to their physical well-being also goes much further than Plato, and can be seen in beliefs related to Asclepius, the Greek god of health and medicine. Inscriptions attributed to a cult of Asclepius, established in the sixth century, show that “diverse contents of the inscriptions anticipated and referred to the potential reactions, emotional states and expectations of people who read or heard about [the narratives regarding people who were healed by the god].”⁴⁵ As can be seen, the cult of Asclepius demonstrates the long-recognized connection between well-being, mental state, and health. Thus, it is possible to see that emotions were not merely abstract concepts disconnected from the body, but forces that could easily affect physical health, according to Plato and his predecessors.

Going back to Eryximachus’ distinction of good and bad love, although there might be exceptions, good love might have been associated with *good (natural) magic*, and bad love could have been associated with *bad (dark) magic*. However, what if good love was used for bad magic and bad love for good magic? Is it possible to use magic with the intention of causing harm while maintaining good intentions? Can someone use love magic with good intentions, but still unintentionally harm another person? Would it be correct to label the emotion as good or bad, and would it help understand the motives behind the rituals?

Of course, the answer to these questions could be addressed only on a case-by-case basis, as both what makes love “good” and how the magical ritual would be labelled

⁴⁵ Asclepius’ Myths and Healing Narratives: Counter-Intuitive Concepts and Cultural Expectations,” *Open Library of Humanities* 2, no. 1 (March 11, 2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.34>.

depend on many factors. However, what these questions should show is that, in contrast with Eryximachus' claim, the categorization of both emotions and magical rituals as "good" or "bad" would be an oversimplification, and such an attempt should be avoided. To continue, similar to Eryximachus, Aristophanes then argues in the *Symposium* that humankind does not understand the power of love, and it is the greatest friend of people, facilitating and guiding them to seek the feeling of completeness, wholeness, and happiness.⁴⁶ Aristophanes' remarks are a bit more detailed and comprehensive compared to the previous descriptions in the sense that, unlike the term "good," both wholeness and completeness are clearer states of being. However, what links Aristophanes' remarks with Eryximachus is that both argue that the emotion of love could lead people to an end goal that could be regarded as positive, such as the balance of the body or feeling a sense of completeness.

Lastly, through a series of questions, Plato's Diotima suggests that love is a bridge, a spiritual force between humans and the Gods, and it helps mortals achieve happiness and wisdom.⁴⁷ Needless to say, Diotima's suggestion could be directly linked with Lewis's divine love, showing a parallel between the way a philosopher who lived between 428/423 BC and 348 BC and a writer who lived in the twentieth century perceived love, indicating a kind of synchronization to an extent. As mentioned before, being able to trace back Plato's ideas in the writings of later thinkers and writers is not a coincidence, as Platonist ideas have greatly influenced the history of Christian thought. However, this transmission of ideas is not simple to track, given that Christian thinkers

⁴⁶ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

could and often did read and were influenced by Plato's writings from any age and location. While going into detail about how Plato has influenced later writers is out of the scope of this research, it is essential to consider his vast influence when studying the way emotions have been described throughout the centuries.

As could be seen through Plato's insights and various perspectives on what love is, it is not easily defined nor is it a singular emotion, and *love's* meaning has been discussed throughout the centuries. Therefore, while it might be quite a puzzling task to pinpoint what love exactly is, it is clear that important thinkers and writers realized the complexity of the emotion and attempted to classify it, highlighting the multifaceted nature of both love and other emotions. This complexity must be kept in mind as the examples and descriptions of magic are discussed in the following pages, since the question of what love is also adds to the complexity of the relationship between love and magic.

CHAPTER III: REACTIONS TOWARD MAGIC

3.1 Magic: Burchard of Worms; Roger Bacon and Witchcraft

As is popularly known, magic and its practitioners have received different kinds of reactions throughout the centuries. While there were people and, sometimes, the Church itself that condemned magic, many monarchs, their close circle, and the general populace continued to use magical remedies. While there are various reasons why magic was criticized throughout the years, negative attitudes towards magic especially stemmed from the belief that “witchcraft, magic and sorcery are all concerned with the producing of effects beyond the normal powers of man, by agencies other than divine.”⁴⁸ In other words, the authorities of the Church tended to believe that the use of magic made the practice of it a deviation from the true religion and path of the devout. The division between magic that could be practised without rejecting religion and that which defied religion remained extremely vague, and this distinction was continuously argued over the centuries. To make things even more complicated, being educated and ecclesiastically knowledgeable people, some clerics of late medieval England were also known for their involvement with and expertise in magic, and “religious men (professed monks and friars) fell under even greater suspicion for involvement in occult practices

⁴⁸ Antoinette Marie Pratt, *The Attitude of the Catholic Church Towards Witchcraft and the Allied Practices of Sorcery and Magic* (Washington, D.C.: [National Capital Press, Inc.], 1915), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/AWCPXL648036033/NCCO?u=bilk&sid=gale_marc&xid=0f2be487&p_g=10, 9.

on account of their greater learning.”⁴⁹ Needless to say, the division between religion and magic was so vague that it was almost natural for the public to be cautious towards religious practitioners as well, in case they used their knowledge to practice harmful magic.

The religious figures’ involvement in magic is specifically attention-grabbing as it is noted that “Priests used magic in search for buried treasure, in attempts to cure sickness and death, and in attempts to foretell the future.”⁵⁰ The reasons mentioned here, such as the attempt to cure death, could easily be classified as dark magic, which involves going against natural laws and religious principles, requiring advanced knowledge to manipulate the natural world. Therefore, the idea that a religious figure could practice magic for such causes greatly blurs the line between legitimate religious activities with illegitimate magical practices and could lead the public to question the reliability of the religious authorities as well. Due to this, countless religious figures and researchers have attempted to draw the line between magic and religion throughout the centuries to clarify the distinction, all unsuccessfully. As a remarkable example, while a period slightly later than this research’s focus, with the dissolution of monasteries in the sixteenth century, religious houses that were “major depositories for texts of magic,” as well as major depositories of everything, fell to pieces, and the religious authorities were no longer the official specialists of the supernatural by this time.⁵¹ Thus, the *unofficial* practitioners, in other words, laypersons, became “a class of professional

⁴⁹ Francis Young, “The Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Democratisation of Magic in Post-Reformation England,” *Religions* 10, no. 4 (March 31, 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10040241>.

⁵⁰ Jonathan K. van Patten, “Magic, Prophecy, and the Law of Treason in Reformation England,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 27, no. 1 (1983): 26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/844911>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

service magicians” that started to gain popularity and legitimacy within the society during the later sixteenth century.⁵² What is quite important about Patten’s remark here, to highlight once more, is that in the case of the monasteries, after they were dissolved, new magical practitioners began to emerge. This indicates that the authorities within the monasteries were indeed involved in magic and were responding to the needs of society. Once the monasteries could no longer fulfill this demand, new practitioners took their place.

To take the conversation a step further, some scholars then came up with an in-between category named “magico-religious practices”.⁵³ Albert Classen expands this concept in his 2017 work *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology*. In his book, which looks into the occult from a variety of fields, and states that “Magic has nothing to do with religion in the narrow sense of the word and instead aims for a recreation of the individual with his/her own self within a holistic universe,” which is a remarkable statement that would possibly help shape new theories about the role of magic and its relation to self-expression.⁵⁴ The perspective of Classen is a contribution to the literature that opens the floor to associations being made between the self and magical practices, indicating that magic could be used as a tool of self-

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Michael Winkelman, “Magic: A Theoretical Reassessment †,” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 32, no. 2 (September 2021): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anoc.12142>.

⁵⁴ Albrecht Classen, *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time : The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology*, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 10-11, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1624167&site=eds-live>.

expression used to externalise needs, wants, and desires, once again making emotions the centre of the conversation.

As previously mentioned, priests and other religious authorities occasionally used magic to their advantage. However, the attitude toward magic, especially from the religious authorities, was not always positive. Some notable religious figures consistently criticized magic throughout the Middle Ages. As an interesting example, “in the early eleventh century, Burchard prescribes penance for practicing love magic.”⁵⁵ As the bishop of Worms, his influence and power on religious matters were quite prominent, and his penitential *Corrector sive Medicus*, discussed in this research, is an extremely valuable source to get an insight into his beliefs and ideas. This penitential was used “as a reference work for the bishop or the clerical community attached to the cathedral in Worms,” and was directly intended for religious authorities to use the work as a guide.⁵⁶ To focus specifically on his inclusion of magic in his work magic, Burchard of Worms instructs:

Have you consulted sorcerers, and brought them into your house to seek evil arts, or for the purpose of making purifications, or, following the custom of the pagans, did you invite diviners to ask about the future almost like prophets? Or have you invited those who practice spells, or those who through enchantments try to see into the future, or those who devote themselves to either auguries or enchantments? If you have done so, you shall do penance for two years on the appointed days.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Laine E. Doggett, *Love Cures: Healing and Love Magic in Old French Romance* (Penn State University Press, 2009), 20.

