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DOSSIER

WEARING IMAGES

Edited by Diane H. Bodart

IMÁGENES PORTADAS

Editado por Diane H. Bodart

THE FLOWERING FOOT OF FLORA. DETAIL OF SANDRO BOTTICELLI, ***PRIMAVERA***, LATE 1470S OR EARLY 1480S, TEMPERA ON PANEL, 202 X 314 CM, GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI, FLORENCE.

PRÊT-À-PORTER: TEXTUAL AMULETS, POPULAR BELIEF AND DEFINING SUPERSTITION IN SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

PRÊT-À-PORTER: AMULETOS TEXTUALES, CREENCIAS POPULARES Y DEFINICIÓN DE LAS SUPERSTICIONES EN LA FRANCIA DE LOS SIGLOS XVI Y XVII

Katherine Dauge-Roth[1]

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Abstract
In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, people commonly wore words, names, letters, symbols, and images about their bodies for protection or healing. Drawing on French sources, this article examines the widespread practice of wearing textual amulets in this period as revelatory of an enduring belief in the power of words and images to protect and heal the individual who wore them. It analyzes the vehement critique of this practice by period theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, who attacked their contemporaries' investment in the materiality of the textual object as superstition.

Keywords
Textual amulets; body; popular belief; superstition; popular errors; medicine; devotional practice; natural magic; demonology; material history; history of print.

Resumen
En los siglos XVI y XVII, la gente usaba con frecuencia palabras, nombres, letras, símbolos e imágenes sobre sus cuerpos como protección o como cura.
Partiendo de fuentes francesas, este artículo examina la extendida práctica de usar amuletos textuales en ese periodo de tiempo como una revelación de la creencia permanente en el poder de las palabras y las imágenes para proteger y curar a los individuos que las usaban. Se analiza la crítica vehemente de dicha práctica por los teólogos de la época, tanto protestantes como católicos, que atacaban a la inversión de sus contemporáneos en la materialidad de los objetos textuales como una superstición.

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Palabras clave
Amuletos textuales; cuerpo; creencia popular; superstición; errores populares; medicina; práctica devocional; demonología; historia de los materiales; historia de la impresión.

IN HIS ENCYCLOPEDIC 1679 *Treatise on Superstitions*, French Catholic theologian Jean-Baptiste Thiers (1636-1703) tells a cautionary tale of a woman who, suffering from an eye ailment, seeks to relieve her pain by a visit, not to the village doctor or priest, but to a local school yard:

> A certain woman... having terrible eye pain, went to a School, and having called over one of the Schoolboys, she asked him if he couldn't write some letters for her to cure her, and she promised him a new garment for his trouble. The Schoolboy who did not want to pass up such a great opportunity to win a new garment, responded that he would happily do it. And immediately he wrote some words on a slip of paper, which he wrapped in rags and gave to her to wear always upon her, warning her never to open it up and look inside. After a little while the woman was cured, and seeing that one of her neighbors was suffering from the same ailment, she gave her the slip of paper, and she too was cured. Their curiosity having incited them both to look at what was written in the paper, they found these words: «May the Devil rip out both your eyes, and fill the sockets with mud.» Having confessed this, they did penance for their sin.[2]

With the story's ominous conclusion, Thiers underlines for his readers the danger of wearing words, highlighting the naïveté of the story's protagonist and her sinful belief in the power of letters to restore her to health.[3] The boy's malicious joke of inscribing, in the place of healing words, a curse that invokes the devil himself clearly demonizes the woman's already transgressive faith in words to cure, for which she must ask forgiveness and do penance. Just as the folds of cloth are unwrapped to expose the text's true malignity, so too the true nature of her act of wearing words is revealed as diabolical.

Yet in seeking out written words for treatment, the ailing woman of this often related story was not engaging in a marginal practice, but simply self-prescribing a common remedy that may well have been suggested to her by a local doctor or even a priest in sixteenth or seventeenth-century Europe. Hung from the neck,

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2. «Une certaine femme... ayant grand mal aux yeux, s'en alla à une Ecole, & ayant fait venir un des Ecoliers, elle luy demanda s'il ne pourroit point luy écrire quelques lettres pour la guerir, & elle luy promit un habit neuf pour sa peine. L'Ecolier qui ne vouloit pas perdre une si belle occasion de gagner un habit neuf, luy répondit qu'il le feroit volontiers : & aussi-tost il écrivit quelques mots sur un billet, qu'il enveloppa dans des chiffons & qu'il luy donna pour le porter toûjours sur elle, luy defendant de la developer & de regarder dedans. Au bout de quelque temps cette femme guerit; & voyant qu'une de ses voisines estoit malade de la mesme maladie, elle luy donna ce mesme billet, & elle guerit aussi. Leur curiosité les ayant ensuite portées toutes deux à regarder ce qui estoit écrit dans ce billet, elles y trouverent ces paroles: "Que le Diable t'arrache les deux yeux, & te bouche les places des deux yeux avec de la bouë. De quoy s'estant confessées, elles firent penitence de leur peché";» THIERS, Jean-Baptiste: *Traité des superstitions*. Paris, Antoine Dezallier, 1679, pp. 385-86. All references to this text are to the first edition, except where specified otherwise. Thiers cites as his source «le P. Mathias Feliscius de Brouwershaven en Zelande, Provincial des Cordeliers de la basse Allemagne, & qu'il assure avoir leuë dans les Sermons de Godscalc de Rozemonde, Docteur en Theologie & Theologal de Louvain» in the early sixteenth century; *idem* p. 385. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

3. For similar tales, see Protestant physician WEYER, Johann: *De Præstigiis dæmonum et incantationibus ac venificiis*. Basel, Joannes Oporinus, 1563. Ed. by MORA, George and KOHL, Benjamin and trans. by SHEA, John as *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance*. Binghampton, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991, p. 416. References here are to the modern edition in English translation. See also Catholic demonologist DE LANCRE, Pierre: *L'incrédulité et mescréance du sortilège plainement convaincue*. Paris, Nicolas Buon, 1622, p. 404, who cites as his source BOISSARD, Jean-Jacques (1528-1602): likely his often reedited *De Divinatione et magicis præstigiis* [1605]. Oppenheim, Hieronymus Galler, 1611.

bound to the arm, carried in special pockets, or in the folds of clothing, texts and images fashioned on paper or parchment were widely believed to restore and preserve health, to provide physical protection from harm, and to bring good fortune to the people who bore them. As Thiers relates, people commonly sought to «[a] void and chase away a huge number of maladies, and to deter a huge number of dangers through the use of *Short Texts* or *Notes*, which are a kind of preservative with words.»[4] Referred to diversely as short texts [*brevets*], notes [*billets*], bulletins, ligatures, and phylacteries, worn texts were a hybrid genre that could include bible verses, prayers, poems, saints' lives, woodcuts and engravings, figurative signs and symbols, so-called magical characters, names and words.[5] Written on paper or parchment, like the «letters» worn by the women in Thiers's story, or batch produced on the printing press, «textual amulets,» as Don C. Skemer has called them in his groundbreaking work on their use in the medieval period, were still commonplace in Counter Reformation Europe. Literary references, esoteric manuals, church statutes, exorcism rites, as well as many lengthy volumes written by theologians and medical doctors who decried acts of wearing words as «superstition» or «popular error,» all testify to the continued and widespread use of textual amulets across both class and confessional lines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[6] Indeed, writing in 1579, Le Mans lawyer Pierre Massé sees his own time as experiencing a revival of the medieval practice discussed by the authors of the infamous late fifteenth-century *Malleus Malificarum*, affirming that «it was a very common thing in their time to wear these aforesaid things, and principally among merchants. This same custom is having a comeback in our times»[7].

While local clergy and medical practitioners were frequent providers of curative and preservative texts and images, itinerant healers, booksellers, and traveling peddlers also offered them for sale. Thiers reports that during a plague epidemic that

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4. «[é]viter & chasser quantité de maladies, & détourner quantité de dangers par le moyen des *Brevets* ou *Billets*, qui sont une espece de preservatifs avec paroles;» Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 357. Emphasis in original. *Brevet*, though it has other meanings, retains here the meaning of its Latin source, *brevia*, meaning simply «a short text.»

5. Skemer, Don C.: *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*. University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. I am grateful for Skemer's helpful responses to my questions as I began my search for surviving printed amulets. In this essay, I use the terms «texts» and «textual amulets» to describe paper or parchment objects upon which were written or printed any or all of these varied textual and iconographic elements.

6. Huguenot Henri de Navarre (1553-1610) is reported to have mocked his Catholic enemies' belief in the power of paper amulets by sending a curative text as a joke to an ailing member of the Ligue; *Recueil General des Questions traitées* és *Conferences du Bureau* d'Adresse, 7 vols. Lyon, Antoine Valançol, 1666-1670, conference 174, vol. 5, p. 206. But Catholic writers were also quick to cite Protestant abuses. Jesuit theologian and demonologist Martín Antoine Del Río (1551-1608) recounts that after a devastating defeat by the Duc de Guise's Catholic forces, among the countless dead Protestants, «when the time came to search the bodies, very few could be found who did not have these sorts of texts attached to their necks; [la plupart des Chefs & Soldats [Huguenots] demeurez morts sur le champ, il s'en trouva fort peu quand ce vint à dépouiller les corps, qui n'eussent de tels brevets attachez à leur col];» Del Río, Martín Antoine: *Les Controverses et recherches magiques*, ed. and trans. by Du Chesne, André. Paris, Regnauld Chaudière, 1611, p. 80. See also Pierre Crespet's testimony about the German *Reistres* that he draws from Jean le Frère's 1573 history of the conflict; Crespet, Pierre: *Deux livres de la hayne de Sathan et malins esprist contre l'homme, et de l'homme contre eux*. Paris, Guillaume de la Noüe, 1590, fols. 157v-158r.

7. «c'estoit chose fort commune en leur temps de porter desdictes choses, & principalement aux marchans. Ceste mesme coustume revient en nostre temps;» Massé, Pierre: *De L'Imposture et Tromperie des diables*. Paris, Jean Poupy, 1579. Massé is referring to pt. 2, qu. 1, ch. 16 of Institoris, Heinrich and Sprenger, Jakob: *Malleus Malificarum* [1486], ed. and trans. by Summers, Montague. London, Pushkin Press, 1971, p. 155.

struck Milan in 1576, salespeople hawked «certain hand-written notes or bulletins, and other printed ones,... that they went along advertising among the ignorant and simple-minded people of the lower classes»[8]. In Corneille's 1636 play, the *Comic Illusion*, the magician Alcandre recounts to Crindor's desperate father, Pridamant, that his runaway son made his way through the countryside to Paris by selling textual amulets: «And to get to Paris / he sold throughout the plain / Texts to chase away / fever and migraine»[9]. In addition to traveling healers, *colporteurs*—who sold printed texts from village to village—offered textual amulets, which were also sold on the Pont Neuf in Paris.[10] Short pamphlet-type devotional texts of few pages—like the surviving examples from the rare books collection of the *Bibliothè*que *Nationale de France* examined below—most often featured accompanying woodcut images.[11] Given their high rate of production on the early printing press, these kinds of texts were widely available and probably commonly worn.[12] Indeed, any printed devotional broadside, short text or image picked up in church or sold by a street vendor could have easily become an amulet simply by folding or rolling it and attaching it to one's person.[13] The making of written amulets continued as well in this age of print, where leftover or reclaimed scraps of paper or parchment could be easily inscribed with short texts, words or symbols for wearing on the body.