⁵⁶ Ludger Körntgen, “Canon Law and the Practice of Penance: Burchard of Worms’s Penitential,” *Early Medieval Europe* 14, no. 1 (2006): 103–17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0254.2006.00176.x>, 104.

⁵⁷ Burchard of Worms, *Corrector sive Medicus*, DB 19.5–61, quoted in Leonardo De Freitas and Anna Lyth, “Pagan, a Blurred Category? A Comparative Analysis of the Discourse on Magic in the *Corrector sive Medicus* and the *Decretum*,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 239, no. 3 (2022): 54.

What is particularly interesting here about Burchard of Worms is his specific interest and condemnation of love-magic. As the bishop of the City of Worms, his punishments were quite notable and influential. Therefore, the fact that rather than addressing magic in general, he focuses on love magic offers significant insights into how prominent figures of the time acknowledged this kind of magic. His penance on the usage of love magic also demonstrates that it was so popular among the society and was taken seriously to the degree that it required an official penance. To give another example from Burchard of Worms:

Among the questions that a priest should ask women in confession, Burchard included the following: Have you done what some adulterous women are accustomed to do? When first they learn that their lovers want to take legitimate wives, they extinguish the men's desire by some magic art, so that they cannot be of use to their legitimate wives, or have intercourse with them. If you have done this or taught others, you should do penance for forty days on bread and water.⁵⁸

What is important to remember in this example from Burchard of Worms is that he is not only talking about magic but also adultery, which itself is an extremely serious sin according to Christianity as well. Specifically, adultery was such a significant issue that lifelong penance could be imposed, such as the example in the *Penitential of Theodore* (ca. 668-900), Archbishop of Canterbury, as he wrote, “If he commits adultery with her and it comes to the knowledge of the people, he shall be cast out of the Church and shall do penance among the laymen as long as he lives.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Columban (ca. 600), an

⁵⁸ Burchard of Worms, *Corrector* in PL 140:975, quoted in Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 September 2007, 44, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199282227.001.0001>.

⁵⁹ John McNeill and Helena Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal “Libri Poenitentiales” and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 193.

Irish missionary, ordered, “If any laymen begets a child of another’s wife, that is, commits adultery, violating his neighbor’s bed, he shall do penance for three years, abstaining from juicy food and his own wife.”⁶⁰ What these extracts show is that adultery was not a matter that was taken lightly and required serious punishments. Considering this, Burchard of Worms’ penance for using love magic to force someone into adultery seems to be much lighter compared with Columban and Theodore, as he only orders penance with bread and water for 40 days. Therefore, the fact that adultery and magic combined do not necessarily lead to a longer or harsher punishment indicates that the use of magic was not a major influence on how Burchard of Worms designed a punishment. Possibly, his main focus might have been on the occurrence of adultery rather than the use of magic while including the given rule in his penitential. Still, the inclusion of love magic in the work further signifies its popularity. In this sense, Burchard’s specific punishments demonstrate the possibility of using love magic in the cases of adultery, and that it was taken seriously enough by religious authorities to be subject to punishment.

To continue, it is also extremely attention-grabbing to see Burchard’s input on women who used love magic to be with married men. In order for Burchard to include this case in his penitentials, he or others should have encountered similar examples at least a few times. Otherwise, including such a specific penance for such a specific sin would be quite unreasonable. It is unfortunate that Burchard does not include any information as to some other reasons why these women might have used love-magic, which would have been an excellent window into the motives of practitioners of it. Still,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 254.

Burchard's remarks on how women used magic to stop men from having intercourse with their wives indicate that there was a great deal of jealousy and possessiveness in the said process. By stopping the men from desiring their wives, the kind of magic Burchard talks about also reveals that sexuality was a major part of these relationships, though there might be other motives too. Of course, while the importance of sexuality is natural and could be easily anticipated with regard to human nature, seeing it through Burchard's words highlights that the love these individuals experienced was not as "pure", if one may say, as the troubadours portrayed it to be.

Going forward, another figure quite important for the study and history of magic is Roger Bacon. Above all, while Roger Bacon's contributions to science are enormous, his research and role as a researcher could be defined in three main categories: "the philosopher, the scientist, and the theological-political agent of renewal."⁶¹ More importantly, Bacon was a researcher who had received recognition for his scientific experiments and was "the first methodologist of science, or, as one may say, philosopher of science."⁶² In this sense, he was a highly impactful figure for scientific research and had a significant influence on the way scientific experiments were done. His intended audience was more general compared to Burchard of Worms, as his works were of interest to both religious and intellectual circles. However, while he was a noteworthy figure in scientific studies, his works and reputation were also associated with magical practices, which led to considerable criticism throughout the years.

⁶¹ Nicola Polloni and Yael Kedar, eds., *The Philosophy and Science of Roger Bacon: Studies in Honour of Jeremiah Hackett*, 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021.: Routledge, 2021), 1, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003033943>.

⁶² Herbert Hochberg, "The Empirical Philosophy of Roger and Francis Bacon," *Philosophy of Science* 20, no. 4 (October 1953): 313–26, <https://doi.org/10.1086/287284>.

Even though Bacon did not define himself as a practitioner of magic, many still questioned his motives, experiments, and involvements. Linked with this, remarkably, Thorndike, a prominent scholar of the history of magic, refers to Bacon as “the first rebel against medieval scholasticism and the first prophet of modern science,” further signifying his major influence.⁶³ However, what is important for this research is not just the attitude others had towards him; his thoughts on magic also signify how the separation between magic and science was defined. Interestingly, he tries to create a distinction between licit actions of science and illicit actions of magic, complaining that “the Canon Law confuses mathematics and magic, and that philosophers are sometimes falsely accused of magic.”⁶⁴ To put it more clearly:

In his attempt to divide philosophy from magic, or, as he more frequently says, true mathematics from false mathematics, Bacon's main criterion seems to be whether one is morally or theologically justified in holding certain beliefs or indulging in certain practices. If a practice is licit, it is not magic; if it is illicit and has to do with the misuse of knowledge, it is magic.⁶⁵

Likewise, Bacon believed many of the manuals of magic contained false information, signaling that he believed it was a mistake to put faith in these books or practices.⁶⁶ It can be seen that he did not dismiss magic as irrelevant altogether, but was very cautious about distinguishing scientific activities from magical beliefs. In this respect, it is clear that Bacon believed some magical beliefs that were, at their core, questionable and had a lower rank of legitimacy compared to scientific research, all the while he was accused

⁶³ Lynn Thorndike, “Roger Bacon and Experimental Method in the Middle Ages,” *The Philosophical Review* 23, no. 3 (May 1914): 271, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2178622>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ A. G. Molland, “Roger Bacon as Magician,” *Traditio* 30 (1974): 459.

⁶⁶ Bacon, *On the Nullity of Magic*, 18.

of being a magician. Even though he tried to distance himself from magical activities, he was not able to control how others perceived his experiments, and continued to conduct experiments that were prone to be associated with magical rituals.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the difference between what others described as magic and what Bacon viewed as science is not wholly clear, but it is quite easy to see that what was regarded as magic differed according to the person. What was magic to others was science for Bacon.

The discussions about Bacon and whether he was involved in magical practices continued for many years after his death. As an example, John Dee wrote a book, which is now lost, “to demonstrate that Bacon’s deeds did not depend upon the action of demons.”⁶⁸ More specifically, by the seventeenth century, “Gabriel Naude included him, [Bacon] among the great men to be defended against charges of magic,” and in light of these attempts, it is possible to suggest that Bacon was “being transformed from a magician into a hero of experimental science. Out of this grew the popular picture of him as a lone figure struggling desperately to illuminate a darkened age.”⁶⁹ According to this view of John Dee, it is interesting to see that science and magic were seen as polar opposites, and a legitimate scientist could not also be a magician; therefore, Bacon must have been either one or the other.

⁶⁷ George Molland, “Roger Bacon and the Hermetic Tradition in Medieval Science,” *Vivarium* 31, no. 1 (1993): 140, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853493x00123>.

⁶⁸ C. H. Josten, trans., *Monas Hieroglyphica* by John Dee (Antwerp, 1564), with an introduction and annotations, *Ambix* 12 (1964): 122–24, quoted in A. G. Molland, “Roger Bacon as Magician,” *Traditio* 30 (1974): 448, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0362152900006619>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

All in all, as can be seen from the examples, magic and magical rituals received a variety of responses from the common folk, religious authorities, scientists, and nobles. Magic was a part of everyday life throughout the Middle Ages, whereas it was also penalized by some authorities. People used it, meanwhile fearing it. With this in mind, it is possible to see that magic was accepted as a reality of everyday life, but it was still deeply dreaded, and many people made attempts to control it.

Before going any further, it is worth noting that the usage of magic has rarely been simply about the execution of certain rituals and repetitive actions, or the usage of bizarre sentences and methods, but was also largely related to how people reacted to these concepts and how they had implemented them in their everyday lives. This prominent place of emotions, both for magical studies and to understand history, is specifically crucial to mention since:

Both distant and not-so-distant past were dictated by emotional dispositions and moods of those involved in them. If fear, hatred, desire, disgust, pity, envy, love, and shame affect our individual choices, they might as well influence the decisions whose consequences go beyond one's singular or communal experience.⁷⁰

To build on this, as explained, magic and magical rituals are rarely only about the individual, but have a community involved in them. It does not necessarily require a large group to execute the ritual, but even when only a single individual is practicing magic, he is faced with others fascinated by what he does, scared by the ritual itself, individuals affected by the ritual, or those against his practices with reactions that might stem from fear and hatred. In this sense, emotions that magical rituals evoke in people

⁷⁰ Rafał Boryśławski and Alicja Bemben, *Emotions as Engines of History* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 1, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003019015>.

tend to affect many people at once, making the practice and reactions towards it a communal experience in many instances. Even more importantly, even the rumor of magic being used could have triggered a collective reaction against it. It was not necessary for individuals to directly observe the incident for this response to occur; only the belief that magic was being practiced could also serve as a reason for such a reaction.

As an example, the fear against witches and their practices was the most famous instance of the communal experience that occult practices could invoke in people. The panic felt by the communities was so grave that people's collective negative feelings towards the unknown practices of so-called witches led to many executions and widespread terror. People feared that their babies could be taken by the witches and get killed, they feared the female power, sexuality, and curse; they dreaded infertility caused by witchcraft, and:

Although everyone feared witches, they did not all fear them in the same way. In particular, the elite had a more intellectual and theoretical fear, while the common people's fear was more immediate and practical. The first field to be discussed, then, is the demonic witch of the elite – the witch who was in league with the Devil. Then comes the village witch of the common people – the witch who harmed her or his neighbours. Witchcraft was also a matter of story and legend, so we need a third field: the folkloric witch. Finally, witchcraft was sometimes a matter of intense personal experience, with people entering trances and seeing visions. They either encountered witches in nightmare visions, or entered trances and went on spirit-voyages that could make others think that they themselves were witches. The fourth field, therefore, is the witch experienced through trance, dream and nightmare: the envisioned witch.⁷¹

As seen in Figure 1 as well, the public went as far as to hang, burn, and harm the so-called witches and published images and stories of these executions in reply to the hatred

⁷¹ J. Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2016), 9-10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315560458>.

and fear felt by the public. The underlying reason for the extreme reactions given to the idea that witches existed was generally the fear felt against the witches' complex nature and the possibility of being harmed by them, though the reasons may vary from person to person. In this sense, again, the emotions the notion of witchcraft evoked in people became a collective experience in many communities.

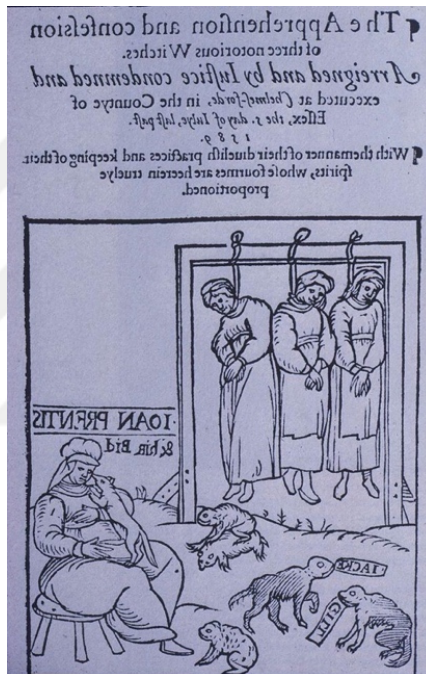


Figure 1 Execution of the Chelmsford Witches, 1589.⁷²

This argument is supported by an official government document, likely a report of complaint written on 27 February 1671, which is now presented by the National Archives (UK), as illustrated in Figure 2. The complaint goes as “she hath been the cause of the/Queen’s barrenness & several other things/& that she caused the bull to kill

⁷² *Execution of Chelmsford Witches in Essex, 1589*, Visual Arts Legacy Collection, Artstor, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.13885482>.

Colonel/Robinson a parliament man.”⁷³ Again, showcasing that witches and their mystical activities were easily associated with harming people and causing injury or even death in some cases, naturally invoking a fear in the public who wished to protect themselves.

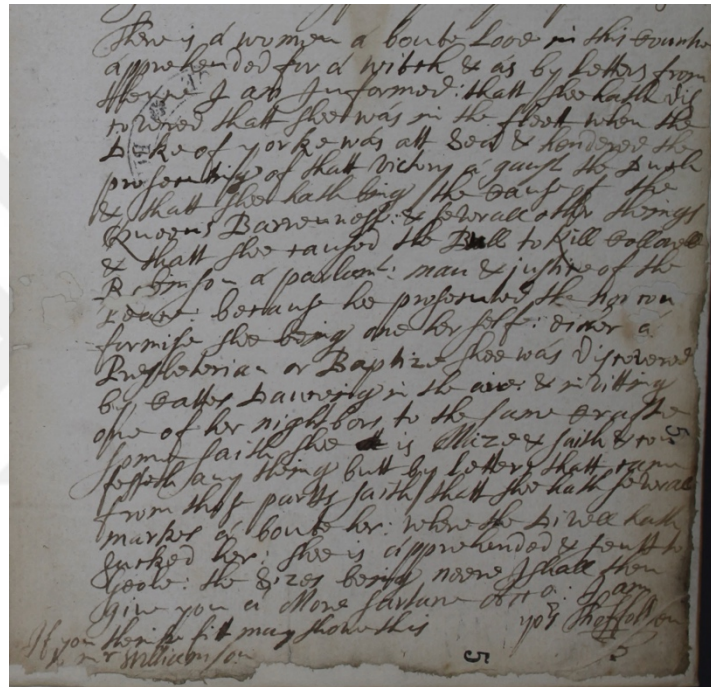


Figure 2 Excerpt from “Fear of Witches,” The National Archives (UK).⁷⁴

Further, the excerpt shows that the Queen’s infertility is blamed on a supposed “witch,” and of course, in many instances, a queen’s infertility means great problems for the royal lineage and the well-being of the whole community, directly harming the population as a whole. Similarly, the document also includes a claim about the death of Colonel Robinson and attributes it to the wrongdoings of the witch, indicating that the

⁷³ The National Archives, “Fear of Witches,” *The Archives: Education Resources – Early Modern Witch Trials*, accessed June 10, 2025, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/early-modern-witch-trials/fear-of-witches/>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

writer of this letter tended to hold the said witch accountable when significant, harmful incidents happened. Therefore, the official complaints and letters received by the authorities about the harm caused by witches clearly illustrate how magic, witchcraft, and occult practices influenced communal emotions and experiences. Of course, the witch hunts that occurred between the 14th and 17th centuries, a popular subject of research, resulted from a complex interplay of factors, including economics, religion, and gender roles, and this study will not go into detail as to why these reactions were given to the supposed witches. However, what the case of witches, as well as the previous examples, shows is that magic and occult rituals, as well as witchcraft, resulted in extreme reactions, mostly negative, throughout the centuries, and have been a topic associated with fear and danger, which resulted in a collective response from the public.

3.2 Magical Rituals in History: medieval Courts and Academia

Medieval royal courts also served as settings for significant conversations and important decisions about magical rituals, making the study of magic usage in courts all the more significant. As an example, it is known that the astrologer of the court of Juan I of Aragon had an extremely significant role in the decision-making process and that he did not fix a date for the marriage between him and Violante de Bar until the astrologer Damlau SesPlanes, “whose sophisticated astronomical tables and almanac further attest to the high levels of astrology and astronomy in the court of King Pere,”

was consulted regarding the wedding.⁷⁵ SesPlanes was so prominent and successful in his field that “in 1376 King Pere excused him from requisite military service for three years in exchange for his work on the stars.”⁷⁶ The fact that SesPlanes was able to get out of military work due to his esoteric skills and knowledge in astrology shows that, above all, astrology was an indispensable part of King Pere’s and then Juan I of Aragon’s royal courts and decision-making, as also mentioned above.

This alone signals the gravity of the trust put in, especially astronomy, and in the position astrological work had in the hierarchy of duties, being above military work in some instances. To put it differently, understanding the stars and the significance of their alignment to come to conclusions about the coming events was as important as physically protecting the country, at least according to King Pere, once again showing the deep and significant place magical practices held in courtly matters. Likewise, trusting the astrologer and astrology to the point of arranging his life accordingly is a prime example of how magic has been at the centre of some people’s lives, important decision-making processes, and belief systems. Building on this, to look into a later example, another interesting case of prominent figures utilising occult practices would be Charles II of England, and his deep interest in astronomy, alchemy, and occultism, heavily depending on his astrologer Elias Ashmole, especially regarding his actions and decisions about the Parliament.⁷⁷ Ashmole was not only an astrologer, but also an

⁷⁵ Alejandro García Avilés, “Two Astromagical Manuscripts of Alfonso X,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 59 (1996): 21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/751395>, Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers*, 112.