Though textual amulets are common across many religious traditions and have been used since earliest times, they took on particular prominence in late sixteenth and seventeenth century France as a central topic in the debate over «superstition» that marked this era of intense religious reformation.[14] Faced with the persistence of popular magical ideas as well as the proliferation of learned natural magic, which

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8. «certains billets ou bulletins écrits à la main, & autres imprimez, ... qu'on alloit sonnant parmy le vulgaire ignorant & simple;» Jussano, *La vie de Saint Charles Borromée,* trans. by Le Père de Soulfour, bk. 4, ch. 4, qtd. in Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 358. Cardinal and Catholic reformer Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), who worked tirelessly to care for the plague's victims and punished priests and local officials who neglected their duties, condemned such door-to-door sale of texts by decree; *idem* pp. 358-59. See also Lebrun, Pierre: *Histoire critique des pratiques superstitieuses*. Rouen, Guillaume Behourt, 1702, pp. 346-47.

9. «Et pour gagner Paris, / il vendit par la plaine / Des brevets à chasser / la fièvre et la migraine;» Corneille, Pierre: *L'Illusion comique*. Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1987, act I, scene 3.

10. The *colporteur* gets his name from the basket of books he carried (*-porteur*) hung from the neck, or the *col*.

11. The extant texts examined here probably owe their survival to the fact that they were bound, for single leaves and smaller bits of paper or parchment were easily confused with printer's scraps or lost among family papers, and likely never worn, for they show no sign of having been attached to the body.

12. Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 222-233 and Watt, Tessa: *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

13. Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* p. 224. Thiers includes devotional images among merchandise commonly sold on the porches of churches; Thiers, Jean-Baptiste: *Dissertation sur les porches des* églises. Orleans, François Hotot, 1679, Preface, n. pag.

14. On ancient amulet traditions, see Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 23-44. While this article focuses on the use of textual amulets by European Christians, these practices were also well developed in the period among Jews and Muslims. On Islamic magical traditions, see Zadeh, Travis, «Magic, Marvel, and Miracle in Early Islamic Thought,» in Collins, David J. (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West from Antiquity to the Present*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 235-267 and Canaan, Tewfik: «The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans.» In *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, pp. 125–77. Aldershot, Ashgate/Varorium, 2004. On Hebrew traditions see: Haddad, Gérard: *Manger le livre. Rites alimentaires et fonction paternelle*. 2nd ed., Paris, Hachette, 2005; Trachtenburg, Joshua: *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion*. Atheneum, [1939] 1970; and Schrire, T.: *Hebrew Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966. I thank Robert Watson for his source recommendations.

knew the height of its popularity in the late sixteenth century, theologians—both Protestant and Catholic—wielded an unprecedented attack on rituals and beliefs that they qualified as «superstitious.» Joined by doctors and surgeons seeking to defend their profession from non-university-trained healers, these theologians sought to identify and ultimately to eliminate countless pernicious practices and beliefs that they saw as running rampant in their communities, often conflating recipes drawn from learned magical treatises and practices observed among their parishioners and patients.

It is in this fraught context that I examine the endurance of magical-religious understandings of the power of words and images to heal or protect the body and the objections that religious and medical authorities leveled against these beliefs. First, through exploring the forms and functions of textual amulets from this period, this essay provides a window into how people may have conceived of the power of written or printed words and images in dynamic interaction with their physical and spiritual selves, illuminating and expanding our understanding of the intimate relationships that early moderns maintained with textual objects in this age of «print culture.» Gaining access to these popular textual beliefs and practices today is, of course, fundamentally flawed, for we must learn about them by and large through the filter of the demonologists, churchmen, doctors and surgeons who decried their influence. However, in the case of textual amulets, enough significant and varied evidence exists—including the survival of texts meant to be worn—to confirm their prevalence in popular practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to begin to articulate some of the ways in which people of this period invested these paper and parchment objects with power. Second, this essay examines the debate over textual amulets as a nexus through which to investigate the larger problem of defining superstition central to this period. Reading the treatises of sixteenth and seventeenth-century theologians who intensely scrutinized these beliefs and practices for evidence of superstition reveals the difficulties and ambivalences that characterized their attempts to make distinctions between acceptable pious practice and guilty superstition. For Catholic theologians especially, distinguishing between practices involving texts and images that were supported and encouraged by the Church and unacceptable deformations of their use required careful navigation.

MATERIAL FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

In contrast to medallion-style amulets made of metal or stone also worn for healing or apotropaic purposes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, textual amulets were inexpensive, widely available, and easy to obtain.[15] They were

15. Bordeaux mayor and author Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) wore a medallion to protect against sun and headache; Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de: *Les Essais*, ed. by Villey, P. and Saunier. Verdun L. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, bk 1, ch. 21, pp. 100-101. The Queen mother Catherine de Médicis (1519-1589) wore a bronze medallion, currently held at the Bibliothèque Nationale Française. The characters and words that figure upon it, possibly authored by royal physician Jean Fernel (ca. 1497-1558), are direct borrowings from physician, theologian,

lightweight, highly portable, versatile, and could be ready-made on the printing press or custom made, written in ink according to a person's specific needs. Perhaps most importantly, they were discreet. Unlike other kinds of worn images and insignia commonly displayed in this period, such as pilgrim badges, medals, jewelry or embroidery upon garments, paper and parchment amulets were worn underneath the clothing and were most often hidden from view, placed in direct contact with the body they were meant to protect.[16] Though some were worn encased like relics, consistent with their valorization as precious objects, carried in cloth or leather pouches, metal capsules, or natural encasings such as wood, bone, ivory, or the shaft of a feather, most paper and parchment texts were probably simply folded or rolled and hung from the neck, wrapped around or tied to a member.[17] Intensely personal objects, usually worn for extended periods of time or even a lifetime, textual amulets became a permanent part of the body that bore them. Wearing a text or image hung from the neck or fastened around the arm or the wrist reflected, then, a desire for intimate and long-lasting contact with the sacred or magical words and images it contained and a belief in their power to communicate healing or protective qualities to the body.

Though sixteenth and seventeenth-century critics of amulets made much of those that included so-called foreign elements such as astrological symbols, characters, images, figures and names drawn from non-Christian traditions, most textual amulets—and certainly almost all printed amulets—contained textual and iconographic elements that would have been considered mainstream: quotations from scripture or the liturgy, prayers, saints' lives, images of saints, images of Christ and his wounds, symbols such as the cross, and holy names, whose written or printed form became the receptacle of their power or the power that they represented. Longstanding belief in the magical efficacy of holy names and sacred texts—scripture being the manifest word of God—made these textual elements particularly appealing.[18] Among quotations drawn from the bible that were worn in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the first lines of the Gospel of John (1:1-14), «In the beginning the Word was with God, and the Word was God,» which had been favored for protection and healing since early Christianity, remained the most widespread, consistently appearing in early modern compilations of prayers meant for amuletic use.[19] The portability of textual amulets also allowed them to function as memory aids that people could

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and occult philosopher Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486-1535); Béhar, Pierre: «Le Talisman de Catherine de Médicis : La magie appliquée,» in his *Les langues occultes de la Renaissance. Essai sur la crise intellectuelle de l'Europe au XVI^e siècle*. Paris, Éditions Desjonquères, 1996, pp. 61-89. On stone and metal amulets, see Cherry, John: «Healing through Faith: The Continuation of Medieval Attitudes to Jewelry into the Renaissance,» *Renaissance Studies* 15.2 (March 2001), pp. 154-71.

16. It is important to note, however, that pilgrim badges, openly displayed on hats and coats, also had an amuletic function, as they were believed to protect the pilgrim on the journey home. Usually made of cheap metal, they could also be fashioned of paper or parchment; Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 68-69.

17. Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 360.

18. On the magical efficacy of words, see Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 75-124 and Clark, Stuart: *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 281-93. On belief in the power of divine and angelic names, see *idem* pp. 107-15.

19. See its use, for example, in the popular compilation supposedly authored by Pope Leo III (750-816), *Manuel ou, Enchiridion de prieres*. Lyon, N.p., 1584, 1-2, which appeared in Latin in 1525 and in French translation first in 1579.

easily pull out and recite from or meditate upon when needed. Many remedies or preservatives suggested that texts not only be worn but also be spoken at regular intervals or in times of crisis, a performative ritual thought to enhance their efficacy.[20] At the same time, as Massé attests, wearing a text could also substitute for saying it from memory. Describing the simple pious practices of good Catholics, he writes «there are those who say the Gospel of Saint John *In principio* every day, and those who don't know it, wear it written on them.»[21]

Short narratives of saints' lives, prayers to them, and their images, which survive in relatively large numbers in collections today, were commonly worn as vehicles for the saints' curative or protective powers. One extant early sixteenth-century amulet from Normandy filled with prayers to several saints promises its wearer protection from natural and supernatural perils of all kinds thanks to its origin at Mary's tomb, here located in Rome:

> This prayer was found in Rome on the tomb of the virgin Mary. And it has such virtue that whoever will say it or have it said once a day or will wear it in written form on himself /... will never die by water / nor by fire / nor in battle / nor by sudden death nor by lightning. Nor will a storm happen wherever it will be. And if he who wears it had a demon in his body, he will leave soon. And for the woman in labor, she will soon give birth without peril.[22]

Though many texts promise such comprehensive apotropaic or cure-all properties, saints were also invoked according to their specific healing attributes. For instance, Saint Margaret aided women in childbirth, while Saint Roch and Saint Sebastian protected those threatened by plague, whose swift and lethal ravages in medieval and early modern Europe made it the disease from which people most frequently sought specific amuletic protection. The *Devout prayer to say in times of plague*, published in Paris in 1619, contains a series of prayers—including invocations of the Virgin Mary, Saint Roch, and Saint Sebastian—to protect or cure its bearer from the contagion.[23] The accompanying directions for its use highlight the versatility and accessibility of such short devotional tracts. For the literate user, the prayers provided a portable script complete with detailed instructions for their daily use, while for the unlettered, the prayers could instead be worn. As the text itself

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On the *Enchiridion*, see Deonna, Waldemar: «À l'escalade de 1602. Les 'billets' du Père Alexandre,» *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 40.3-4 (1942-44), pp. 82-87. On the Gospel of John's use, see Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 87-89.

20. Natural magic saw the physical pronouncement of words as invigorating them with life force. See, for example, Agrippa of Nettesheim, Henry Cornelius: *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed. by Tyson, Donald and trans. by Freake, James. Woodbury, MN, Llewellyn Publications, 2006, p. 211. On the power of both spoken and written words see p. 213 and p. 221.

21. «il y en a qui disent tous les jours l'Evangile de sainct Jean *In principio*, & ceux qui ne le sçavent, le portent escript sur eux;» Massé, Pierre. *Op. cit.* fol. 46r.

22. «Ceste Oraison a este trouvee a Romme sur le sepulchre de la vierge Marie. Et a telle vertu que qui la dira ou fera dire une foys le jour ou la portera sur soy en escript / ... ne mourra en eau / ne en feu / ne en bataille / ne de mort subite ne fouldre : ne tempeste ne cherra ou elle sera. Et se cil qui la portera avoit l'ennemy dedens le corps bien tost departira. Et femme qui travaille denfant : bien tost enfantera sans peril;» *La Mesure de la plaie de Jésus Christ*. N.p., n.p., n.d., fols. 1v-2r. Mary's tomb is actually located in Jerusalem.

23. *Dévote oraison pour dire en temps de peste*. Paris, Mathurin Hénault, 1619. Originally produced in a Portuguese convent suffering from an outbreak, the text was reprinted in French translation.

FIGURE 1: WOODCUT OF SAINT ROCH DISPLAYING THE BUBO ON HIS THIGH TO AN ANGEL, JEAN PHELIPOT, *LA VIE SAINCT ROCH PRESERVATEUR DE LA PESTE & EPIDIMIE*. N.P., P. LE CARON, 1494, FOL. 1R. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

specifies, «and those who do not know how to read can wear it.»[24] Here again, the prayers' sacred power was thus believed to be communicated to its bearer through physical contact alone.