⁷⁶ Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers*, 112.

⁷⁷ Francis Young, “Politics and the Decline of Magic, 1649–1714,” in *Magic in Merlin’s Realm: A History of Occult Politics in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 250.

antiquary and alchemist, and “his book remains one of the key sources for the history of alchemy.”⁷⁸ In light of his interests, Ashmole is a figure who stands out with his deep knowledge on the topic, which was one of the reasons why Charles II (1660-1685) took an interest in him. While it is known that Charles II was an enthusiast of esoteric practices, it is particularly interesting to see that he not only gave an office to Ashmole, possibly due to more reasons than only his esoteric knowledge, but also the king’s courtiers as well as the king himself “applied to Ashmole for astrological elucidation of questions concerning the outcome of their negotiations with parliament at various points from 1669 to the 1680s, not least during such events as the exclusion crisis.”⁷⁹ Even from this example, it is clear that the services provided by astrologers, or even other practitioners from various fields, were recognised by not only the rulers but also the courtiers. What is specifically appealing about Ashmole’s case is that he was heavily involved in the political matters of the court and was trusted extensively since he was the one who got to analyse and give consultation on matters discussed in the parliament. This alone would have given Ashmole a great deal of political power and insight that he was able to acquire through his knowledge of occult practices and astrology. This alone would suggest that magic has had the power of helping individuals acquire wealth, power, and status through giving its practitioner a way of getting into courtly circles.

⁷⁸ “Ashmole, Elias,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-c-764>.

⁷⁹ Bruce Janacek, “A Virtuoso’s History: Antiquarianism and the Transmission of Knowledge in the Alchemical Studies of Elias Ashmole,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 3 (2008): 415, Michael Hunter, “Ashmole, Elias (1617–1692), astrologer and antiquary,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, accessed April 13, 2025, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-c-764>.

What is quite remarkable and worth noting is that while the religious authorities condemned magic and its practitioners more often than not, the authorities that ruled the country were deeply intertwined and interested in these practices, as can be seen from the given examples.

To exemplify the usage of astrology, magic, and occult practices in the royal courts, John Dee (1527 – 1608) would naturally be one of the figures that first comes to mind with his widespread fame and strong relationship with occultism. Being quite an influential man, John Dee was an occultist and a mathematician who had close ties with Elizabeth I as well as her courtiers. He was known as a brilliant yet complex man who eventually found himself interested in occult matters, which received differing responses from his contemporaries. What makes John Dee and Ashmole quite similar is their critical presence in the royal court. In the case of John Dee:

When Elizabeth was crowned on 15 January 1559, it was on the astrological advice of Dee that the date was chosen. Court fortune smiled on Dee — his mathematical and cartographical expertise brought a succession of noble visitors and influential entrepreneurs to his house, while his work on antiquarian and genealogical studies in support of Elizabethan expansionism brought him into direct contact with the centre of power.⁸⁰

Once again, it becomes evident that people such as John Dee had a noticeable place in the way decisions were taken throughout the Middle Ages through their influence on the rulers as well as the powerful social circles of their period. What is once again highly interesting is that Elizabeth I chose her coronation day according to John Dee's insights, as mentioned in the quote above, indicating his occult knowledge and astrological

⁸⁰ S. Wiseman, K. Hodgkin, and M. O'Callaghan, *Reading the Early Modern Dream*, 1st ed., The Terrors of the Night (Routledge, 2007), 68, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060628>.

wisdom's gravity for both political and historically monumental events. In this sense, while it is important to remember that his occult knowledge is not the only reason why he was respected or paid attention to, John Dee also becomes another important figure who shows that esoteric practices stood at the heart of many major events historians constantly write and research about, such as Elizabeth I's coronation.

As evident, the way occult practices, especially astrology, have made their way into politics and influenced the decision-making of Europe's rulers and their courts exhibits their renowned place within the society, the elites, and the courts. For further demonstration, a great example of this is the case of John of Nottingham and his supposed plan against Edward II and Hugh Despenser, Earl of Winchester. Francis Young summarises the event in great depth as he writes:

On the evening of 30 November 1323, a delegation of 28 citizens of Coventry called on the house of John of Nottingham, a reputed necromancer. The citizens swore John and his lodger Robert le Mareschall to secrecy and complained that the Prior of Coventry, supported by the Despensers, was extracting extortionate taxes. The citizens asked John to use magic to kill Despenser and his father, as well as the king and the prior. In return, they promised him twenty pounds (a [large] sum at the time) and a 'reward' (gareison) in any religious house he chose. This probably meant a corrody (a permanent income derived from the lands of a monastery).⁸¹

Following this incident, due to John of Nottingham's lodger Robert turning him in, he was ambushed in his house. As a result, both John and the men who called upon him were tried in 1325 for the reason of attempting murder. Luckily for them, while the reason for the decision is unclear, they were not sentenced to any punishments and were

⁸¹ Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England: A History of Sorcery and Treason* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 27.

able to continue their lives as before. Rather, the lodger Robert was punished in light of the false evidence he provided to the officials in 1326.⁸²

There are several interesting elements to the story of John of Nottingham and his lodger that would contribute to our understanding of magic, its place in society, and how it has been utilised. Above all, one thing that is clear from their story is that magic was indeed seen as a serious matter that could put a person in jail, or worse, to death in some cases. Whether John of Nottingham received any punishment or not does not alter the fact that the belief he practised magic was enough for authorities to act on this information and bring him in for questioning. Likewise, the example given shows that John of Nottingham's supposed attempt at murder through magic was taken so seriously that it emphasised the gravity of magic's possible consequences. Of course, the attempt to murder is also a dangerous and valid reason for the authorities to act on the lodger's allegation and would require the officials to question John of Nottingham regardless of his usage of magic. However, what this story specifically displays about the usage of magic is that, firstly, it suggests that using magic to harm someone was not an unimaginable act; the authorities must have encountered or heard of similar cases for them to take such claims seriously. Secondly, the authorities likely believed that magical practices could indeed be effective and actually harm a person, which is why they gave John of Nottingham their attention.

What would link John of Nottingham's story with the specific topic of this thesis is that both the actions of the Coventry men and of the lodger should have been heavily influenced by fear and anger, showcasing the complex relationship magic had with

⁸² Ibid., 30.

emotions as a response to magic. The fact that the Coventry men used the reason that the “Prior of Coventry, supported by the Despensers, was extracting extortionate taxes” as the motive for using magic to inflict harm on him reflects the complex emotions they would have felt against the injustices that had been done to them. While it is always very important to once again note that emotions are quite complex and are not always trackable nor simplified into one single category of emotion, it is visible that these men reacted in a way that made them willing to take the risk of being tried and maybe even punished just to harm the person that oppressed them: signaling a presence of strong emotions. Likewise, the lodger’s motivation behind informing on John of Nottingham might have been fear of the authorities, fear of the dark magic that was being practised, or fear of the consequences they might face if caught. While these are all assumptions, as we do not have concrete evidence on why the lodger did what he did, more specific examples on the way emotions played a role in magical rituals will be discussed in the following pages. However, it is also viable to believe that the events that unfolded, exercising magic, being caught and tried, and being released, would have evoked strong emotions in the participants throughout the process.

One last example before going forward would be the widespread belief, during the period, that James II used necromancers to control the wind against William of Orange, though not very successfully. Again, according to many, it was the necromancers’ “failure to perform their rituals one day that finally allowed William to slip through,” linking political events directly with esoteric practices.⁸³ Above all, the belief that occult practices would be able to change the course of major political events

⁸³ Ibid., 267.

shows the extent to which society, especially related to matters of the court, believed in their effectiveness. More importantly, the possibility that period's contemporaries believed the reason William of Orange was able to succeed was related to the malfunction of the magical ritual James II used, the analysis of magic's relation to these incidents and their aftermath would also provide new insights about the reactions given to the conflict and help understand the period's atmosphere better. In this sense, all in all, what is eye-catching regarding the examples mentioned up until this point is that politics, courtly circles, and magical rituals have been deeply connected throughout the centuries, and even widely known historical incidents could function as a case for the study of magic.

CHAPTER IV: PICATRIX AND LOVE MAGIC AT USE

4.1 The Name *Picatrix*

One of the most important works for studying the magical rituals of the Middle Ages is the popular manual *Picatrix*. After being first written under the name *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* in Arabic around the eleventh century, the manual was then translated into Spanish under the rule of King Alfonso X and then into Latin in the thirteenth century.⁸⁴ The work gained great popularity under the name *Picatrix* in Latin-using regions of the world after this translation. As mentioned, this thesis utilizes Dan Attrell and David Porreca's translation, which was prepared based on David Pingree's Latin edition of the *Picatrix*.⁸⁵ Even before delving into the text itself, the name is attention-grabbing and is worth looking into. The name, an interesting title, sheds light on the origins and content of the work. According to J. Thomann, "Read as a Latin word *picatrix* would be the feminine of *picator* derived from the word *picare*: this acquired in Medieval Latin—parallel to the Romance equivalents—the meaning 'to prick'" and continues to explain that "*picatrix*" might be the translation of the author's name, Maslama al Majriti, since "'Maslama' is derived from the Arabic root *s-l-m* of which one of the meanings given

⁸⁴ Henry Kahane, Renée Kahane, and Angelina Pietrangeli, "Picatrix and the Talismans," *Romance Philology* 19, no. 4 (May 1966): 575, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44940180>.

⁸⁵ al-Majrīṭī, *Picatrix*.

by Arabic lexica is *ladagha* = ‘to sting’”.⁸⁶ Through the possibility of the name being related to the word “to prick,” a significant element of the *Picatrix* is highlighted: that its contents can and will “wound or hurt with or as with a pointed instrument or weapon.”⁸⁷ Related with this, the word prick is also defined by the OED as a “pointed weapon or implement; a dagger or pointed sword,” once again showing the name’s connection with “a thing that pricks or pierces.”⁸⁸ This could be interpreted as magical rituals in the book have the power to hurt and sting, and even could be used as a weapon, emphasizing the power such rituals held. In other words, while Thomann does not come to a definite conclusion about the origins of the name *Picatrix* and does not confirm the origins of the name, the possibility that the original translators might have deliberately chosen the title, knowing that it meant “to sting” could lead to the supposition that the content of the work was considered to be dangerous, highly effective and included serious information that could “sting” the readers or others. Another interesting aspect of the name would be its feminine form, with the suffix -trix. This could suggest that the rituals in the book may have been attributed to women rather than men, possibly signifying that mostly women were expected to practice such harmful magic. However, such an assumption should be approached with caution, as the origins of the name are not entirely clear.

⁸⁶ J. Thomann, “The Name *Picatrix*: Transcription or Translation?” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 290, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/751354>.

⁸⁷ “Prick, V. Meanings, Etymology and More,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed May 26, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/prick_v.

⁸⁸ “Prick,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed July 29, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/prick_n.

To continue with the content of the *Picatrix*, it is not one “coherent theory of magic” and has a variety of philosophical, practical, and theoretical information within it.⁸⁹ The work is built upon the belief that within the cosmic system, each element: humans, animals, and letters, could influence their counterparts, and the rituals within *Picatrix* are designed to evoke these influences on the designated correlatives.⁹⁰ However, to give a general framework, the text has three main categories of magical rituals. Initially, it has guides on how to prepare talismans; secondly, it includes prayers to planetary spirits about a specific demand; and lastly, “rituals that aim to make the spirit descend and appear in front of the practitioner. The spirit will appear in a human shape, and the practitioner can then make his/her requests,” which seems to have connections with the idea of conjuring spirits, or demons.⁹¹ While each of these categories are quite interesting on their own, this research will focus on instructions for preparing talismans, providing various examples from the *Picatrix* regarding the invocation of love.

4.2 Talismans of *Picatrix*

To begin with, the first talisman that will be analyzed in this paper is named “An image to cause a durable love” and goes as follows:

⁸⁹ Kahane et al., “*Picatrix* and the Talismans,” 574.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Andrea Franchetto, “Review of *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*, translated by Dan Attrell and David Porreca,” *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 8, no. 1 (2020): 122.

Make two images, and place a fortunate planet in the ascendant and the Moon in Taurus joined with Venus. Using the Figures of al-Khwarizmi (the ones that employ 0s), write “220” on one image and “284” on the other. Join both images in an embrace. Then there will arise a perfect, durable love between the two.⁹²

Needless to say, the name of the instruction gives an idea about the contents of the ritual: to create a durable relationship based on love. The main understanding from this ritual is that love was viewed as an emotion that could be controlled; thus, it was possible to manipulate and instill it in another person. Another clear indication of the usage of this talisman would be, though not a new finding, that love magic was used to find *permanent* love, i.e., marriage.

As a similar example to the one before, *Picatrix* also touches upon how to receive the love of another person by writing:

An image for acquiring the love of another. Make two images. Make one in the hour of Jupiter with Virgo ascending and the Moon waxing. Let the Moon be in the ascendant, fourth, seventh, or tenth house. Make the second image in the hour of Venus, herself facing Jupiter; let the unfortunate planets be receding from the ascendant; let the ascendant of the second image be in the seventh house and the lord of the ascendant facing the lord of the ascendant in a trine or sextile aspect. Once this is done, join them together in an embrace, and bury them in the home of that man who wants to acquire love and goodwill.⁹³

The talisman to acquire the love of another and the one used to acquire permanent love are quite similar in the sense that both are used to force love upon another person and create a relationship as a result. This use of love magic is quite popular and is the main motive that comes to mind when discussing love magic. In this sense, these two examples from the manual were given to highlight love-magic’s most popular usage

⁹² al-Majrīṭī, *Picatrix*, 54.

⁹³ Ibid., 55.x

before going forward. These two guidelines are not assigned to any particular gender nor aim to provoke any outcome other than simply love. Therefore, both of them could be utilized by anyone who desired to force a relationship.

Regarding genders, what is a big misconception about love-magic is that women were the only, or primary, users of these rituals. However, men also had utilized love-magic throughout the centuries and tried to manipulate women into a relationship through magical remedies. As an example, *Picatrix* once again writes:

From the forms of Venus, inscribe upon a stone of lapis lazuli the figure of a naked girl holding a chain around her neck with a man next to her and the form of a small boy raising a sword behind her, in the hour of Venus. Whoever carries this image will be loved by women and will achieve their desire.⁹⁴

Above all, what is quite significant about this example is the image of a naked girl, which does not necessarily seem to contribute to the aim of the ritual. In this sense, the fact that the girl is portrayed to be naked, and the boy having a sword behind her back, directly evokes associations being made with control and gender roles. Why is the girl naked? Could the sword be phallic, which would connect this ritual with sexual themes? Why does the boy hold a sword? Is this love or control? *Picatrix* seems not to make a distinction between them and sees love through control, and the sword to be a valid form of love. Of course, this interesting entry helps explain how gender roles have been reflected through magical rituals, and why the study of it could also help shed light on the power dynamics of the period. As seen, men did indeed use love-magic, but the instructions they received were rich in imagery regarding how women were to be controlled, which further emphasizes the role of women as a subordinate.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 111.

One last example from the *Picatrix* to emphasize how men used love-magic, a specific instruction becomes quite eye-catching:

An image so that men may be loved by women. Make an image of a girl out of a cold and dry metal, and make it with Mercury ascending in Virgo, increasing in the circle or being the almutaz of the chart. Do this in the hour of Mercury until the image is complete. Afterwards, make another image in the form of a young man while Mercury is in Virgo and returning to the place of the first image or in Gemini. Watch for the diversity of the ascendant (that is, when Mercury is in Gemini, do not put Virgo in the ascendant, but whichever one you do put in the ascendant, put Mercury in it). Once you have made both images thus, join them in an embrace, and wrap the hands of each around the sides of the other. Do all this in the hour of Mercury with Virgo or Gemini ascending. Encircle the images with a band of that metal from which you created them, and bury the images in the most densely populated quarter of the city. Once you have done this, men will be joined with women and have high quality sex.⁹⁵

As can be seen in this example as well, which was written for the use predominantly of men, the instruction aims for men to be able to get high-quality sex, which is a remarkable aspect of this ritual. The entry starts in a standard fashion, explaining what men have to do to get the love of women, but ends with the note that, through practicing this ritual, men could receive sex, not only love. Of course, sex and love could be seen here as accompanying concepts. However, the fact that the rituals particularly mention sex, and not only love, once again demonstrates that these rituals included components regarding gender roles and could be used as a source to understand the relationship between men and women of the era.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 59.