Printed amulets most often combined textual and iconographic elements, a hybridity that both diversified the functionality of the amulet and rendered it more accessible to a wider public. Images, typically appearing as broadsides or as the first recto or last verso of short booklets, as in the surviving amulets examined here, provided powerfully portable visuals that could be taken out and meditated upon when the need arose. The position of woodcuts on either end of these small, lightweight, four to eight-leaf texts allowed for their easy contemplation and facilitated their being pressed directly against the body for transmission of their healing or protective power. The inclusion of images increased these texts' availability to a wider population who, while perhaps unable to read the accompanying texts, understood the images and likely knew the prayers quoted within by heart. Jean Phelipot's 1494 *Life of Saint Roch protector from the plague and epidemic*, an account of the saint's life accompanied by a compilation of prayers, displays on its first recto a woodcut of Saint Roch unveiling the bubo on his thigh to an angel who carries a remedy, just as the saint would heal the sick who invoked him (Figure 1).[25] Like images of Saint Roch that were commonly paraded through towns or hung on walls of homes and monasteries in times of plague to preserve their inhabitants from the dreaded contagion, so might wearing his image on one's person protect that individual from contracting it.[26] Thiers recounts his first-hand experience with another common textual amulet composed of both an inscription and an image to invoke the aid of the three Magi. General protection and cure were sought, he writes, «by wearing upon oneself an image representing the adoration of these same Kings, with this inscription: THREE HOLY KINGS, GASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHASAR, *pray for us, now and in the hour of our death*.» «In 1679,» he recalls, «I found one of these images enclosed in a tin phylactery hung at the neck of a young child.»[27]

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24. «& ceux qui ne sçauroit lire la pourront porter;» *Idem* n. pag. [3].

25. PHELIPOT, Jean: *La vie sainct roch preservateur de la peste & epidimie*. N.p., P. Le Caron, 1494, fol. 1r. Similarly, a woodcut of Saint Margaret appears on the first recto of her life; *La vie de Madame Sainte Marguerite*. N.p., n.p., n.d., fol. 1r.

26. PHELIPOT, Jean. *Op. cit.* fols. 11v.-12v.

27. «en portant sur soi une image qui represente l'adoration des mêmes Rois, avec cette inscription: SANCTI TRES REGES, GASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHASAR, *orate pro nobis, nunc & in hora mortis nostra*[.] En 1679. je trouvai une de ces images enfermée dans un phylactère d'étain pendu au cou d'un petit enfant;» THIERS, Jean-Baptiste: *Traité des superstitions*, 2nd ed. Paris, Antoine Dezallier, 1697, p. 408. Emphasis in original.

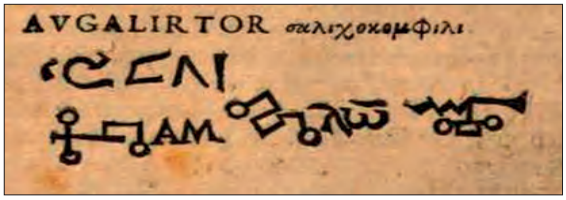

FIG. 2 . PARACELSUS, OPERA, BÜCHER UND SCHRIFFTEN [...], 2. TEIL. DIE MAGISCHEN UND ASTROLOGISCHEN BÜCHER [...], STRASSBURG, L. ZETZNERS ERBEN, 1616, II, P. 548.

Binding practices also reflected the belief that powerful words and images, like natural elements and plasters frequently used in medicine, infused their virtues through bodily contact.[28] Remedies called for prepared texts to be placed directly over or be attached to the afflicted member or organ, so that the words or images they contained could infuse their healing powers precisely where they were needed, as seen in the common placement of textual amulets over the heart. Hanging texts from the neck, the most common and convenient way to wear them, or carrying them in a breast pocket put them in direct communication with the heart, the center of the physical and spiritual self. The verse accompanying the Saint Roch woodcut in the plague amulet examined above (Figure 1) issues an implicit invitation to place the saint's image over that central, life-sustaining organ, affirming that «Whoever will serve Saint Roch *with heart*, / Will be preserved from plague.»[29] Positioning texts over the heart was particularly common in remedies for fever, as in a standard prescription relayed by Thiers of a *novena*, a nine-day series of prayers that invoked both the trinity and the virgin Mary, concluding with the injunction «and these words must be worn at the neck.»[30] Similarly, Swiss physician-alchemist-astrologer Theophrastus von Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus (1493-1541), suggests a cure for impotence that involves writing and wrapping a sign-filled band of parchment around the penis (Figure 2): «You will change this membrane every day, and do this during nine days, in the morning with the sunrise. You will roll the aforesaid membrane at the spot that is uncovered when the foreskin is a bit retracted.»[31]

Bearers of textual amulets may have seen significance in the way in which the texts they wore were folded, just as they often did in how they were written or bound to the body. The physical shape of the signs upon its support was also often thought to influence a cure. A common ancient remedy for fever and inflammation reported by Thiers, for example, prescribes wearing the word «ABPACAΔABPA,» the word that we are accustomed to hearing today as «abracadabra,» written in the shape of an inverted cone, intended to encourage the disease's power over its victim to lessen, just as the cone diminishes from top to bottom, as reproduced by Thiers in his treatise

28. On the medical belief that amulets worked through contact with the flesh, see BALDWIN, Martha R.: «Toads and Plague: The Amulet Controversy in Seventeenth-Century Medicine,» *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 67.2, 1993, pp. 227-47.

29. «Qui sainct roch de cueur servira. / De peste preserve sera;» PHELIPOT, Jean. *Op. cit.* fol. 1r. My emphasis.

30. «il faut... & porter ces paroles à son cou;» THIERS, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 403. Words worn at the neck were thought to cure many other afflictions including rabies, eye trouble, and toothache; *idem* p. 355 and p. 418 and FERNEL, Jean: *On the Hidden Causes of Things [De abditis rerum causis]. Forms, Souls and Occult Diseases in Renaissance Medicine*, ed. and trans. by FORRESTER, John M. and HENRY, John. Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2005, p. 667.

31. «Tu changeras cette membrane tous les jours, et cela pendant neuf jours, le matin avec le lever du Soleil. Tu rouleras ladite membrane à l'endroit qui se découvre quand le prepuce est quelque peu rétracté;» PARACELSUS. *Op. cit.* bk. p. 1, 27. Weyer ridicules a similar remedy against impotence; WEYER, Johann. *Op. cit.* p. 464.

(Figure 3).[32] Likewise, certain more elaborate bindings carried symbolic significance. Another prescription for fever required attaching a prayer to the right arm with needle and thread: «You fold this text saying in the name of the Father, etc. Then you attach it to the right arm of the fever Sufferer with five suture points of red thread, also saying *in the name of the Father, etc.* It must be worn for nine days. It is attached while fasting.»[33] Here the curative text and the flesh become one through the embroidery of the arm of the feverish patient, the five suture points by which the text is attached in red thread symbolically incising the body with the five wounds of Jesus Christ, the *stigmata.*[34]

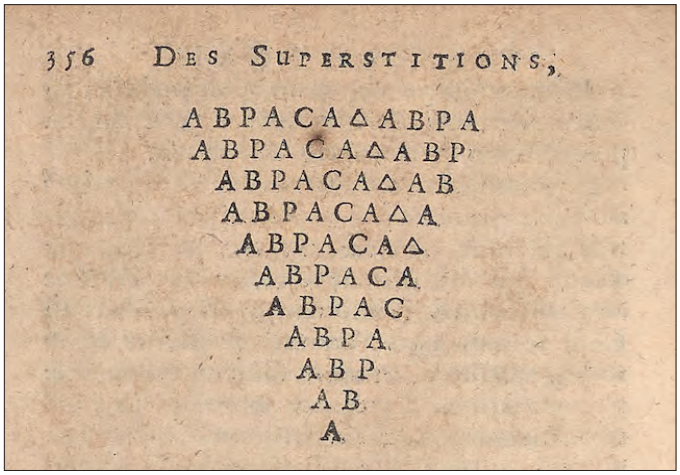

FIGURE 3: JEAN-BAPTISTE THIERS'S REPRODUCTION OF THE «ABRACADABRA» CONE AMULET, IN HIS *TRAITÉ DES SUPERSTITIONS SELON L'ÉCRITURE SAINTE, LES DECRETS DES CONCILES, ET LES SENTIMENS DES SAINTS PERES, ET DES THEOLOGIENS*. PARIS, ANTOINE DEZALLIER, 1679, P. 356. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Textual amulets that invoked the power of Christ's body—and in particular of his bleeding body—occupied an important place in amuletic tradition. The full-body representation of Christ featured on the final verso of another early sixteenth-century prayer compilation could be meditated upon or worn against the body, allowing for intimate communication with Christ's body and his protective power (Figure 4).[35] Wearing Christ's image next to the skin was perhaps the next best thing to having it tattooed there, as Jerusalem pilgrims routinely did on their inner arms beginning in the late sixteenth century.[36] In this amuletic text, we learn that Christ's image was made to correspond to the widely used apotropaic «Measure of Christ» (*mensura Christi*) or «Length of Christ» (*longitudo Christi*), a measurement that when multiplied by fifteen, was believed to calculate Christ's actual height, intensifying

32. THIERS, Jean-Baptiste. *Op cit.* 2nd ed. (1697), pp. 355-56. The ancient incantation is first attributed to a poem appearing in second-century physician Serenus Sammonicus's *De Medicina Praecepta*; SKEMER, Don C. *Op. cit.* p. 25.

33. «On ploie ce billet disant au nom du Pere, &c. puis on l'attache au bras droit du Fébricitant avec cinq aiguillées de fil cramoisi : disant aussi *au nom du Pere, &c.* On le doit porter neuf jours : on le met à jeun;» This remedy is attributed to Agrippa von Nettesheim by the anonymous *Les* Œuvres *magiques de Henri-Corneille Agrippa*. Liège, n.p., 1788, p. 105. Emphasis in original.

34. Contemporary mystic Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon (1648-1717) similarly attached the sacred name of Christ to her skin with pins and ribbons; GUYON, Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte: *Vie par elle-même*, ed. by SAHLER, B. (ed.), Paris, Dervy-Livre, 1983, pp. 39-40.

35. *La Mesure de la plaie*. *Op. cit.* fol. 4v.

36. On pilgrimage tattoos, see: FLEMING, Juliet: «The Renaissance Tattoo,» in CAPLAN, Jane (ed.), *Op. cit.* pp. 61-82; LEWY, Mordechay: «Jerusalem unter der Haut. Zur Geschichte der Jerusalemer Pilgertätowierung,» trans. by KONTARSKY, Esther, *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 55.1 (2003), pp. 1-39, first published in Hebrew under the English title «Towards a History of Jerusalem Tattoo Marks among Western Pilgrims,» *Cathedra* 95 (2000), pp. 37-66; OUSTERHOUT, Robert: «Permanent Emphemera: The 'Honourable Stigmatisation' of Jerusalem Pilgrims» in *Between Jerusalem and Europe: Essays in Honour of Bianca Kühnel*, ed. by BARTAL, Renana and VORHOLT, Hanna, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2015, pp. 94-109; and my own *Signing the Body: Marks on Skin in Early Modern France*. New York and London, Routledge, forthcoming 2019.