4.3 Examples of Terms in *Picatrix*

What is also interesting to see regarding the rituals given is that there are extremely specific details about how to practice love magic, and most of the terms require prior knowledge to understand what the instruction says. To explain the complexity of the system that *Picatrix* uses, the definitions of some of the terms might be helpful:

- 1- Ascendant: “Marks the place where the Sun, Moon, and planets appear to rise above the horizon in the East.”⁹⁶
- 2- Aspect: “An aspect describes the quality of the relationship between two planets in an astrological chart. The word aspect derives from the Latin word *aspicere*, which means ‘to see’ or ‘to behold’; planets in aspect can see each other.”⁹⁷
- 3- North node (of the Moon) or the Dragon’s Head: “The north lunar node, also called the ascending node, Dragon’s Head, or Rahu, represents yearnings, compulsions, and new cycles.”⁹⁸ To explain further, the north *node* is that: “The great circle of the moon’s orbit intersects with that of the sun’s orbit (i.e., the ecliptic) at two diametrically opposite points called ‘nodes.’ The one in which the moon passes from southern to northern latitudes is called the ascending, the other the descending node.”⁹⁹
- 4- Fixed Sign: “The fixed signs are portrayed in biblical and occult literature as creatures symbolizing the four directions or four “corners” of the world; their symbols are the Bull (Taurus), the Lion (Leo), the Eagle (Scorpio), and the Human or Water Bearer (Aquarius).”¹⁰⁰

As can be easily seen, none of the terms or procedures used in the given examples are simple or easy to comprehend for an unqualified person uneducated in the field. Considering the complexity of the terms and the text itself, it is plausible to think that

⁹⁶ Donna Woodwell, *The Astrology Dictionary: Cosmic Knowledge from A to Z* (New York: Adams Media, 2020), 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁹ Willy Hartner, *The Pseudoplanetary Nodes of the Moon’s Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies*, *Ars Islamica* 5, no. 2 (1938): 112-154, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4520926>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

these talismans and guides on how to prepare them were not aimed at being used by common folk, who rarely knew how to read and write, let alone being learned in complex matters such as these.

Nevertheless, it is also rather important to consider that while the practitioner might have been intended to be an educated specialist, it is almost impossible to know who their clientele was. Thus, it is still very much possible that the common folk, including people who did not know how to read and write, also benefited from the instructions and talismans of the *Picatrix* through the help of a magical practitioner.

CHAPTER V: LOVE MAGIC IN USE

Understanding how love magic was used in day-to-day life and analyzing specific instances where this practice can be traced would provide insight into the reasons behind using these rituals. For this reason, the following chapter will examine four different cases as examples of magic related to love. All examples take place on the European Continent, and each of the examples was taken from secondary sources that provided information and translation of these cases.

5.1 Love Magic in Venice: Marco Dandolo

An interesting example of supposed love magic usage was the case of Andriana Savorgnan, a courtesan, who got married to Marco Dandolo, a Venetian noble and a member of a highly influential family. The unexpected match between Savorgnan and Dandolo sparked fear and speculations about whether Savorgnan used love magic to bind Dandolo to herself, since a noble marrying a courtesan was an unusual event.¹⁰¹ Even more interestingly, Dandolo's family tried to annul the marriage through "the Patriarch of Venice, and at the same time they attempted to have Andriana punished by

¹⁰¹ Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27.

the Holy Office for her purported use of love magic to literally bind Marco's love and force him to marry her.”¹⁰² Accordingly, Dandolo’s family “argued before the Patriarch of Venice that the marriage of the young couple was not valid because Marco had been bound by Andriana's love magic” and believed that he had lost the ability to act of his own free will and with a clear mind.¹⁰³

Through this claim itself, it is possible to see that love-magic was thought to have the power to strip away the person’s ability to reason. Interestingly, during the investigation of this claim, one of Andriana’s friends, Franceschina, confesses that she and Andriana:

Collected olive branches given out in church and brought them to Andriana's kitchen, where they burned the tips. Then they tied each one and dipped it in holy water, and Andriana said the following words: ‘As I bind this wood with this string, so too may be bound the phallus of Nicolo Corner so that he may not be able to go to any woman other than me.’ The women then went down to a ground-floor room, where Andriana planted the branches in the ground and said: ‘As this wood both will not grow again or branch out again, so too Nicoletto Corner may not be able to have relations with other women than me.’¹⁰⁴

To once again remember, Burchard of Worms also has a penance for the same act of stopping men from having sexual relations with other women, particularly their wives, indicating that what Andriana was suspected of doing was not unheard of. Interestingly, even after Franceschina’s confession, there is no evidence and no documents indicating that Andriana received any kind of punishment or any record of annulment of the marriage. However, what is more important than the outcome of the investigation is the

¹⁰² Ibid., 20.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 31.

intersection of love and fear concerning magic and how they are related to gender and class dynamics, especially in the case of Andriana. Above all, it is possible to see that the suspicion towards Andriana is primarily the result of her marrying above her social status, as she is directly accused of using magic when she secures a seemingly unreasonable marriage. This suspicion of magic being involved signifies the possibility of using love magic for securing a profitable marriage during the Middle Ages, highlighting an important motive to practice this kind of magic.

As another significant point, the family's attempt to get Andriana punished by the Holy Office, and the family's belief that the Holy Office would take action against the situation, once again underlines the approach religious authorities had toward magic. As mentioned previously, the fact that the family was able to turn to the Holy Office when in doubt signifies the possibility of getting the authorities involved in the matter when needed, at least in the case of powerful families. Why the friend of Andriana confessed could also be a topic of debate, whether it was due to fear, or forced from her, but there is no clear record as to why she did such a thing.

6.2 Love Magic in Modena: Laura Coccapani

Another example where *love* and other related emotions led to the use of magic would be that of Laura Coccapani, who began experiencing problems attributed to evil forces, which caused her to be repelled by her husband and avoid intercourse.¹⁰⁵ As a result of the abrupt actions of Coccapani, a Franciscan, Trionfanti, who had a relationship with Coccapani prior to her marriage and who was believed to be the primary suspect in this matter, was accused of causing this lack of interest by magic.

As a result, the Inquisition of Modena arrested the Franciscan in 1628 because he had “some of the victims’ pubic hairs, which were widely believed to be powerful instruments in magical spells. Trionfanti acknowledged the affair but emphatically denied having cast a spell.”¹⁰⁶ It is also noted that the Congregation of the Inquisition freed him in February 1629 as a result of the investigation and his defense statement.¹⁰⁷ While the Franciscan refused to accepting the claim he used any magical rituals, what is specifically seen through the Coccapani case is that it was believed to be possible to use love magic and rituals to prevent a relationship between two people, signifying jealousy or a need to control the other person’s relationship, again a reminiscent of Burchard’s remarks on adultery and magic used to stop sexual relations. Coccapani’s case also showcases that the feeling of jealousy was associated with love as well, and love magic could have been used to express and act on this jealousy. This association

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey R. Watt, “Love Magic and the Inquisition: A Case from Seventeenth-Century Italy,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 41, no. 3 (2010): 675, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40997345>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

between love and jealousy could signify the strong relationship between possessiveness and love relationships during the period as well. Likewise, both examples have the religious authorities involved in the matter, but resulted in the freeing of the accused, also showing that not every accusation led to punishment, and there were several cases where the authorities ruled in favor of the accused.

5.3 Love Magic in Lotharingia: King Lothar II of Lotharingia

Another similar case where the usage of magic, for purposes of love or to prevent love, is seen in Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims's remarks on King Lothar II of Lotharingia (835-869), who attempted "to divorce his wife Theutberga and marry his concubine Waldrada."¹⁰⁸ Hincmar was convinced that Waldrada had used love magic to bind Lothar to herself.¹⁰⁹ Of course, these accusations were never confirmed, but were widely acknowledged during the period, signifying the common usage of love magic to gain the love of powerful figures, even the rulers themselves.

Above all, this case once again highlights that a woman marrying a man in the higher classes was approached with caution and allegations, as was seen in the first case as well. Therefore, this specific case once again confirms the strict class hierarchies and customs when it comes to marriage in the Middle Ages. However, another specific point in this case is the potential use of love magic against rulers and monarchs. Even though

¹⁰⁸ Rider, *Magic and Impotence*, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

these powerful figures most probably had their own magicians who were there to protect the rulers against sorcery, love-magic was able to manipulate the most powerful men of the society, as seen in this case as well. In this sense, no one was safe from these magical rituals, and the rulers were also affected by the rituals done by others.

5.4 Love Magic in the Frankish Kingdom of Austrasia: Queen Brunhild

To continue with a similar case to Hincmar's:

In his *History of the Franks*, Aimoin, a monk at Fleury (d. after 1008), claimed that the Merovingian queen Brunhild (d. 613) had used magic to break up the marriage of her grandson Theuderic II to Ermenberga, the daughter of King Witteric of Visigothic Spain. This was because she did not want another queen to rival her own power.¹¹⁰

As seen, both cases are of a similar nature, showcasing that love magic could have been used to earn the love of certain individuals who held power or to hold on to power one already had. While Brunhild did not exercise a ritual that could be strictly seen as love magic, she indeed interfered with the love relationship of two people by occult means to protect her political power.

What is a distinctive similarity in both of these cases of Waldrada and Brunhild is also the fact that both Brunhild and Waldrada were *accused* of using magic to either create or break a marriage of powerful men. Thus, what these examples would suggest is the common usage of love magic to interfere with people's relationships, which could

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

easily lead to uneasiness within the community when an unexpected match was made or a match unexpectedly broken up, as mentioned. Since women were often suspected of practicing magic, they may have believed to influence decisions and relationships, granting them political power over men. This suggests that women may have held more power in politics and governance than was previously believed. Additionally, even without any association with magic, certain attributes attributed to women by the contemporaries of the Middle Ages, such as being seductive and deceitful, imply that they may have exercised more power in the political arena than initially appears.

All in all, what is quite clear from these four specific examples given, in the cases of the Franciscan, Brunhild, Waldrada, and Andriana, is that accusing someone of using love magic was not an unprecedented event. One reason people were accused of using magic was securing a profitable marriage, which had either political or economic advantages to the person who practiced magic. Another reason love magic could have been useful was in cases when an individual needed to manipulate the outside world to protect their power.

CHAPTER VI: LOVE MAGIC IN ROMANCES

Romances are captivating sources that help us trace the culture and society of the period in which they were written. However, like any literary source, they should be approached with caution because they do not always present reliable accounts. Often, romances exaggerate, alter, or misrepresent the circumstances and cultural norms of their time. Therefore, they are not solely about understanding historical events; instead, they provide insight into the types of stories that people of that era wanted to read.

Before going any further, pinpointing what romances are is crucial. To once again remember the OED's description of the term, romances are "a medieval narrative (originally in verse, later also in prose) relating the legendary or extraordinary adventures of some hero of chivalry."¹¹¹ While romances were indeed legendary and, in most instances, literary, they were also seen as reliable and factual sources throughout history as:

The various stories about King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table first inscribed in French in the Middle Ages are to be found in many and varied contexts, having been translated, adapted and recast into medieval languages such as Middle High German, Old Norse, Occitan, Latin, Middle English and others. Their manuscript contexts show that medieval consumers of Arthurian literature regarded them not only as literary fictions, but also at times had reason to situate them as chronicles, as education, as history, and more.¹¹²

¹¹¹ "Romance, N. & Adj.," Oxford English Dictionary.

¹¹² Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen, *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=63499bf8-93c1-37d5-9ac0-b726a392fff8>

What Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen highlight here is the significant relationship between romances and historical storytelling, and the potential of using romances as sources for gaining a deeper understanding of history. An interesting aspect of these romances is that they often tell stories set in a distant past rather than in the era in which they were written. Additionally, they frequently take place in various settings and cultures, including those of the Welsh, Bretons, and Cornish. This may explain why some romances were considered historical sources rather than simply literary works. Being set in a distant past and culture, they also tended to include the cultural norms, beliefs, and social values of the time and culture in which they were written. Due to this, both seeing how people perceived their past and how their own values were reflected in the stories demonstrates double historicity and makes romances a complex source.

To continue, one of the first names that comes to mind regarding romances is Chrétien de Troyes. Being a French writer of Arthurian romances, Chrétien de Troyes wrote numerous chivalric romances that are still known today, such as *Lancelot* and *the Knight of the Cart*. His work was so influential that with his poetry and perspective towards love, he has been one of the reasons for the emergence of the idea of *courtly love*:

[Gaston Paris (1839-19023)] published an article in which he used the term *amour courtois* to describe the kind of love between Lancelot and Guinevere in Chretien de Troyes's *Conte de la Charrette* (also called “Chevalier Charrette” or “Lancelot”). *Amour courtois* was soon translated into “courtly love,” and in the next half century innumerable books were written about, or referred to, courtly love.¹¹³

¹¹³ John C. Moore, “‘Courtly Love’: A Problem of Terminology,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 4 (1979): 621-22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709362>.

It is quite interesting to see that the term emerged only in the late twentieth century and has no known precursors, and refers to “a special form of love in which the courtly lover idealized his beloved lady and spoke to her or about her in the exalted language usually reserved for a deity.”¹¹⁴ In this sense, it is possible to see a correlation between the way a lover and God are approached by those who created or used the stories. In light of this, it becomes important to highlight that the language used to describe romantic love and love for God is quite similar in several of these romances. This suggests that the troubadours experienced a comparable kind of love and relationship in both contexts. Keeping Chrétien de Troyes’s significant contributions to the field in mind and the similar approaches towards the deity and love, this chapter will analyze *Cligès*, as well as *Tristan and Iseult*, and compare the love magic used in these two romances.

6.1 Love Magic in *Cligès*

The story *Cligès* is essentially about a man and a woman who fell in love, Cligès and Fenice, and the impossible love between them due to the fact that Fenice is the wife of Cligès’s uncle. The story focuses on three characters: Alis, who is Cligès’ uncle; Fenice, who is Alis’ wife; and Cligès, who is Fenice’s lover. As Fenice and Cligès fall in love, they come to understand that being together is impossible. In her desperation to

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 622.

be with Cligès and keep Alis away, Fenice turns to magic. The nurse, Felice's confidante, decides to help the lovers and:

Assures her [Felice] that she will weave such spells and potions and enchantments that she would be ill-advised to have concern or fear for this emperor; so soon as he shall have drunk of the potion that she will give him to drink, and they will both lie together; but however close she will be to him, she can be as secure as if there were a wall between the two of them. 'But let not this and this only vex you if he has his pleasure of you in dreams; for, when he shall be sound asleep, he will have joy of you in dreaming; and will quite surely think that he has his joy of you waking, nor will he imagine that it is a dream, or vision, or falsehood. He will delight in you so that he will think he is awake while he is sleeping.'¹¹⁵

Through the usage of the nurse's spell, Felice is able to trick her husband into believing that she is with him and is having sexual relations with him, all the while she remains untouched. The making process of the potion is also explained as:

Thessala crushes her potion; she puts therein spices in plenty for sweetening and blending. Well does she pound and mix it, and strains it till the whole is clear, and there is nought acid nor bitter there; for the spices which are in it make it sweet and of pleasant odour.¹¹⁶

There are a few layers of important aspects of the potion mentioned by Chrétien de Troyes here, in the version translated by L. J. Gardiner. Above all, it indicates that love magic was not always used to control someone or to make them fall in love with a certain person, but it also helped people, in many cases, women, to protect themselves. At least it was believed to have worked for this purpose. Through using the potion in *Cligès*, Felice is able to stop someone whom she does not want to have sexual

¹¹⁵ Chretien De Troyes, *Cliges: A Romance*, Project Gutenberg, n.d., <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2414/2414-h/2414-h.htm>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

intercourse with, Alis. This specific example shows that love magic was not always used to make the other person fall in love with oneself, but to protect one's love, too.

Likewise, interestingly, in the context of *Cligès*, magic used for love is so incorporated in the story that it does not have an extensive explanation for why or how the potion is used, nor does it contain elements that could trigger a sense of surprise in the reader, thus signalling the regular usage of such potions or the knowledge of their existence in society. The role of the potion is so casually mentioned in the text that the immediate reaction of Felice after learning about the said potion is described as “The maiden loves and approves and esteems this boon and this service. Her nurse, who promises her this, and vows to keep faith with her, puts her in good hope; for by this means she will think to come to her joy however long she has to wait.”¹¹⁷ As seen, the lack of grand gestures or reactions from Felice could be an indicator of the normalised place of magic, love magic specifically, within the community that listened to the romances.

The first and only thing mentioned before Felice puts the potion to use is her approval and appreciation of the potion. She is not surprised, confused, or afraid of the object in her hand. Likewise, Chrétien de Troyes does not spend any time explaining the role or importance of this potion to the reader, once again signalling that assumption that the audience has an acquaintance with the topic at least to an extent. Another reason for this could be that supernatural elements and magical potions were widespread in romances. As a result, audiences would have often been familiar with these concepts, which may eliminate the need for explanations about how magic works within the story.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Further, to put the story in historical context for a better analysis, *Cligès* was most probably primarily read in royal and aristocratic courts in the Middle Ages, as well as aristocratic circles, due to the fact that the nobles were heavily interested in supporting authors of Arthurian romance during the period.¹¹⁸ In a sense, Arthurian romances were widely acknowledged and held considerable value: “The impressive documentation, mainly consisting of expenditure statements, wills, inventories of libraries and owners’ marks (coats of arms, names), points in particular towards aristocratic families as owners of Arthurian books.”¹¹⁹ In light of this, it can be assumed that the notion of magic and magical potions in the story of *Cligès* should point out that the aristocratic audience of the Arthurian romances was likely familiar with certain magical rituals and tools. At the very least, they were aware of magic as a theme present in popular stories.

6.2 Love Magic in *Tristan and Iseult*

“Rather would I be torn limb from limb than that the love of Iseult and of Tristram should be renewed in the case of us twain; for of them are such mad actions told that I am ashamed to recount them. I could not reconcile myself to the life that Iseult led.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen, *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 124.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 128.

¹²⁰ Chretien De Troyes, *Cliges: A Romance*, n.d.