FIGURE 4: FULL-BODY WOODCUT IMAGE OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE FINAL VERSO OF THE ANONYMOUS *LA MESURE DE LA PLAIE DE JÉSUS CHRIST*. N.P., N.P., N.D., FOL. 4V.
Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the amulet's protective power.[37] Sixteenth and seventeenth-century prayer compilations also attest to the wide distribution of the representation of Christ's side wound for purposes of healing or self-preservation. The story of Longinius, said to have pierced the side of Christ with a lance, gave rise in the ninth and tenth centuries to the wearing of representations of that wound, a tradition easily translated from manuscript illumination to print beginning in the late fifteenth century.[38] Woodcuts of the almond-shaped wound, labeled as having been made life-size—equal to «the measure of the wound of Jesus Christ»—imitated earlier manuscript representations, though they lacked their vivid blood-red coloring. The wound was usually framed by a diamond and surrounded by a text that told the story of its origin and power, as it is presented in the early sixteenth-century amulet discussed above and pictured below (Figure 5).[39] Those who meditated upon the to-scale representation of the wound or wore it on their bodies were believed to be immune to pain or to heal faster. Wearing it reputedly slowed hemorrhaging as well, making it particularly popular among parturient women, threatened by the dangers of blood loss during miscarriage and birth. Another early seventeenth-century engraving of the wound, published in a short composite text of the life of Saint Margaret and «the Fifteen Effusions of blood of our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ» was meant specifically for use by laboring women.[40] But, as its accompanying explanation reveals, the wound's touted apotropaic powers extended to protection from dangers of all sorts, having first protected Charlemagne and his soldiers in battle, another occasion for bloodletting:

> This is the measurement of the side wound of our Savior Jesus Christ, which was brought from Constantinople to the Emperor Charlemagne in a gold chest, as a precious relic, so that no enemy could do him harm, and has such power that he or she who reads

37. See Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 142-43, 151-52, 224, and 248-49.

38. On this tradition in late medieval manuscripts, See Bozóky, Edina: «La Blessure qui guérit,» in Cordier, Pierre and Jahan, Sébastien (eds.): *La Blessure corporelle. Violences et souffrances, symboles et représentations*. *Les Cahiers du Gerhico* 4 (2003), pp. 7-24. See also Skemer, Don C., *Op. cit.* p. 248, fig. 10 for a manuscript amulet (Princeton MS 138.44) for parturient women that includes the wound's representation. On its use as a blood staunching charm, see *idem* p. 207 and Sparrow Simpson, W.: «On the Measure of the Wound in the Side of the Redeemer, Most Anciently Worn as a Charm, and on the Five Wounds as Represented in Art,» *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 30, 1874, pp. 357-74.

39. «la mesure de la playe du costé nostre seigneur Jesuchrist;» *La Mesure de la plaie*. *Op. cit.* fol. 1r and fols. 3v-4r. The representation of Christ's wound and that of the «measure of Christ,» discussed above, are often conflated.

40. «les Quinze Effusions du sang de nostre Sauveur & Redempteur Jesus-Christ;» *La vie de Madame Sainte Marguerite*. The wound woodcut and accompanying text appear on 8v.

> it or who has it read, or wears it on their person, neither fire, nor water, nor wind, nor tempest, nor knife, lance or sword, nor devil will be able to harm, and the woman who gives birth the day she sees the aforesaid measurement, will not die suddenly in childbirth, but will be delivered easily. And any man who wears it on himself out of devotion, and bears witness to it, will gain honor and victory over his enemies, and they will not be able to hurt him or to do him wrong. And any day that he reads it, he will not die a bad death. Amen.[41]

On a symbolic level, amulets featuring Christ's open side wound provided flesh to flesh contact between Christ's body and the body that sought protection from harm. Here again, engravings of the wound consistently appeared on the exterior first recto or final verso of these booklets, allowing the wound's image to be easily worn directly against the skin.

In addition to providing protection from disease, hemorrhaging, and other dangers, textual amulets found their most widespread acceptance and even encouragement by Catholic authorities as a defense against malevolent influences. In a period marked by the pursuit of witches and demons, who themselves were believed to use *malificia*—hidden texts, images, or objects—to do evil, Catholic theologians continued to defend the use of sacred words, symbols and images worn on the body as effective shields against the devil, a practice dating from early Christianity. Not surprisingly, the cross, the «original and true character» of a Christian metaphorically imprinted upon them at birth, and used throughout the rites of the Catholic Church, was the sign of choice, as demonologist, linguist and poet Pierre Le Loyer (1550-1634) relates, purposefully choosing the terms *charactere* and *phylactere*, so often used in the negative to describe practices deemed superstitious, to make his point:

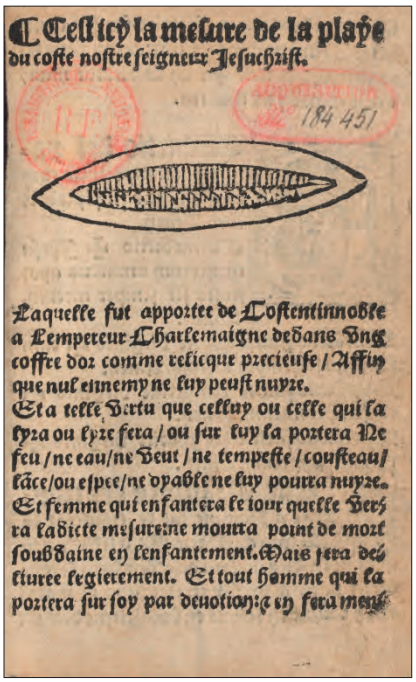

FIGURE 5: WOODCUT OF JESUS CHRIST'S SIDE WOUND, *LA MESURE DE LA PLAIE DE JÉSUS CHRIST*. N.P., N.P., N.D., FOL. 1R. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

> [T]he cross is the true character, the Symbol, the guardian and the Phylactery to arm man against the devil, who hates nothing more than this sign that reminds him that he was undone and conquered by it, through Jesus Christ, and death overcome. The coat of arms appropriate for Christians is the Cross.[42]

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41. «C'est icy la mesure de la playe du costé de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ, laquelle fut apportee de Constantinople à L'Empereur Charlemaigne dedans un coffre d'or, comme relique pretiuese, afin que nul ennemy ne luy peut nuire, & a telle vertu que celuy ou celle qui la lira ou lire la fera, ou sur soy la portera, ne feu, ne l'eau, ne vent, ne tempeste, cousteau. lance ou espee, ne diable ne luy pourra nuire, et la femme qui enfantera le jour qu'elle verra ladicte mesure, ne mourra point de mort soudaine en l'enfantement : mais sera delivree legerement. Et tout homme qui la portera sur soy par devotion, & en fera mention, aura honneur & victoire sur ses ennemis, et ne peut-on le grever ne luy faire dommage. Et le jour qu'on la lira, de mauvaise mort on ne mourra. Amen;» *La vie de Madame Sainte Marguerite*. *Op. cit.* 8v. A «life-size» figure of the wound of Christ also appears in the *Enchiridion de prieres*. *Op. cit.* p. 133.

42. «[L]a croix est le vray charactere, le Symbole, la garde & le Phylactere pour munir l'homme contre le diable, qui ne hait rien plus que ce signe qui luy met en souvenance qu'il a esté deconfit & debellé en iceluy, par Jesus-Christ, & la mort vaincuë. Les armes propres des Chrestiens c'est la Croix;» LOYER, Pierre: *Discours des spectres* [1586 as *Quatre livres des spectres*, expanded 1605], 2nd ed., Paris, Nicolas Buon, 1608, p. 900.

For Jesuit theologian Martín Antonio Del Río (1551-1608), too, the cross was a powerful apotropaic: «at this sign alone all the magical arts fade away, and ... the poisons remain without force or power... [O]ut of fear of this sign alone, Demons run away.»[43] Among other effective and legitimate defenses against the devil, Del Río also lists several textual amulets based on scripture: «pious writings and texts, or sacred AMULETS hung from the neck, like the Apostles' Creed, the Gospel of Saint John, which begins *In the beginning was the word*, or some other selection from a Psalm.»[44] The names and images of Jesus, the holy family, and the saints were also considered highly effective protective amulets.

The Catholic rite of exorcism made extensive use both of the sign of the cross and of sacred texts and images worn on the body. To testify to the appropriateness and effectiveness of wearing sacred texts to fend off malevolent forces, Le Loyer recounts at length the success story of a cure for demonic obsession. When a man, worried by his tormented wife's demonic visions asked Flemish Jesuit Gaspar Berze (1515-1553) for help, the priest, too busy to attend to her in person, provided him instead with the opening words of the Gospel of John that brought about her cure:

> [N]ot wanting to disappoint the husband entirely, he wrote on a half sheet of paper the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John and gave it to the husband, telling him to attach it to his wife's neck. The husband obeyed Berzey, and it resulted, thanks to the faith that he had in the written text and the holy words of the Gospel, that his wife found herself cured and got out of bed healthy and well disposed, having not had or felt diabolical visions since.[45]

The use of such texts to ward off demons found authoritative approval in Maximilien van Eynatten's (1574-1631) Church-commissioned 1626 *Manuale Exorcismorum*. Van Eynatten likens the practice to the use of relics and *agnus dei*, pendants representing Christ as the sacrificed lamb of God.[46] His extensive instructions to the exorcist affirm that «[i]n addition to the pious custom of wearing relics and 'Agnus Dei,' antiquity allows and advises the devotional wearing of holy objects of piety such as the Apostles' Creed, the beginning of the Gospel of Saint

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43. «à ce seul signe touts les arts magiques s'evanouyssent, &... les venefices demeurent sans force & vertu ... [À] la seule crainte de ce signe, les Demons s'enfuyront;» DEL RÍO, Martín Antoine. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1050-51. Catholic theologians consistently refer back to the legend that Emperor Constantine (272-337), after converting to Christianity, had reputedly made the Labarum cross his army's standard and worn it as a protective amulet on his right arm. See, for example, MASSÉ, Pierre. *Op. cit.* fols. 45v-46r. On Constantine's conversion, see Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* I. pp. 27-28, qtd. and trans. in ODAHL, Charles Maston: *Constantine and the Christian Empire*. London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 105 and 98.

44. «les escrits & billets pieux, ou les sacrez AMULETES pendus au col, comme le Symbole des Apostres, l'Evangile de Monsieur sainct Jean, qui commence *In principio erat verbum*, ou bien quelque particule de Psaume;» DEL RÍO, Martín Antoine. *Op. cit.* p. 1054. See also PLACET, François: *La Superstition du Temps*. Paris, La Veufve Gervais Alliot, & Gilles Alliot, 1668, pp. 118-19, who is responding to Jean-Albert Belin's assertion that the cross and the name of Jesus must be rejected as magical talismans in BELIN, Jean-Albert: *Les Talismans justifiez*. Paris, P. de Bresche, 1658, p. 104.

45. «Et toutefois ne voulant de tous points malcontenter le mary, il escrivit en demie feuille de papier le commancement de l'Evangile de sainct Jean & le bailla au mary, luy disant qu'il l'attachast au col de sa femme. Le mary obeïst à Berzey, & de là s'ensuivit par la foy qu'il eut à l'écrit & paroles sainctes de l'Evangile, que sa femme se trouva guerie & se leva du lit saine & dispôte, sans que depuis elle eust ou sentist des visions diaboliques;» LE LOYER, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 949.

46. John the Baptist refers to Christ this way in John 1:29.

John or a particular Psalm.»[47] Placing sacred texts upon the afflicted individual's body thus continued to play an important role in the arsenal of defenses against the demonic in the seventeenth century. Period exorcists and witch trial judges too were counseled to shield themselves from evil influences by wearing protective amulets on their own bodies, advice inherited from the 1487 *Malleus maleficarum*:

> [A]s we have said before, the Judge should wear round his neck Consecrated Salt and other matters, with the Seven Words which Christ uttered on the Cross written in a schedule, and all bound together. And he should, if he conveniently can, wear these made into the length of Christ's stature against his naked body, and bind other Holy things about him. For it is shown by experience that witches are greatly troubled by these things, and can hardly refrain from confessing the truth.[48]

The use of textual amulets in the closely monitored context of exorcism thus continued to receive widespread approval from Catholic Reformation theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, determining their admissibility as pious practice in their everyday use would prove far more problematic.

DEFINING SUPERSTITION

As Stuart Clark has argued in *Thinking with Demons* and the sheer volume and numerous editions of the many works that deal with superstition and popular errors in the period confirm, the concept of superstition was «immensely important to contemporaries» in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, «more so, arguably, than any other time in European history.»[49] Linked to the major social, religious, and intellectual movements of the day—religious reformation, acculturation, and demonology—superstition became the greatest of all moral vices.[50] Belief in the power of worn words, signs and images to heal or protect their bearer came under intense scrutiny from both Protestants and Catholics in the dueling campaigns

47. «[o]utre le pieux usage de porter des reliques et des 'Agnus Dei,' l'antiquité permet et conseille le port religieux de saints objets de piété tels le Symbole des Apôtres, le début de l'Évangile de saint Jean ou d'un psaume particulier;» Van Eynatten, Maximilian: *Manuale exorcismorum/Manuel d'exorcismes* [Antwerp, Plantiniana B. Moreti, 1626]. Paris, Édition Communication Prestige, 1995, p. 27. Van Eynatten's manual was published in 1618, 1626, and 1648 and in several editions of the *Thesaurus Exorcismorum*. Cologne, Laar Zezner, [1608] 1626.

48. Institoris, Heinrich and Sprenger, Jakob. *Op. cit.* pt. 3, qu. 16, 231. Translation by Montague Summers.

49. Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* p. 474. See also Monter, William: «The Assault on Supersition, 1680-1725,» in his *Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe*. Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1983, pp. 114-29. Popular and learned magical practices received significant treatment in the Protestant and Catholic demonologies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, including: Weyer, Johann. *De Præstigiis dæmonum* (1563), *Op. cit*., translated into French as *Cinq Livres de l'Imposture et Tromperie des Diables: Des enchantements et sorcelleries*, trans. Grévin, Jacques. Paris, Jacques Dupuys, 1567 and again as *Histoires, disputes et discours des illusions et impostures des diables*. Geneva, Jacques Chovet, 1579; Le Loyer, Pierre: *Discours de spectres* (1586), *Op. cit.*; Del Río, Martín Antoine: *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*. Louvain: Gerard Rivius, 1599, republished in Lyons in 1608, translated as *Les Controverses et recherches magiques*, *Op. cit.*; Boguet, Henry: *Discours execrable des sorciers*. Paris, Denis Binet, 1602, 2nd edition 1603; and De Lancre, Pierre: *L'incrédulité et mescréance du sortilège plainement convaincue* (1622) *Op. cit*. These are followed by two major theological treatises devoted to superstition: Thiers, Jean-Baptiste: *Traité des superstitions* (1679 and 1697), *Op. cit*. and Lebrun, Pierre: *Histoire critique des pratiques* superstitieuses (1702), *Op. cit*.

50. Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* pp. 474-75.

against superstition that marked this period. Vehement Protestant critiques only raised the stakes for Catholic reformers, demanding clearer definitions and fixed criteria by which the licit or illicit nature of worn words and images could be securely determined. Moreover, the notoriety of learned natural magic and the proliferation of its teachings at the close of the sixteenth century, coupled with popular magical practices that both drew from these and informed them, surely contributed to making practices of wearing words ever more worrisome to clerics, who attacked the sign-filled rituals of occult philosophers side-by-side with more popular renditions of their prescriptions.[51]

While Catholic Reformers struggled to reign in popular practices that contradicted the teachings of the Church, the persistence and ambiguous status within Catholicism of rites such as exorcism that invested textual objects worn on the body with protective or transformative power served as excellent fodder for Protestant critique. As part of a larger condemnation of what they saw as Catholic superstition—directed against the cult of the saints, the cult of relics, and the doctrine of transubstantiation—Protestant authorities roundly critiqued the wearing of words and belief in their efficacy as yet another Catholic ritual tinged with magical elements. For them, belief in healing by the power of words was a particularly terrible form of superstition, because it not only revealed a lack of faith, but also represented a manipulation of divine power by human hands—like the sacrament of the Eucharist—and reeked with idolatry—like the cult of saints and the cult of relics. Protestant leader Martin Luther (1483-1546) warns his followers to beware of textual practices that he associates with «godless papists» and sorcerers, placing Catholics and magicians in the same camp:

> It is... a frightful misuse and a piece of witchery to write the words «In the beginning was the Word» on a slip of paper, incase this in a quill or some other container, and hang it around one's neck or somewhere else; or to read these words as a protective charm against thunder and storm, as was customary in the papacy. Sorcerers also have the habit of misusing the names of Jesus, Mary; of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; of the holy three kings; also the words: «Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews» in connection with their knavery and whoremongering.[52]

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51. On the importance of not drawing absolute distinctions between learned and popular healing practices in the early modern period, see Brockliss, Laurence and Jones, Colin: *The Medical World of Early Modern France*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 276-83. The ideas, rituals, and recipes of learned magic had much in common with healing and apotropaic practices that issued from popular lore. Moreover, the works of occult philosophers knew wide currency through translations and popular compilations that circulated throughout France in the offerings of the *Bibliothèque bleue*—a collection produced specifically for distribution to a wide public; Mandrou, Robert: *De la culture populaire aux dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles. La Bibliothèque bleue de Troyes*. Paris, Imago, 1999, esp. 45 and 80-86. Agrippa von Nettesheim's (1486-1535) *Three Books* were first published in Latin in Antwerp and sold in Paris beginning in 1531. The first complete edition was published in Cologne in 1533, and again in Lyon shortly after Agrippa's death, with the first English translation dating from 1651; Agrippa. *Op. cit.* xxxix-xl. Other occult philosophers influential in France and beyond include Marsilo Ficino (1433-1499), Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525), Paracelsus (1493-1541), Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576), Antoine Mizauld (1510-1578), and Giovanni Battista Della Porta (1535?-1615). See also Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* pp. 219-20.

52. Luther, Martin: «Sermons on the Gospel of St. John,» chapters 1-4, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Joaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1957, vol. 22, pp. 106-07. Words become powerful, according to Luther, only when used by «true Christians» exercising their faith; Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* p. 467.

Protestant physician and demonologist Johann Weyer (1515-1588), who also likened Catholics to magicians for their belief in the power of words and images, specifies that he «stole from the priest» the magical formulas he quotes in his treatise, so «that all may clearly see the need for exploding everywhere this nonsense about periapts, characters, figures, rings, images, and all other such prodigies.»[53] Weyer accuses priests of propagating superstitious faith in these methods and ridicules those who put their faith in them, telling the tale of his wife's intervention in the life of a young girl supposedly possessed by demons, whose priest had given her a leather-wrapped textual placebo to wear to keep her demons at bay.[54] In Weyer's tale, his wife triumphantly saves the girl from the sacrilegious methods of the priest, throwing the amulet into the fire, admonishing her and her family for their idolatrous belief in the power of a piece of paper, and instructing her in a righteous, superstition-free—Protestant—faith in God.

While such accusations of superstitious beliefs and practices were certainly a mainstay of Protestant invective against the Catholic Church and central to the confessional controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestant and Catholic reformers, despite their differences, shared a common enemy in superstition and fought against it with equal discursive might, drawing many of their arguments from a common patristic heritage.[55] As Clark underlines, combatting superstition was a primary focus of both Protestant and Catholic reformation movements, for it «defined in the broadest theological and moral terms what religious reformation was actually about» and served as «a cultural weapon directed by churchmen primarily at the populace at large (although also, of course, at their clerical competitors).»[56]

The wearing of texts and belief in their efficacy was problematic on the most basic level for reformers of both Protestant and Catholic persuasions because it risked privileging materiality over meaning. As many of the remedies and prescriptions reproduced above suggest, no matter how pious the contents, makers and users of textual amulets might mistake the words themselves, their physical form, the ink with which they were made, or the paper upon which they were written, as the source of their cure or protection, rather than looking to God for deliverance. For Protestant writers such as Weyer, wearing words represented the epitome of Catholic idolatry. Protestants drew from Augustine (354-430), who had devoted substantial attention to the subject of superstition in his writings and denounced all binding of textual amulets to the body as pagan magic, and from John Chrysostom (ca. 349-407), for whom attention to the materiality of the text distracted the Christian from according proper attention to truly understanding the divine word.[57]

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53. Weyer, Johann. *Op. cit.* p. 397. All translations of Weyer's text are by John Shea.

54. *Idem,* pp. 416-17.

55. Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* p. 468. For in-depth treatment of Protestant rhetoric on superstition, see pp. 457-88. See also Thomas, Keith: *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, New York, Scribner, 1971, pp. 253-79.

56. Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* p. 475. For further analysis of early modern theologians' overarching definition of «superstition» see pp. 472-88.

57. Augustine: *On Christian Doctrine*, bk. 2, ch. 26. For comprehensive discussion and documentation of patristic and medieval sources on the question of textual amulets see Skemer, Don C. *Op. cit.* pp. 21-73. On Augustine

Weyer critiques the power Catholics invested in the commonly worn excerpt from the Gospel of John, jokingly suggesting that Protestants, who often carried the whole Bible with them, might then be assured of extra protection:

> One such [example] is the first chapter of John's Gospel, written in the tiniest letters upon a small piece of paper. It is consecrated during Mass and affixed to the neck, and it is thought to be a wonderful amulet against enchantment and against the Devil's machinations. But if this little paper is to be so effective, surely those who avowedly carry Sacred Scripture around at all times in their hands or in their sleeves will have a unique advantage against Satan's enterprises. But unless that Scripture take root in our hearts, where it is brought to reality by the heat of life, as it were, it remains a dead letter even if it be hung about our necks a thousand times, or attached to our persons, or carried about, or rubbed on, or muttered beneath the breath, or inscribed or imprinted upon seals or rings, or drunk, or eaten, or even swallowed whole.[58]

Theorizing spoken words as mere «beatings of air» and their written counterparts as «dead letters,» Weyer draws a contrast between faith in the materiality of the text hung from the neck and true faith, metaphorically inscribed in the heart, rather than worn on the chest. Quoting Chrysostom, he critiques the privileging of the materiality of the sacred text:

> Certain priests carry about their necks a written portion of the Gospel. But tell me, foolish priest, is not the Gospel read daily in Church and heard by all? If, then, the Gospels profit a man nothing when put into his ears, how can they save him when hung about his neck? Then too, wherein lies the power of the Gospel? In the shapes of the letters, or in an understanding of the sense? If in the shapes, then you do well to suspend them about your neck; if in the understanding, better for you that they be placed in the heart than hung about the neck.[59]

Weyer rejects belief in the ability of scripture to ward off the devil as idolatrous, for it attributes power to the words themselves, rather than to God alone:

> [I]t is surely an impious lie to claim that these words possess a power so great that the mere writing of the letters produces such wondrous effects. The efficacy of the Gospel does not depend upon written characters applied to this figure or that ring or seal or image; it depends upon a mystical power which works for the salvation of him who believes. But it is not the word spread upon the page that does this, or the word printed or engraved upon material of whatever sort, or fastened to the neck, or placed on the lintel, or buried in the ground beneath the threshold.[60]

Though Catholic theologians of the period also drew from the hardline approaches of Augustine and Chrysostom often cited by their Protestant counterparts, in

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and superstition, see also Brown, Peter: *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, University of California Press, 1967, pp. 413-18.