To start with a quote from *Cligès* to showcase the prominent place of *Tristan and Iseult*, the given extract refers to the moment when Felice shares her fear of experiencing a fate similar to that of Iseult after falling in love with Tristan. In this sense, *Tristan and Iseult* is a romance of great importance when it comes to understanding the usage of love magic in romances due to its influence on other stories as well. *Tristan and Iseult* is a story without a known writer, but thought to be of Celtic origin. While the story was first orally transferred from one to the other throughout earlier centuries, it was then written down by Beroul and Thomas of Britain, in the second half of the twelfth century.¹²¹

Notably, “of these writers we have no historical information beyond the high probability that both were in the Anglo-Norman cultural orbit,” resulting in their versions of the story being considered as “marginally Arthurian.”¹²² One reason for such categorization was that, throughout the story, “King Arthur is mentioned several times, and Iseult makes it clear that his prestige was firmly established at the time by insisting that he be present to give credence to her oath of innocence and to protect her should any other accusations be leveled against her,” showcasing the element of justice and chivalry is present in the story, which are characteristics of Arthurian romances.¹²³ While the exact location and date of when the story was read are unknown, it is now believed that it was likely known in various courts, including French and Anglo-

¹²¹ John Halverson, “Tristan and Iseult: The Two Traditions,” *Zeitschrift Fr Französische Sprache Und Literatur* 93, no. 3 (1983): 271.

¹²² Norris J. Lacy and Geoffrey Ashe, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Pub, 1996), 37.

¹²³ Ibid.

Norman.¹²⁴ Due to the story's popularity and long history, it has a considerable number of different variations, and the content changes according to the version. However, in the general sense, the story focuses on the characters Tristan and Iseult, who fell in love as a result of mistakenly drinking the love potion that was prepared for Iseult and Tristan's uncle, King Mark, to drink. At the beginning of the story, as seen in Bédier's compilation of various versions of the story, King Mark plans to leave his throne to Tristan without marrying and having an heir due to his love and trust in Tristan. However, the king's love for Tristan is so grand that the barons of King Mark believe Tristan used magic to get the love of the king, and when Tristan became the king, they will "hold [their] lands from a magician."¹²⁵ As a result of the barons' hatred towards Tristan, the barons force King Mark to marry by threatening him. King Mark, without a choice, agrees to marry only if someone is able to bring the Fair One with Golden Hair, Iseult, to him. What makes this specifically a daunting task is that Iseult, daughter of the king of Ireland, is promised in marriage to whoever kills the dragon in the country, which many have failed to do.

As a result of Tristan's devotion to his uncle, Tristan volunteers for the task, and he then travels to Ireland with the aim of taking Iseult to his home country for her to marry King Mark. After a series of events, Tristan kills the dragon and succeeds in taking Iseult with him. However, during their time together, Iseult starts to develop strong feelings for Tristan and feels quite unsatisfied when she learns that he has come to take her for another man, rather than for himself. Since Iseult is not entirely happy

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Bédier, "The Romance of Tristram and Iseult", 27-28.

with how things have turned out, her mother prepares a love potion for Iseult and the king to drink in order to strengthen their marriage:

Her mother gathered herbs, flowers and roots, mixed them with wine, and brewed a powerful potion. When she had finished it by science and by magic, she poured it into a phial, and gave it secretly to Bragwaine, saying: Girl, thou art to follow Iseult into the land of King Mark, and thou lovest her faithfully. Take therefore this phial of wine, and remember my words. Hide it in such wise that no eye may see it and no lip may come near it. But when the wedding night comes, at the moment when thou leavest the wedded pair, pour this aromatic wine into a cup and give it to King Mark and to Queen Iseult to drink together. See to it, my daughter, that they alone taste this potion, for such is its virtue that they who drink it together will love each other with all their senses and all their minds for ever, in life and in death". Bragwaine promised the Queen that she would do according to her will.¹²⁶

However, while on the road towards King Mark, Iseult and Tristan mistakenly drink the love potion together and fall in love with each other. Upon seeing the way Tristan and Iseult look at each other, Iseult's lady-in-waiting, Bragwaine, chants: "Iseult, my dear one, and you, Tristram, it is death that ye have drunk."¹²⁷ In the end, though with variations, the love between them indeed becomes their end.

Looking into the significance of magic and how it is carried out in *Tristan and Iseult*, various points become important. First of all, the mother of Iseult, who is a queen, prepares the potion with their own hands. This, foremost, highlights that the royal family did practice magic too, or at least could have used magic for their advantage when in need, and this was accepted in such a widespread sense that it was included in a popular romance. In this sense, what the story of *Tristan and Iseult* highlights is that magic, and

¹²⁶ Ibid, 45.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 47.

especially love-magic, could be used by people of different classes, and it did not necessarily require a complex ritual.

Considering this, the second point that becomes eye-catching is the simplicity of the ritual as mentioned. The queen simply mixes herbs and equivalent ingredients with wine to prepare the love potion, which resonates with natural magic and alchemical efforts rather than dark magic. This point again indicates that love-magic was a practice that could have been easily practised at home by the common folk as well, without getting the help of professional practitioners. Of course, a certain extent of familiarity with the plants would have been needed, as some were poisonous, but complex theoretical knowledge was unnecessary for such practices. Of course, this makes love-magic a big threat and a concern for those who might have been afraid of being influenced by it, as it seems almost impossible to track down who did magic to whom, and even people of high social power, such as a queen, practiced it.

Further, considering love as an emotion, the story of *Tristan and Iseult* also shows that love was thought to be forceable upon people and could have been easily manipulated by a single potion. This is important because it emphasizes that emotions were perceived as things that could be altered or influenced when necessary, through relatively simple potions. In this regard, being able to change a person's feelings would also show the limited space reserved for free will in the context of emotions. Thus, this possibility of manipulating emotions and the queen choosing to prepare a love potion to guarantee love upon the new couple highlights a core value: the importance of love in marriages, even if the marriage is arranged for political reasons. Her desire for her

daughter to love her arranged husband reveals that, despite the nature of arranged marriages, affection between partners was a crucial aspect to consider.

In this sense, love-magic in *Tristan and Iseult* highlights a completely new aspect of using magic: simply to bring love into forced situations where the women had no choice but to marry the men. In this sense, what the queen attempts to do is to protect her daughter from a loveless marriage that could lead her to be unhappy in the long run, even though, in different terms, what the love magic of *Tristan and Iseult* and *Cligès* does is to protect the women who did not necessarily love their partners. As an excellent topic for further study, both these examples show that love-magic could have been used by women to create a sense of control over relationships that they, or their loved ones, did not have the choice to decide against. Being forced into relationships or marriages, love-magic could have been a tool for women to try to love their husbands, or to protect themselves from them, to be able to lower their anxiety, and enjoy what life has brought them. Thus, both these examples could be seen as an attempt to create a safe space for themselves in relationships where they were not happy or suspected their loved ones might not be happy, as in the case of Iseult's mother.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

All in all, this thesis has aimed to show that love magic was utilized for various motives and purposes during the Middle Ages. Despite popular belief, love magic was not only about getting the chance to make a profitable marriage but had many layers to it, and people used love magic for reasons such as protection and political gain. Therefore, love magic was not always done for the sake of love, but was also used to protect oneself, harm others, and control the relationships that people, seemingly, were powerless over. It is possible to see that love magic also served as a tool for individuals to express their wishes and reduce their anxieties by creating an illusion of control over relationships and events.

Iseult's mother creates the potion for her daughter to influence the outcome of the story while her daughter was getting married to a man she did not know and did not love, and Fenice utilizes magic to be able to protect her love while she is married to a man she does not desire. In this sense, love magic, and magic in general, helped to influence the story's outcome when the characters had little control over it. However, apart from romances, love magic also had the power of helping people secure good marriages, stop the sexual relationship between two people, cause adultery, and change the way people interacted with each other. Building on this, what has been briefly touched upon throughout the thesis, but is a topic that would need further research, is the evaluation of the magical rituals primarily used by men and how they compare to the magical rituals primarily used by women. Such a study would help understand whether there is a significant difference between how the genders utilised love magic

and see if there was a major difference between the motives to use magic, or the instructions they received in the manuals. As was seen, while the instructions in *Picatrix* that were dedicated to men had elements of control and guidance on how to dominate women, especially for sexual advantage, women's rituals tended to focus on finding a suitable husband or love. A more detailed study to compare carefully whether there is a considerable discrepancy between the magic designated for men and women would also reveal a better insight into the power dynamics of the period.

Further, while tracking down the personal feelings and exact motives of the practitioners might be nearly impossible, especially for the common folk, the examples given in this study indicate that while love magic was indeed a major part of the culture, everyday life and literary stories of Middle Ages, and the emotions involved in these practices seem to be far more complex than they first appear to be. Fear, the desire to control, and the need to protect oneself are all reasons for the utilization of love-magic, which makes it an excellent research field for the history of emotions and gender studies, as shown. Needless to say, the complex nature of emotions and the related difficulties when it comes to categorizing terms related to magic have been obstacles to this research. However, while understanding the boundaries of what love or magic are still remains a task to be accomplished, this study emphasizes the crucial role of love magic for understanding the society of the Middle Ages.

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