58. Weyer, Johann. *Op. cit.* p. 391.
59. *Idem,* pp. 391-92.
60. *Idem,* pp. 405-06, citing Romans 1:16.

developing standards for determining superstition they relied most on Thomas Aquinas's (ca. 1225-74) careful yet more moderate treatment of the subject in his *Summa Theologicæ* (1265-1274), where he asks: «Is it wrong to wear divine words suspended from the neck?»[61] While Aquinas reasoned that the wearing of sacred words to cure or protect was lawful given that relics could be worn to similar ends and that spoken words were often used to heal, he also established careful criteria for determining its licit or illicit nature.[62] Catholic reformers, however, were more reticent in their endorsement of the pious wearing of texts than was their scholastic forefather, in large part because of the Reformation context in which they wrote, where Catholic belief in the transformative power of relics and of words, both spoken and written, was under fire. Though, as discussed above, some carefully administered wearing of sacred symbols and texts continued to meet with qualified approval by the Catholic Church, pious uses of the worn text became more the exception than the rule.

Determining superstition based on the elements that composed the text was, of course, the most straightforward. Texts that included elements foreign to Christian tradition were easily dismissed as superstitious. Such «unknown and newly formed characters» met with intense criticism from Protestant and Catholic theologians alike, who targeted natural magicians with vehemence.[63] Church authorities attacked practices that used astrological symbols, letters from created cryptographic or non-Latin alphabets, and «barbarous names,» invented or taken from the Jewish Cabbala, manuals of «secrets,» and treatises of natural magic.[64] There was no question as to the diabolical origin of healing methods that applied such «monstrous characters» to the body.[65] Del Río recounts with distain how a healer «had the ill carried to the public square, and there publicly hung from their neck certain short texts filled with strange and diverse characters, with the names of some Demons, like *Bulfar*, *Narthim*, *Oleasar*, *Bilech*, *Mammon*, *Oriens*, and others like them.»[66]

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61. Aquinas, Thomas: *Summa Theologiæ*, Gilby, Thomas (ed.), 61 vols. Cambridge, London, and New York, Blackfriars, Eyre & Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill, 1964-76, qu. 96, art. 4, vol. p. 40, 80. I provide my own translation of the Latin section title «utrum suspendere divini verba ad collum sit illicitum,» as this edition shortens it in English translation. The *Malleus Malificarum*, which drew from Aquinas, was also a source for early modern demonologists; see pt. 2, qu. 2, ch. 6. For Catholics who present Augustine's position, see, for example, De Lancre, Pierre. *L'incrédulité et mescréance du sortilège*, *Op. cit.* pp. 404-05 and Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* pp. 281-82; for Chrysostom, see Del Río, *Controverses magiques*, p. 74, Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 280, and Le Loyer, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 890.

62. Aquinas, Thomas. *Op. cit.* pp. 81-83.

63. «characteres incongneus & de nouvelle forme;» Le Loyer, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 891. See also Massé, Pierre. *Op. cit.* fols. 45r-45v and Van Eynatten, Maximilian. *Op. cit.* p. 28.

64. Period demonologists show particular disdain for the use by natural magicians of textual elements drawn from the Hebrew tradition, the Cabbala representing one of the keystones for Renaissance magic. Neither Le Loyer nor Del Río hides his contempt for the use of the tefillin and phylacteries by «superstitious Jews,» a tradition these writers believed to have seeped into Christendom; Le Loyer, Pierre. *Op. cit.* pp. 889-98 and Del Río, Martín. *Op. cit.* pp. 986-87. On anti-Semitism among period theologians, see Zika, Charles: «Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy,» in *Exorcising Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 69-97 and Po-Chia Hsia, Ronnie: *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988.

65. Del Río, Martín. *Op. cit.* p. 989.

66. «faisoit porter les malades en la place publique, & pendoit là publiquement à leur col de certains brevets remplis d'estranges & divers caracteres, avec les noms de quelques Demons, comme *Bulfar*, *Narthim*, *Oleasar*, *Bilech*, *Mammon*, *Oriens*, & semblables;» *Idem*, p. 987 and p. 990. Del Río also attacks Parcelsus in particular, who

Likewise, any mixing of Christian and non-Christian or pseudo-Christian elements, typical of the texts that issued from or were informed by natural magical practice, rendered an amulet's use reprehensible. As Thiers reminds his readers, Aquinas had warned «that there be no vanity mixed in with sacred words.»[67] Theologians cautioned their readers to avoid «short texts in which people put down in writing the Gospels,... mixed with certain superstitious things,» and condemned healers who drew from heterogeneous traditions in their prescriptions, «us[ing] sometimes sacred words, sometimes monstrous and unintelligible words.»[68] Celestine Prior Pierre Crespet (1543-1594) describes his distaste for

> certain little books that [he] saw printed in Lyon, in which there are an infinity of Crosses, against being struck by a canon, a sword, or by lightning, and in which there are prayers inscribed *against all the world's perils*, and are contained several names of God taken from the Cabala, interspersed with diverse Crosses that signify well enough that this is superstition as condemned by the Church.[69]

Heterogeneity signaled superstition, the mixing of licit and illicit elements in textual amulets revealing on a micro level the much larger problem facing theologians in their battle against superstition: how to isolate and eliminate the «magical» from the «religious» in the beliefs and practices of ordinary people where they were often one and the same.

WEAR IT WELL

While texts that included non-Christian elements were easily categorized as superstitious, these were far less commonly used than mainstream religious texts—prayers, scripture, images of Christ or the saints, as we have seen from the examples examined above. The amuletic use of ostensibly «pure» sacred texts was, in fact, potentially all the more pernicious, since the devil might use the appearance of piety to corrupt Christians. Thiers responds to those who «believe that there is no sin in using Preservatives, Ligatures, Notes, and Prayers, etc., because all these things are composed of words taken from Scripture or the Religious Rites of the Church,» that the use of sacred texts often serves as a demonic ruse, through which

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was a Protestant and criticized for publishing in the vernacular and for borrowing remedies from local healers. On Paracelsian influence in France, see Brockliss, Laurence and Jones, Colin: *Op cit*., pp. 119-28; Dubus, Allen George: *The French Paracelsians: The Chemical Challenge to Medical and Scientific Tradition in Early Modern France*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002 and Kahn, Didier: *Alchemie et Paracelsisme en France à la fin de la Renaissance (1567-1625)*. Geneva, Droz, 2006.

67. «qu'il n'y ait quelque vanité meslée avec les paroles sacrées;» Thiers, Jean-Baptiste, *Op. cit.* p. 276.

68. «les brevets dans lesquels on couche les Evangiles, ... meslez avec certaines choses superstitieuses;» «us[ant] par fois de paroles sacrées, par fois de monstrueuses & non intelligibles;» De Lancre, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 403.

69. «certains petits livrets que j'ay veuz imprimez à Lyon, où il y a une infinité de Croix, contre les coups de canon d'estoc & de tonnerre, & où il y a des prieres inscrites *contra omnia mundi pericula*, & y sont contenus plusieurs noms de Dieu tirez de la Caballe, entre-lardez de diverses Croix qui signifient assez que c'est superstition condamnee par l'Eglise;» Crespet, Pierre. *Op. cit.*, fol. 157v. Emphasis in original.

«he teaches the abuse of the most holy things.»[70] As demonologist and judge Pierre De Lancre (1553-1631) highlights, by encouraging the amuletic use of sacred texts the devil thus leads Christians down a slippery slope, «persuading them that if some good comes out of it, that it comes from the strength of the powerful words taken from the Church of God and from sacred characters alone, and not from him, the bad Demon, who remains behind the Curtain, always hiding.»[71] Indeed, for early modern theologians, the devil could always be found lurking in the shadows of popular magical-religious practice.

The more difficult problem facing Catholic Reformers, then, was the task of determining whether or not seemingly pious amulets were crafted and worn with proper intent. In response, they borrowed criteria from Aquinas, whose recommendations echo Chrysostom's earlier critique. Del Río presents Aquinas' two major conditions for the licit use of textual amulets as follows:

> The first, that there be nothing superstitious mixed in among the pious words, for example, if someone had faith in the shape or the color of the letters, in the way it was written, or in the material the text is made of, or in the ink. The second, that the intention of he who wears it upon himself be good and righteous, so that while he respects the pious meaning of the words, he puts all his hope in God, and he wears it, either as a mark and profession of his belief, or for another healthy and pious end, and he expects the outcome from divine power.[72]

Aquinas's conditions ask where the creator and bearer of the text put their faith. As long as Christians pay no attention to the text's materiality or to the conditions of its production and they seek protection or cure from God alone rather than putting their trust in the words themselves, they can wear sacred texts without risking superstition, as Del Río underlines:

> [W]hen no hope is attached to the words, to the way they are written, to the number of Crosses, to the shape, or other similar things, it is a holy and pious thing to wear on oneself out of reverence... the Gospel of Saint John, a Psalm of David, and similar passages of holy Scripture hung from the neck.[73]

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70. «croyent qu'il n'y a point de peché à se servir de Preservatifs, de Ligatures, de Billets, d'Oraisons &c. parce que toutes ces choses sont composées de paroles tirées de l'Ecriture-Sainte, ou des Offices de l'Eglise;» «il enseigne l'abus des choses les plus saintes;» Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 445.

71. «[l]eur persuadans, que s'il arrive quelque bon effect de cela, qu'il vient de la seule force des paroles substantielles tirees de l'Eglise de Dieu & des cayers sacrez, & non de luy qui est mauvais Demon, qui pense estre derriere le Rideau, & s'y tenir tousjours à couvert;» De Lancre, Pierre. *Op. cit.* pp. 401-02. See also 33-34, Massé, Pierre. *Op cit.* fol. 45v, and Del Río, Martín. *Op. cit.* p. 80.

72. «La premiere, qu'il n'y ait rien de superstitieux, meslé parmy les pieuses paroles : pour exemple, si quelqu'un se fioit à la figure, ou couleur des lettres, à la façon de l'Escriture, ou à la matiere du billet, ou de l'ancre. La seconde, que l'intention de celuy qui le porte sur soy soit bonne & droicte, comme s'il observe bien le pieux sens des paroles, mais qu'il remette tout son espoir en Dieu, & qu'il le porte, ou pour marque & profession de sa creance, ou pour quelque autre fin saine & pieuse, & qu'il en attende l'effet de la puissance divine;» Del Río, Martín. *Op. cit.* pp. 1054-55.

73. «[Q]uand on n'attache point son esperance aux paroles, à la façon de l'escrit, au nombre des Croix, à la figure, ou autres choses semblables, c'est chose saincte & pieuse de porter sur soy par reverence ... l'Evangile de S. Jean, quelque Pseaume de David, & semblabes tesmoignages de l'Escriture saincte pendus au col;» Idem, 78. Any attention to the temporal conditions of the text's production made its use superstitious as well; Le Loyer, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 888.

Echoing the sentiments of their Protestant counterpart, Weyer, and his patristic source, Del Río and his contemporaries underline the importance of focusing on *fond*, or deeper meaning, rather than on *forme*, superficial materiality. The superstitious sin by privileging the matter over the message, or, as Le Loyer puts it, «having greater faith in the characters and the surface of the letters than in the deeper meaning inside the Scripture... having more faith in the words than in the promises the words carry.»[74]

Even in the highly regulated context of exorcism, Church authorities stressed that priests should remain vigilant «because this remedy is easily corrupted by certain bad practices.»[75] Van Eynattan cites Aquinas at length, advising officiating priests to oversee the use of textual amulets carefully to ensure «that no importance is attached to the way of writing or to other things that have nothing to do with the deeper meaning.»[76] The exorcist must confirm that «all hope is placed in God and his good will, from whom alone a result is expected, and that they wear these sacred words with the unique intention and in the sole way permitted by the Church.»[77] The priest bears the responsibility for educating his charges, verifying the texts they use, and intervening when necessary to ensure the avoidance of all superstition:

> [B]ecause ignorant people easily lose themselves in these sorts of practices, the exorcist or he who has souls in his care will . . . prohibit them from wearing objects of this sort without their having given them to him to examine first, so that secondary circumstances may never be held to be as important as the principal ones. He will also inquire as to the intention or the mindset of those who wear them and if he finds that something useless was used as though it were necessary, or if he discovers that they hope for a vain result or one that is not consistent with the Church's intentions, that they throw away these things as superstitions.[78]

Faith in the text or image itself to cure or to protect was problematic on another level because it bestowed power where none was, since textual objects alone had no natural ability to bring about change in the body. Unlike certain herbal or mineral remedies worn as amulets around the neck that were believed to communicate their natural properties through the skin, characters and words had no such inherent qualities, as judge and demonologist Henry Boguet (1550-1619) reminds his reader:

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74. «ayant plus de fiance aux paroles qu'aux promesses portees par les paroles;» Le Loyer, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 888. Belief that the textual object, rather than God, was responsible for protection or healing made the bearer of text guilty of idolatry, or at least its less pernicious form, «vain observance.» On the categories through which early modern theologians read superstitious practices, see Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* pp. 475-78. On the distinction between «vain observance» and «magic,» see p. 482.

75. «parce que ce remède est facilement corrompu par quelques mauvais usages;» Van Eynattan, Maximillian. *Op. cit.* p. 27. The author's warnings constitute one of the longest cautionary pieces of his «Instruction.»

76. *Idem,* pp. 27-28.

77. *Idem,* p. 28.

78. «[P]arce que des gens ignorants s'égarent facilement dans des pratiques de ce genre, l'exorciste ou celui qui a charge d'âmes ... les empêchera de porter des objets de cette espèce sans les leur avoir donnés à examiner d'abord, de façon que les circonstances secondaires ne soient pas tenues pour aussi importantes que les principales. Il s'enquerra aussi de l'intention ou de l'esprit de ceux qui les portent et s'il trouve que quelque chose d'inutile a été employé comme nécessaire, ou s'il découvre qu'ils espèrent un effet vain ou qui n'est pas dans l'intention de l'Église, qu'ils jettent ces choses-là comme des superstitions;» *Idem*, pp. 27-28. See also p. 22.

> It is quite certain that characters and words have nothing that can bring about this result. Because, who will say that the P and the A are good against eye pain ? Who will say that the words *Abracadabra Abracadabra, etc.* take away fever? Who will judge that these verses *Gaspar brings myrrh, etc.*, free the patient from epilepsy? ... It is in vain that people believe that words chase away, / From our indisposed bodies, the evil that pursues them.[79]

As Del Río puts it, echoing Weyer, words «are somehow dead and destitute of energy,» lacking the natural qualities necessary to effect a cure. Moreover, he argues, «[a]nd if they have some force, they must necessarily borrow it from the temperament of either the ink or the paper, in which, or upon which, they are written,» an idea he finds equally implausible.[80] Del Río and his contemporaries reason—again following Aquinas—that since ink and paper lack any natural ability to cure, and the power of any amulet depends on its natural properties, anything achieved by its wearing must be attributed to supernatural—and necessarily demonic—forces: «if some result is produced, for which the natural powers of the object cannot be the cause, this result must be reputed prodigious, and the Preservative filled with superstition.»[81]

Physicians and surgeons too joined this debate, calling on the argument of natural efficacy in issuing their own warnings against popular textual remedies and the healers who prescribed them.[82] If the material object pressed against the skin had no true natural healing virtues, then it was not to be trusted. Royal surgeon Amboise Paré (ca. 1509-1590) warns people to reject any unnatural methods for the sake of their health, both spiritual and physical, and to trust only doctors and surgeons

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79. «[l]l est bien certain que caractères et paroles n'ont rien qui soit propre à cet effet. Car, qui dira que le P. et l'A. sont bons contre le mal des yeux ? Qui dira que ces mots : «Abracadabra Abracadabra, etc.» ôtent la fièvre ? Qui jugera que ces vers : « *Gaspar fert myrrham* ,» etc., libèrent le patient de l'épilepsie ? ... C'est en vain que l'on croit que la parole chasse, / De nos corps indispos, le mal qui les pourchasse;» Boguet, Henry. *Op. cit.* p. 87. On amulets that were thought to communicate virtues through contact, see Baldwin, Martha R. *Op. cit.*

80. «sont je ne sçay quoy de mort & destitute d'energie : Et si elles ont quelque force, il faut de necessité qu'elles l'empruntent du temperament ou de l'enchre ou du papier, par lequel, ou sur lequel elles ont escrites;» Del Río, Martín. *Op. cit.* p. 74. Del Río and his contemporaries are responding to natural philosophers who sought to prove the natural efficacy of words; *idem*, p. 70 and 78. See also Weyer, Johann. *Op. cit.* pp. 392-93, Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* p. 277, and Lebrun, Pierre. *Op. cit.* p. 636.

81. «si quelque effet est produit, dont la vertu naturelle du subjet ne puisse estre la cause, tel effet doit estre reputé prodigieux, & le Preservatif remply de superstition;» Del Río, Martín. *Op. cit.* p. 78. See also p. 70. Aquinas provides these criteria regarding superstition in his *Summa Theologicæ*, qu. 96, art. 4, vol. 40, pp. 80-85. Canon of Cambrai Jean Polman also summarizes this position in his 1653 *Brevarium theologicum*, qtd. by Thiers, *Traité des superstitions*, pp. 275-76. Of the five rules for determining superstition provided by Bishop Pierre Binsfeld's (ca. 1545-1598) often reprinted late sixteenth-century manual for priests, *La Theologie des Pasteurs*, the first two cite the test of natural efficacy; Binsfeld, Pierre: *La Théologie des pasteurs et autres prestres ayant charge des ames* [1594], trans. Philippe Bermyer. Rouen: L. Du Mesnil, 1640, p. 326. For Protestant treatment of distinctions between efficacy and inefficacy in nature which «were the intellectual foundation of Protestant attitudes to superstition and the occasion for its 'demonization',» see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 483-85; p. 483.

82. Numerous medical treatises attack «popular errors» in this period, including: Du Breil, André: *La Police de l'art et science de medecine* (1580), *Op. cit.*; Joubert, Laurent: *Erreurs populaires au fait de la medecine et regime de santé*. Bordeaux, S. Millanges, 1578, the first book of which appeared in Bordeaux in 1570, modern edition by Tiollais, Madeleine: *La Médecine et le régime de santé*, vols. 1-2. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997; Sonnet de Courval, Thomas: *Les tromperies des charlatans descouvertes*. Paris, Nicolas Rousset, 1619; and Duret, Jean: *Discours sur l'origine des moeurs, fraudes et impostures des charlatans, avec leur descouverte.* Paris, D. Langlois, 1622, an unacknowledged translation of part of Mercurio, Girolamo: *De Gli Errori Popolari d'Italia*, Venice, 1603.

who bring about cure «by Nature's grace alone.»[83] Doctors Laurent Joubert (1529-1582) and his contemporary, André Du Breil, similarly indicted alternative healing methods and their practitioners in their treatises on popular errors, condemning the use of «superstitious and vain Remedies» that go beyond the natural virtues of elements in seeking cure, worn texts and images among them.[84] In a culture of increasing scientific empiricism, natural efficacy became the litmus test for superstition, summoned by medical doctors and theologians alike.[85] At the same time, however, as was the case with their ecclesiastical counterparts, some doctors themselves continued to prescribe textual amulets, much to the chagrin of some of their professional peers. Weyer condemns other doctors' use of these texts, which he refers to contemptuously as «those so-called 'little notes' [*breviola*] invented by some good-for-nothing to counter fevers.»[86] He decries «the monstrous employment of superstitions and unknown words... [that] have stealthily crept in to soil and slander our hallowed art of medicine.»[87]

THE WANING OF THE WORN WORD

Despite repeated condemnations, fascination and curiosity over the power of words and figures worn upon the body and ambivalence regarding their efficacy and acceptability persisted in medical and theological circles through most of the seventeenth century. Even some doctors and theologians who outwardly critiqued textual amulets seem confounded by the success of some textual remedies, readily admitting the apparent benefits of those whose effects they observed first hand. Paré, like several of his contemporaries, reveals some ambivalence regarding the power of words, even as he critiques their use. He testifies that he saw fevers disappear by prayers alone or jaundice vanish overnight «through the use of a certain little text that was suspended from the neck.»[88] Van Eynattan admits that though he believes that astrologically-based remedies are «pernicious for the soul and the body,... sometimes and often, many people seem to have been cured of their illness

83. Malgaigne, Joseph-François (ed.): Œuvres *completes d'Amboise Paré*, 3 vols. Paris, J.-B. Baillière, 1840-41, vol. 3, p. 66. Paré discusses certain remedies with sarcasm, pp. 64-65.

84. «Des Remedes superstitieux et vains;» Joubert, Laurent: *Erreurs populaires au fait de la medecine et regime de santé*. Bordeaux, S. Millanges, 1578, table of contents. Joubert condemns the use of remedies that go beyond the natural virtues of elements in seeking cure, including worn texts among them. He planned a chapter in his unfinished *Erreurs populaires* entitled «Against those who rely only on the efficaciousness of textual amulets, without purges, or other remedies» [Contre ceus qui s'arretet du tout à l'efficace des brevets, sans purgacion, ou autres remedes] . The section figures in his table of contents as pt. 5, bk. 24, ch. 1. See also Du Breil, André. *Op. cit.* pp. 126-27 and Fernel, Jean. *Op. cit.* p. 649.

85. Clark, Stuart. *Op. cit.* pp. 479-85.

86. Weyer, Johann. *Op. cit.* p. 393.

87. *Idem*, p. 387. Weyer, who learned the art of medicine from Agrippa and defended his mentor in other contexts, here unleashes a vehement critique against him and «many other modern physicians so given to superstition,» Paracelsus being a prime offender. Yet Paracelsus himself spoke out against medical «imposters» for whom «paper alone suffices for their recipes;» Paracelsus: *La Petite chrirugie.* Paris, Olivier de Varennes, 1623, preface; rpt. in *L'Art d'alchimie & autres* écrits *de Théoph. Paracelse Bombast.* Paris, Presses Littéraires de France, 1950, p. 66.

88. Malgaigne, Joseph-François (ed.). *Op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 64.

in this way»[89]. The choice of the vexed question of the power of the worn word for public debate at royal doctor and journalist Théophraste Renaudot's (1586-1653) *Bureau d'Adresse et de Rencontre*, where the hot issues of the day were discussed before a diverse public during popular weekly conferences from 1633 to 1642, confirms the continued importance of the practice and the diversity of views it inspired. Recorded responses to the topic «On amulets and whether illness can be cured with words, short texts, or other things hung around the neck or attached to the bodies of the ill» reveal widely divergent opinions and attitudes toward wearing words and images as a healing practice.[90] As late as 1697, in an addition to the second edition of his treatise on superstition, Thiers bemoans that his contemporaries, not only commoners but also the educated, continued to rely on spoken and written charms for cure and protection:

> [W]hat surprises me, is that being as badly concocted, as ridiculous, as extravagant, as vain and as crazy as they are for the most part, that they still find today so much credibility among people, and even among numerous people of good sense, albeit of little faith, who do not care in the least in what manner they are cured of their illnesses, and protected from dangers and perils that can befall them, as long as they are cured once. This is a blindness that is all the more deplorable because it is voluntary, and they fall into it knowing fully what is at stake.[91]

Even as Thiers issues his complaint, however, at the eve of the eighteenth century, the anxious condemnation of the wearing of words by doctors and theologians had already begun to turn to derision. Entries from the period's dictionaries reveal an important shift in the socio-cultural acceptability of using textual amulets among the elite. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Jean Nicot's 1606 *Treasure of the French Language* had defined *brevet* in neutral language: «*Brevet*, or something else that is suspended from the neck, or tied to the wrist, or another part of the body, to protect or cure some illness or poison.»[92] By 1690, Furetière's

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89. Van Eynatten, Maximilian. *Op. cit.* p. 28.

90. Speakers made wide-ranging arguments, from attesting that remedies should not be decried simply because their workings are not fully understood, to asserting God's ability to invest texts with supernatural power, to invoking the placebo effect, brought on by the powerful workings of the imagination, to all out denial of the natural efficacy of words, paper, and ink to heal; *Recueil General des Questions traitées* és *Conferences du Bureau* d'Adresse. *Op. cit.*, conference 174, vol. 5, pp. 207-08. On Renaudot's conferences, see Solomon, Howard: *Public Welfare, Science, and Propaganda in Seventeenth Century France: The Innovations of Théophraste Renaudot*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1972 and Jellinek, Eva: «Les savants aux conférences du bureau d'adresse de Theophraste Renaudot (1633-1642),» *Papers on Seventeenth-Century French Literature* 13.24 (1986), pp. 329-46. Renaudot himself was a Paracelsian, enjoying the protection of Richelieu in a period hostile to non-Galenic medical approaches; Brockliss, Laurence and Jones, Colin. *Op. cit.* p. 124.

91. «[C]e qui me surprend, est qu'estant aussi mal digerées, aussi ridicules, aussi extravagnantes, aussi vaines & aussi folles qu'elles sont pour la pluspart, elles trouvent encore aujourd'huy tant de créance dans le monde, & mesme auprés de quantité de personnes de bon sens, quoique de peu de foy, qui ne se soucient gueres de quelle maniere elles soient gueries de leurs maladies, & preservées des dangers & des dommages qui leur peuvent arriver, pourveu qu'elles le soient une fois. Ce qui est un aveugelement d'autant plus déplorable qu'il est volontaire, & qu'on y tombe avec connoissance de cause;» Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit.* 2nd ed. (1697), vol. 1, pp. 483-84.

92. «Brevet, ou autre chose qu'on pend au col, ou qu'on lie au poignet, ou autre partie du corps, pour preserver ou guarir de quelque maladie ou poison;» «Brevet,» in Nicot, Jean: *Le Thresor de la langue francoyse, tant ancienne que moderne*. Paris, David Douceur, 1606.

Universal Dictionary clearly situates the use of worn texts and figures in the camp of quack doctors and fakes: «*brevet* also refers to certain little notes, characters or prayers that charlatans and tricksters give out to cure many illnesses, or to do extraordinary things; «*CARACTERE* is also used for certain papers that charlatans or sorcerers give out, which are marked with some talismanic figures, or with simple seals. They make the stupid commoners believe that they have the power to make them do marvelous and incredible things.»[93] The 1692 *Dictionary of the French Academy* likewise categorizes the use of texts to cure as superstitious: «*Brevet* also refers to certain slips of paper, characters, or words used superstitiously to cure several illnesses.»[94] While the use of other types of amulets believed to have natural curative or protective properties continued and even found favor among prominent physicians through the eighteenth century and beyond, by the end of the seventeenth century the wearing of texts for these purposes was condemned, as Martha R. Baldwin highlights: «Within the span of the seventeenth century, the only significant change that one sees with respect to the therapeutic use of amulets is the rejection of amulets inscribed with words or biblical verses. Such amulets became universally decried as magical, superstitious, demonic, or ineffective.»[95]

While the condemnation of textual amulets was undoubtedly restricted to a certain elite, to be sure the practice of wearing words upon the body increasingly became a source of ridicule and comedy as it moved into the eighteenth century, as Laurent Bordelon's 1710 literary account of the «extravagances» of the magically inclined, blundering Monsieur Oufle confirms. Among his multiple attempts to seduce the woman he loves, Monsieur Oufle resorts to a recipe for a textual amulet found in his readings, an act that the narrator openly critiques. He relates with sarcasm that Oufle decides to «attach to his neck certain barbaric words ... which no one understands at all and which those who imagined them did not understand at all either.»[96] Oufle follows a prescription in making his amulet that Bordelon pulls directly from Thiers's treatise: «Attach to the neck these words and crosses † authos † à aortoo † noxio † bay † gloy † aperit †... to be loved by all.»[97] Bordelon makes of his text-wearing protagonist an ignorant buffoon.

Though Bordelon's satire of Oufle's reliance on worn texts and other superstitious rites signals an important shift in thinking among the elite and undoubtedly garnered wide audience appeal, we must be careful not to think practices that put

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93. «*brevet*, se dit aussi de certains billets, caracteres ou oraisons que donnent des Charlatans & des affronteurs pour guerir de plusieurs maladies, ou pour faire des choses extraordinaires;» «*CARACTERE* se dit aussi de certains billets que donnent des Charletans, ou Sorciers, qui sont marqués de quelques figures talismaniques, ou de simples cachets. Ils font accroire au sot peuple qu'ils ont la vertu de faire faire des choses merveilleuses & incroyables ...» in Furetière, Antoine: *Dictionnaire universel,* 3 vols. La Haye and Rotterdam, Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690. Emphasis in orginal.

94. «Brevet, se dit aussi de certains billets, caracteres ou paroles dont on se sert superstitieusement pour la guerison de plusieurs maladies;» in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. Paris, Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694.

95. Baldwin, Martha R. *Op. cit.* p. 247.

96. Bordelon, Laurent: *L'Histoire des imaginations extravagantes de Monsieur Oufle*, 2 vols. Amsterdam, Estienne Roger, Pierre Humbert, Pierre de Coup, & les Freres Chatelain, 1710, vol. 1, p. 73.

97. «Attacher à son cou ces mots & ces croix † authos † à aortoo † noxio † bay † gloy † aperit † ... pour se faire aimer de tout le monde;» Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Op. cit*. 2nd ed. (1697), vol. 1, p. 410.

faith in the power of the worn texts and images extinct at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Arlette Farge's study of «l'écrit sur soi» in the period, *Le Bracelet de Parchemin*, counters this conclusion, bringing to light an intriguing set of tiny surviving texts fished off the bodies of the period's unidentified dead.[98] Though many of the pieces of paper and parchment she recovered from police records at the *Archives nationales* are administrative documents, records of work done, letters, or reminders, some, like the precious paper bracelet of one François Petit, carefully tied with red thread on his right arm, clearly harken back to the magical belief we have examined in the power of texts worn against the skin.[99] The police report relates the careful unveiling of this text as follows: «on the right arm we found a little roll of paper attached with a thread, having unrolled the piece of paper we found written François Petit 20 Feburary 1761 and having unstitched the piece of cloth we found a piece of parchment one and a half inches long on which was printed: † / E 184 / ♥.»[100] Just what these characters, enclosed in their tiny many-layered package and bound to the body, meant to their bearer and why he wore them are lost to us. But such undecipherable signs, written or printed upon pieces of parchment or paper, worn around the wrist, the neck, or carefully stowed away in a pocket or purse, attest to the continued prevalence of the practice of wearing texts, at least among the lower classes, throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, the use and influence of magical amulets even knew a revival of sorts in the nineteenth century thanks to the publication or reedition of chapbook grimoires such as the *Enchridion of Pope Leon*, the *Grimoire of Pope Honorious*, and the *Black Dragon*, which included simple prayers, healing charms, and magical formulas. Popular medical treatises such as the 1817 anonymous *Doctor of the Poor* provided numerous healing charms, whose recipes continue to proliferate today.[101] The amulet collection of Pitt River Museum in Oxford, England houses several examples of printed textual amulets created and worn in nineteenth-century France.[102] The practice of wearing amuletic texts even persists globally in our own times, with internet advertisements for the sale of textual amulets making the same promises of healing, protection, and good fortune made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to potential twenty-first-century buyers.

In sixteenth and seventeenth-century France, evidence of the use of textual amulets confirms the continued prevalence of a magical-religious relationship to

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98. Farge, Arlette: *Le Bracelet de parchemin. L'écrit sur soi au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris, Bayard, 2003.

99. Though Farge comments that these texts are «never talismans or amulets,» this extant text and at least one other she describes strongly suggest otherwise; *Idem*, p. 107 and pp. 38-39.

100. «ayant déroulé le morceau de papier avons trouvé écrit François Petit 20 février 1761 et ayant décousu le morceau de toile avons trouvé un morceau de parchmein d'un pouce et demi sur lequel est imprimé: † / E 184 / ♥;» Archives nationales, Z² 4133, «Registre contenant le procès-verbal de levée de cadavres trouvés dans la rivière de Seine et dans l'étendue de ce bailliage-pairie, Guilbert greffier (11 mai 1757-19 mai 1774);» qtd. in Farge, Arlette. *Op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

101. Davis, Owen: «French Charmers and their Healing Charms,» in Roper, Jonathan: *Charms and Charming in Europe*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hamphire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 91-112. Work by twentieth-century folklorists and ethnologists revealed an active charming culture in the French countryside as late as the 1980s; *idem*.

102. A small blue cloth pouch contained five tiny folded texts printed on paper, including the beginning of the Gospel of John and prayers for blessing and protection. Transferred from the Wellcome Institute in 1985; 1985.52.1001.1-4, viewable on line: <*http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/index.php/keys-amulet7/index.html*>.

words and images worn upon the body. A long-standing belief in the power of the written or printed word or image to heal and protect crossed both class and confessional lines, drawing the fury of physicians and clergy for whom such a materialist faith was fraught with superstition. At the same time, many doctors and priests participated in perpetuating these practices, and sometimes maintained ambiguous positions as to their validity or permissibility. Catholic theologians in particular found themselves in the precarious position of having to strike a delicate balance between the defense of Church-sanctioned uses of the worn word and image and their critique of popular abuses of this practice.

On another level, the proliferation of textual amulets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pushes us to further expand what we mean when we celebrate «print culture.» Invested with the ability to heal or to protect the bodies that bore them, worn words and images testify to a valorization of the materiality of the paper or parchment object and to an intimacy between body and text that calls for the creation of new categories of textual familiarity. Further, the vestiges of popular belief and practice examined here testify to the widespread use of texts upon the body across segments of the population traditionally classified as illiterate, such as the letter-seeking woman who visits a schoolyard to find a scribe, with whose story this essay began.[103] Since most textual amulets did not require reading to dispense their benefits, but promised to transmit their healing or apotropaic powers through simple contact with the body, the power of words became accessible to all, even to those with little ability to decipher the words they bore. Textual amulets thus complicate our understanding of the kinds of relationships the people of this print-filled period maintained with paper, parchment, and ink, as well as with written or printed words and images, expanding our notion of just what constituted literacy in the period.

103. On literacy and the reception of print technology in the period, see Zemon Davis, Natalie: «Printing and the People,» in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1975, pp. 189-226, Chartier, Roger: «Reading Matter and 'Popular' Reading from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century,» in Cavallo, Guglielmo and Chartier, Roger (eds.), trans. by Cochrane, Lydia G.: *A History of Reading in the West*. Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, pp. 269-83, and Cipolla, Carlo: *Literacy and Development in the West*. Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1969.

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